

Ep #77: Self-Care: Have Your Dinner Before Dessert



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With Your Host

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Self-care is such a hot topic, especially these pandemic quarantine days. When so many of us are challenged every day to balance going to work as essential workers, being unemployed in a system that doesn't support you, or adapting to working from home with kids full-time. And these days, taking beautiful and loving care of ourselves is more important than ever and doesn't ever need to look like a spa experience. Like taking hours to check out of the world.

Self-care, in my world, looks very much like checking in and looking at our thoughts and what they're creating, and evaluating the importance we give to our self-care or not. Ready to learn a new framework for self-care? Curious about the concept of self-care as dinner before dessert? Keep listening, it's going to be a 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 finds you doing so well. It is about 243 million degrees in my Brooklyn apartment right now. Five stories above New York City. I am missing the ease of life pre-pandemic. Going to the beach and not thinking like, oh, do we have a parameter around us where there aren't as many people, going to the park, all those things.

And my goodness, what a privilege to be sitting here missing the beach and the park, right? So today, I want to share a framework for thinking about self-care and what it means to put ourselves first in the most loving and thoughtful way.

Some of you have heard me talk me talk before about self-care as a form of activism. An idea I learned from the radical Black lesbian poet, Andre

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Lorde. For those of us raised as girls and socialized as women, for all the fems out there, taking care of ourselves can be a radical, even political act because it goes against the grain of what we've been taught about being the self-sacrificing mother, the loyal sister, the forgiving daughter. The one who centers other people's needs and feelings above our own.

When instead, we own our value as humans and take the time and energy to feed our bodies, minds, and spirits, we reshape the landscape of how we think about ourselves. When we learn to manage our minds. And for so many of us caught up in codependent relationships, codependent ways of thinking, self-care can serve as a way out of the woods, as a start down a healthier path towards caring for and valuing ourselves as we are because we are worth it.

Now, many of us have heard the phrases, "First things first, work before play," or, "dinner before dessert." They all boil down to the idea that we need to do the things that matter, but who decides that? Or are important before the fun stuff.

And sure, in general, this can be a pretty efficient and efficacious way to function in the world, to adult, as they say. That said, what I want to challenge here and something I work on a lot with my coaching clients, both one-on-one and in my six-month coaching program is how we define our terms.

Because the language we use to describe our lives matters. Our thoughts matter because they create our top down brain to body feelings. And we take action based on our feelings, and create a result in our own lives.

In the case of this concept of have your dinner before dessert, I'll invite us to ask, what counts as dinner and what counts as dessert? What is essential and what is a bonus? Today, I want to show you that self-care, despite what many of us think and how many of us operate, is not dessert.

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It's not the thing to put off until all of the other items are checked off the to-do list. Real self-care that feeds our minds, bodies, and spirits is the most important entree ever. It's actually the main course.

So when we are living in codependent relationships with people-pleasing habits, with a framework that it is vital that we project this vision of ourselves into the world that says I am perfect and beyond reproach, the thought habit in our minds is to put other people's needs and desires first because we live with a thought pattern that our happiness depends on someone else's happiness, on everyone else being okay, everyone else saying we are worthy.

In reality, we are only responsible for our own feelings. Not in a blame-y way, but in a real empowering and meaningful way. Our thoughts and thought patterns are what come before our feelings. The ideas and thoughts often taught to us by our society, culture, and family of origin that create our mental landscape and that we then nurture without even meaning to by thinking them again and again until they become beliefs in our minds are the thoughts that create our feelings. And the same is true for everyone else.

If we continue to think that our actions determine our partners' or parents' or coworkers' feelings, then we will continue to feed our own sense of guilt or blame or shame around another person's discomfort and we will continue to tell ourselves that it is our job to raise their spirits, to make them happy. And thus, to put ourselves second if it will make them feel better.

And that is a lot to put on ourselves. It's exhausting, my sweet loves. But it's how codependency works and it keeps us locked up in concern for others without even checking in on ourselves and our own thoughts and feels.

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What I want to propose is that we use thought work, breath work, to get back in touch with what we need to feel our best. Mind, body, and spirit. And then work on getting what we need without guilt or shame, without making excuses or justifying.

We get to take care of ourselves because we deserve to. Just because we're alive. There's nothing to prove here, my beauty. You were born perfect. Now, there are a lot of ways to think about self-care, and some that I consider more long-lasting and sustainable than others. And babies, I'm a nurse, I'm all about sustainable solutions.

Let's take the example of exercising. So you can exercise because you want to achieve a certain body size that you think will make you more attractive or appealing to others, to fit the societal norm that's taught to us that women should be as small as humanly possible.

And what I'll posit is that that whole framework is actually a form of other care. Not self-care. Because you are engaging in an activity to meet what you think are other people's expectations of you, and because you are hanging your happiness on someone else's opinion or thoughts. Someone else's analysis of whether you are worthy of love based on the pull of gravity on your magnificent human form.

See how that works, my beauty? We think the action of exercising will change how we feel about ourselves and how others think about us. Alternatively, you can exercise because it gets your endorphins pumping, makes you feel strong and powerful, helps you to have great energy throughout your day and to sleep so much better at night.

It helps support your adrenals, your thyroid, your digestion. This is movement, however you define it - all movement matters - as true self-care. Same activity, different framing, different thoughts creating different feelings leading to that same action, different outcome or result.

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Small and vital commitment to yourself made and honored, self-trust built. Different life-long outcome for sure. This second framing, that is sustainable self-care. And when we put our needs at the center of what we do, be it the half hour jog or walk or run, or 10 minutes of reading by yourself, taking a shower alone, and yes, that one was pointed at all the moms out there with kids at home full-time.

My sister is always like, “I haven’t taken a shower alone or gone to the bathroom alone in seven and a half years.” Her eldest is seven and a half, as you might guess. When we put these needs at the forefront, we strengthen our connection to who we are, what we want, and what we need.

And beauty, listen in. Allow your inner children to hear this one. This is different from selfishness. Caring for ourselves need not require disregarding others. But this is a mindset shift for people living with codependent thinking. And yes, it is one that with coaching can be reframed and lived into in a new way that feeds you.

So I have a lot of clients who say they don’t know what they want or need, like pretty much everyone I work with, especially in my six-month codependency class. I’d also like to challenge that idea a little, to say that our bodies and our spirits know what they need, but our minds, our egos, our habitual thoughts get in the way.

Our minds may put some ideas on repeat, like a broken record or that cassette tape in your mind, in your monkey mind that I love talking about, about you being unworthy, about what you do or don’t deserve, about how much you may or may not matter.

And many of those ideas born out of codependency, which were once super adaptive, brilliant, amazing survival habits as a kiddo are simply false. But they can easily drown out the wisdom our bodies and spirits hold.

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So much of what I do as a life coach is about helping people to lovingly quiet their mind, to hit pause and pull the needle up on that broken record so that their deeper embodied wisdom can come through.

The wisdom that you came to this planet with before systems of oppression, socialization, on and on, did its work on you. And this is challenging work, which is why we often need a coach and of course, I have a coach because coaching is vital and helps us to see our minds.

And step number one is to get into your body. The simplest and most available, totally for free way I know the way to do that is to breathe. But like, really breathe. To connect in with your breath, which is ever present. And when our thought habit is one that leads us to feel anxious, stressed, worried, to future trip, to roll around in the past, we hold our breathe. We breathe at the top of our lungs, we do not give our bodies that vital oxygen, that connection we need.

And so we pause. And we breathe slowly and deeply into our bellies. Not the top of our lungs. And so we activate our ventral vagal complex, to help us to feel more safe, social, connected inward and outward. And if the words ventral vagal complex are totally new to you, episodes 48 and 61 are all about polyvagal theory and your beautiful autonomic nervous system. Give those a listen, my nerd.

So breathing. Breathing. But really, really, really prioritizing a moment of stillness every day to connect with your breath. Through this attention to the breath, we let our bodies and spirits speak as we check in with ourselves and through finding stillness, mindfulness, can listen into what our bodies are saying to us. The somatic truths that our bodies hold.

And we can listen to these parts of ourselves, we can respond in a loving way to give ourselves what we need. So let's look at some examples. Let's say it's the evening and your partner wants to watch yet another shoot-em-

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up movie. Okay, take a few breaths and listen into your body before you give that really just knee-jerk yes that is so common for us as we work to unravel and rewrite our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits.

So you listen into your body and maybe you hear that actually, you need a walk instead, or some time for yourself to read a book. Or just a few minutes to stretch first because well actually, it turns out you really like Scarface and you're like, yeah, that sounds like a fun Friday night, but I'm going to stretch first.

In codependency, there's this tendency to say yes to everyone and everything, regardless of our own thoughts and feels on the issue. When we can get more in tune with what we need, we can in small ways start to advocate for what we need. And we learn to put ourselves first. That is what self-care is all about.

And from there, you can do the vital self-care that is thought work, and we talked all about this way back in episode 34. All about how when we do daily thought work, writing out our thoughts and then using the thought work protocol to look at the thoughts that are keeping us feeling like crap about ourselves, and thus needing self-care, not feeling like it's the entree in our lives but something we have to do to combat the challenging negative, painful thoughts about ourselves that we were taught and that can keep us feeling like we need that self-care.

Well my love, you can begin to change those stories in your mind. Those stories that lead you to be chronically mean to you and needing that outlet in that same way. Now, my sister and her husband have this system they use with their kids.

And god, Eugenia, my sister, is just the most amazing parent. It's incredible to watch how she's raising her tinies. So in order to get dessert a few days

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a week, the kiddos have to earn a certain number of dinner points, for doing things like washing their hands, eating what they're served, or if they do not like it, engaging in a loving, gentle conversation about why they do not like Brussel sprouts today, though her kids always love Brussel sprouts.

She's like a child magician. It's really stunning. But anyway, what are some other ones? Staying at the table until everyone is done, and then asking to be excused in a gentle tone. So it's all about manners and hygiene. If they earn enough of these points, they can get a sweet treat a few times a week.

What's important here and the reason I bring this up is that I want you to notice, not a single item on the list is about taking care of their parents' feelings. Like, not at all. You get dessert if you have hygiene and manners in her family. Not if you're good or worthy or are caretaker for mom and dad.

In codependency however, you only get dessert, meaning time to care for your own mind, body, and spirit, if and only if you put other people's thoughts, feelings, wants, needs, emotional wellness, et cetera, ahead of your own. It is well past time to flip that script and make sure that you get what you need because you are wonderful and perfect and doing your best.

Growing into the highest expression of your amazingness. Other people can take care of their emotional needs. Let me say that one again, my darling. Other people, other adults can take care of their own emotional needs. That's not your job.

Yes, we are polite and thoughtful and loving, but we are not responsible for how other people feel. When we tune into what we actually need and act on it, we start to break the chains of codependency, people pleasing, perfectionism, and to find our voices, to live into self-care as the primary entree, as dinner, not dessert, in our own lives.

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Me first, you second, with love. Fill your own cup first, my sweet beauty. Growing up in these patterns emptied it. Fill your own cup and give to the collective healing, the collective good. Be of service from your own overflow. Not in lieu of your self-care.

My sweet beauty, if this resonated for you, if you like what you are hearing and you want more, I have an exciting opportunity for you, which is that I am currently enrolling for my six-month online high-touch small-group course called The Feminist Wellness Guide to Overcoming Codependency.

Yes, that's a mouthful but I like it so I'm sticking with it for now. We are enrolling. So it's a very, very small group. It's a beautiful program in which it has this real family vibe and it's very connected and really, really supportive. And we go deep because codependency is so deep. It's so insidious and sneaky.

If you want to learn all about it, you've got a couple options. Head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass, and that tells you all about the masterclass, all of the details. If you want to learn more about it, you can also text me. 917-540-8447. I'll say that again. 917-540-8447. Drop me a text with your email address and I will send you all the information you need.

I also send out lots of sweet and loving text messages couple times a week. So if you want even more love from me, that's a really great way to get it and it's totally free for you. I mean of course, whatever your phone carrier charges, that's between you and Mabel. I love showing my age. I'm proud to be from the 70s.

Alright, I'm going to hush my little buttons. But be in touch. Let's connect. I want to tell you so much more about the masterclass because it's so much fun. It's so amazing. And I would love to have you join us. Alright my

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beauties, let's do what we do. Nice big deep belly breath in, long slow out with a sigh.

Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling.

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.