

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

Have you ever had a conversation with a friend where you just wanted to tell your story, to let it all out, to vent, to kvetch, to be heard, only to have your amiga launch into advice-giving, to start telling you what you should do? Have you ever found yourself being the should-er, telling your pal how to deal with her situation only to have her face fall or to have her say, "Gosh, I just wanted to share"?

Today we're talking about the concept of emotional consent, a way to show up with greater love, care and gentleness for the people in our lives by checking in before we dive in. This way of being conversation has been so beautiful in my life and has helped me to show up for the people I love in a more aligned way. One that recognizes and honors their autonomy and sovereignty and thus, my own. Interested in learning a simple tool for improving conversation and connection? Keep listening, my loves. It's another good one.

You're listening to Feminist Wellness, the only podcast that combines functional medicine, life coaching and feminism to teach smart women how to reclaim their power and restore their health. Here's your host, nurse practitioner, functional medicine expert, herbalist and life coach, Victoria Albina.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this episode finds you doing so well. I recently had the honor, delight and privilege of spending a long weekend with my dearest friends in upstate New York for my birthday. Shocker alert. I'm a Leo. I know it's always surprising, particularly if you follow me on Instagram and see just how much I throw my hair around. And as a Leo, I am all about that birthday love and sharing it with the people who matter to me. We rented a gorgeous house with a salt pool, salt water jacuzzi. I just cannot even go in a chlorine pool. It makes me itchy and yucky and cough. My partner knows that. So they found a salt water alternative, which was like, oh my God. So amazing. And there was a sauna and a steam room and we did oracle deck and tarot readings. We pulled a card for guidance each day and played this beautiful intuition game and got really deep on

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

everything that each of us was dealing with, managing, changing, shifting in our lives. Talked a lot about yoga and meditation and Kundalini and I did a whole breath work meditation session for my friends and it was just so beautiful. It was such a gift to me to hold space for them and just to see how much the breath work would help and support them. And it really resonated throughout the weekend.

And of course, we ate so much. We cooked so much beautiful food. I am forever Argentine, so I barbecued a ton of meat and lots of veggies. Don't worry. And we enjoyed time in nature and with each other. It was just, it was pure magic.

One of the things that I love the most about my friend group is how we show up for, listen to, and support one another. It's so beautiful and I am so honored to call these humans my chosen familia. Truly, so, so honored.

One of the things that we do for each other in conversation is to check in before we respond. And that's what I want to talk about together today. Emotional consent, which may be a new concept for a lot of you. And I'll start by sharing my own story and how I learned about asking before, well, frankly, running my mouth without getting emotional consent. So about 20 years ago when I first started learning about nutrition and health and wellness and I became immediately obsessed and as this know-it-all 20 something, I started telling everyone who would listen exactly how to run their lives and what I thought the right nutrition was for them, that they should be drinking bone broth every day, eating fermented foods. Wifi is going to kill you. Sunscreen's a hoax. I mean, all of it. You need to take B12 every day. I was relentless with all of this new information. It was all so new and so exciting and I was starting to feel better for the first time in my life and I was just bursting at the seams to share it.

And at some point in this early journey into this new holistic, clued in, less toxic way of living, my dear friend Becca pulled me aside and was like, "Hey, V," which stands for Maria Victoria, Maria Victoria, which is my full

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

name. And it's what a lot of my closest friends call me. So Becca said, "V, can I share an observation with you and can I speak bluntly?" And I was like, "Yeah, yeah. Sure." And she said, "Listen girl, you have to chill on telling people how to live their lives without their consent." And her words completely blew my mind because my very ego-driven younger self was trying to help folks. I was giving them all this super useful information with a full heart just because I wanted their lives to be better. I wanted them to feel better in their body. I wanted them to not fight with their partner, to not be depressed or anxious, to eat in a way that fueled their mitochondria and would extend their lives in a healthier, better way.

And what I didn't realize was that I wasn't getting consent before sharing my opinion, before foisting my thoughts onto someone else with the presumption that they wanted to hear what I have to say. And that is not loving. It's not kind and it's not feminist. Oops.

So today I want to talk about emotional consent, which may be a new lens through which to think about consent. I mean, it totally was for me. Hopefully we all have a working understanding of the concept of consent, meaning that we ask for permission before we do a thing that involves another person. I went to Oberlin in the 90s and there was a lot of talk about consent within a sexual context. You ask before kissing someone, touching someone, or engaging with another person's human body. We actually had a yearly event called Safer Sex Night, which is so very 90s and amazing. And there was a space called the Tent of Consent and that's literally what it was called, because you can't make this stuff up, where you could go into this space and there was a guide in there. There was someone to help you out. And you could practice asking for consent and not feeling awkward about it, which was so rad and, once again, so very Oberlin in the 90s.

And asking for consent is a vital feminist framework in which we respect other people's autonomy and sovereignty and their right to control their body in all of the ways. While many of us are familiar with the concept of

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

consent around sexual intimacy, emotional consent hasn't yet found its way into mainstream conversations. Since the idea of consent, generally speaking, is to respect other peoples' autonomy by asking before we get involved in their space, a feminist approach to consent, one that values our emotional lives as much as our physical lives, holds space for the importance of emotional consent. And I would define this simply as respecting yours and another person's ability to self-govern or self-direct in the emotional space. And this means that when a friend comes to you in a highly emotional way, wanting to share something or express themselves, you hold space for them. You allow them to be in their emotions without robbing them of their right to feel what they feel and without inserting your own emotions or thoughts, unless they're interested in hearing them.

And I believe in consent as an opt in practice. That is, we don't assume consent. We ask someone to actively give that consent to us. It's each of ours to give or not. Similarly, when we are in our own feelings space, with practice, we can learn to approach others in a way that acknowledges that they may be in a different space and unable to meet us where we're at. We make sure to get their consent before we lay out our struggles. This sometimes means coming out of our emotional or feeling space, just enough to ask for consent, which takes time and practice for sure. While no one else controls how we feel, no one can make us feel anything ever.

This way of showing up helps you and the person you're talking to feel loved and cared for. That's a gift for you both. This in turn to stronger relationships. By being conscious, thoughtful and loving with our communication, we create stronger loving bonds. We create and respect the trust between two people. When we make sure that others are open to hearing us or conversely, that we are in a space to really hear others, we are setting ourselves up for more clear and effective communication. And in a future episode, we'll take a look at what it means to ask for consent before bringing our feelings to someone else. Right now we could probably use an example, right?

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

Okay. So imagine a friend comes to you and says, "I'm fighting a lot with my roommate and things are really hard around simple things, like doing the dishes, taking out the garbage, having guests over for the night," or whatever the case may be. Often our natural reaction is to start offering suggestions or to start badmouthing their roommate, to commiserate and agree that this situation sucks. The impulse to do so generally comes from a loving place, from not wanting our friend to suffer or from wanting to relieve some of our own anxiety and discomfort around imagining someone we care about in pain.

However, if you take a moment to call to mind a time when you have been on the receiving end of unsolicited advice, I suspect you might have felt put upon or like your voice wasn't being heard or you were being told what you should do when you just needed to vent. Just as in the realm of intimacy, checking in about emotional consent is a way of pumping the brakes, of slowing down the conversation enough to get everyone on the same page, so that effective and respectful conversations can occur.

To continue with this roommate example, what I've learned to do is to respect that other person's autonomy and that they might just not want my opinion, which is totally fine. They might just want to vent or share or get something off their chest. I get consent to share by quite simply saying, "Hey Megan, I hear you about your roommate situation and I hear that it's really hard for you right now. I'd like to share my thoughts. Would you like to hear them?" So in that moment, Megan gets to take stock of her own situation, her own thoughts or feelings, her needs, and she gets to say, "Yeah girl, lay it on me. Tell me all about it." Or, "Actually I was really trying to vent here. I don't really want advice, thanks."

Asking for consent gives the people we love a chance to decide how they want to engage with us, how they want to be engaged with and what opinions they may or may not want to hear.

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

The other place where this comes to bear is if you have expertise in a particular area. A friend may just be saying, "Oh, you know, my belly has been a hot mess lately." They may not be asking you to give them mountains of healing advice around their IBS. They may just literally want to say to a friend, "Ugh, my digestion," and then want to move on. Not that many years ago, like I was saying, I would just dive into like, "Well, you should get a stool test. You should also get checked for SIBO because you've had some gas and bloating. Have you considered doing a paleo diet? Maybe low FODMAPs is good for you. Have you considered using MegaSpore probiotic? Because I really have been seeing great results with that." But oh my gosh, whomever I'm talking to may not have been wanting all of that. If you're an accountant, your friends might not want your tax advice. If you're an entrepreneur, your friends may not be looking for the minutia of how to run a webinar, right? We could go on and on about whatever you are an expert around.

Your friend might just be wanting you to show up and be with them. Just hold space. Just sit there being a person that they love, who they want to share with. So if a friend were to say to me, "You know, I've been really anxious lately," I have trained myself to get that emotional consent by saying, "My darling, you know that I have so many thoughts about so many things you can do to help yourself to heal your anxiety. You let me know if you want to hear about it." And I leave it at that, which gives the person I'm talking with, a person I love and care about, the space to say "Yes, please," or "Whoa, no thank you."

Now, making this a habit, pulling back and asking for consent before sharing an opinion or an idea, takes time and commitment. When we commit ourselves to asking for emotional consent to, pausing and slowing things down when a loved one comes to us with emotions big or small, we not only show respect for their autonomy, but we also model how we want to be treated ourselves. Through our actions, show others how we would like them to interact with us. The most effective way I have found to build

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

this habit of asking for emotional consent is a simple three step process that takes just moments.

Step one is to recognize that your conversation partner or you are in emotional or feeling space. Awareness is key. And just noticing that emotions are doing the talking is the first step. Step two is to take a deep centering breath, in through your nose, and out. Emotionally pump the brakes, get into your body, ground and center yourself in yourself. Remember your goal to show up for the person you're speaking with, with love.

And step three is to get curious. Remember that when someone comes to you with a problem, struggle or emotion, it's about them, not about you. So hold the space for your friend and let yourself get curious. And this doesn't always involve talking, but rather in your mind and your heart, getting interested about the person who's come to us in their emotional space and honoring that they've entrusted you to be their listener. And they may not have asked you to be their advice giver, or coach. There's a saying in my community, "You don't coach without consent." So while you've gained an understanding through this podcast that our thoughts create our feelings and you may want to jump in and help your friend to see the thoughts she's rolling around in and how they may be keeping her feeling less than awesome, it's not your place to do so unless she consents.

So we recognize that the conversation is taking place in an emotional space. We take a breath to get into our bodies and then we get curious about the other person and their experience. In the example about the friend with roommate struggles, we can acknowledge the emotional issue at hand. Take a breath and start with curiosity and consent. "Gosh, that sounds like a hard situation. Can I ask you some more questions," or "Oh, babe, that sounds challenging? I have some suggestions from when I had roommates' struggles. Would you like to hear them?" Or quite simply, "My darling, my love, my sweet friend. How can I support you right now?" Asking for consent in a conversation helps you show up as your best self

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

and to meet your conversation partner in a loving way and increases the chances you'll be met with loving receptivity.

Most of us have an inclination to go in a specific direction in conversations, like problem solving, which that's where my brain loves to go and it's a gift to ourselves and the other person to pause and to realize that supporting others is not about you. It's not about how you want to show up. So you can pause and not just jump into problem solving or commiserating or whatever your particular habit may be. And honestly, showing up for someone in this way, by honoring them and asking for consent, makes you feel good. It's a way of honoring your words by making sure they have a loving home. Go where it's warm. While I totally believe that no one can make us feel anything unless we have thoughts that lead us to feel unheard, disrespected, resentful, or whatever, why set yourself up for heartache? Avoid getting caught in resentment, yours and theirs, by simply asking for consent.

Now, another benefit of engaging in this practice of asking for emotional consent is that we can learn so much about our own emotional responses to other people's issues. Do we tend to get sucked in and take their problems on as our own? Do we jump to help or insist on the changes they should make? Do we stay distant and change the topic? By becoming our own watcher, we can start to notice patterns and how we react when someone comes to us in their feelings and that can help us to see how we react to our own feelings as well. We may notice patterns that are healthy and aligned with how we aim to be in the world, but real talk, even the most aware among us strays from how we would like to show up. Often when we're hungry, angry, lonely or tired or otherwise stressed. And someone else's stress can often bring out or trigger our own stress responses.

When we take the time to slow down, acknowledge the situation, hold love in our hearts for the person we're talking to, breathe and get curious, we learn about our conversation partner and about ourselves. It's only by noticing patterns and discerning which serve us and which hold us back

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

that we can start to make meaningful change. It's worth taking a moment, my loves, to clarify what we're not talking about here, to take a look at a non-example as it were.

So what I'm not talking about is not speaking up in a meeting at work, in a situation in which you've been asked to contribute your ideas. Sharing your opinion when it's been asked for is fully respectful. Even if the content of the opinion may be contrary to what the other person was hoping to hear. We don't need to ask consent before disagreeing with someone when they've already agreed to enter into a conversation and have asked for your input.

Rather, here we're looking at the exact opposite scenario, getting into someone else's business and making it your own, centering yourself in the conversation when that's not the explicit ask. I know that you can be a good listener and can stay on your side of the street. It just takes raising your consciousness and getting really thoughtful in these often-tender moments. And again, this practice gives you the gift of getting to examine your own motivations for being the advice giver, the savior, the one who steps in to save the day. I get how uncomfortable it can be to see someone struggling and to feel like I can make this better. As a healthcare provider and life coach, I totally get that and it's a great opportunity to step back and to recognize that you can't save anyone else. Each of us gets to save ourselves, heal ourselves, make our own best decisions and to honor another person's autonomy is a gift to the world.

You get to pause and be your own watcher as opposed to being someone else's fixer. You get to rewire your brain, which is such a rad thing. And over time can train yourself to show up with curiosity and love, empowering yourself to set the same kind of boundaries with others, which is our topic for next week. You also get to ask yourself if you're focusing on the other person's problems as a way to buffer and avoid your own, which is something I have 110% done myself, and learn to step away from as a coping mechanism for not dealing with my own struggle. Instead, I get to

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

honor the person I'm talking to by getting their emotional consent before getting too involved. I get to honor my own process and needs by not projecting my anxiety or worry onto someone else and to bring our recent series about inner child into this conversation.

If you weren't listened to as a child, if your needs or space or emotions weren't honored, if you were told to stop crying or to suck it up, buttercup, to move on or get over it before you've processed it, you may be quick to react from that place when someone's sharing hard things. And my love, it is such a gift to show up for your inner child and to repair it yourself by showing up for others the way you would have liked to have been shown up for, the way you want to be shown up for now. Getting emotional consent is an act of re-parenting and it's beautifully healing.

Next week we'll be talking about asking for emotional consent and your inner child is going to love the exercises we're going to be doing together as homework then, my darling. And your homework for this week... Wow, that was such a great segue... is to start to practice this.

As always, awareness is our first step. Start by bringing your focus and awareness to the times when you really want to step in and be the fixer, the commiserator, the gossip, the one who says, "Oh my God, he's such a jerk," and launches into a diatribe. Ask yourself why you want to do this and if it's in line with your highest self. See what it feels like to get consent before responding and notice how awkward and also lovely it can be for the person speaking. While doing this, getting emotional consent in this way, is super common in some communities, most of us haven't experienced being asked how we'd like to be listened to.

Sit with that. Experience it. Hold space for it and give it a try the next time a friend calls with a sad story, an upset story, anger, whatever. See what it feels like to get emotional consent and be sure to subscribe to the show so you get a notification for next week's episode, which is all about how to ask for the emotional consent that you're going to practice giving this week.

[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #27: Getting Emotional Consent

I also send out weekly podcast reminders and special freebies just for podcast listeners. So take a wee moment, my darling, to head on over to victoriaalbina.com to sign up for my mailing list. I love to share these ways of communicating, connecting, and living that have been such a gift for me. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Take care, my love, and I'll talk to you soon.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of Feminist Wellness. If you like what you've heard, head to victoriaalbina.com to learn more.