

Ep #79: Conflict Avoidance



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With Your Host

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When we believe that other people's opinions of us matter more than our own, sharing our opinions, wants, needs, desires, setting boundaries, upholding them, and entering into challenging conversations can feel, well, challenging.

Today, we'll be looking at the thought errors behind conflict avoidance, and I'll be sharing some simple remedies to help you begin to rewrite and reimagine your experience of sharing your truth so you can get what you want in life, and can pause before hiding your authenticity away for fear of upsetting someone else.

Does this resonate, my beauty? 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. So, I am excited. It's official. We bought a place in the Hudson Valley, upstate New York, which I know, Hudson Valley is not real upstate to people in Albany, but it's real enough to me. Still unoccupied Lenape territory, and we'll be settling in up there soon.

And I'm just so excited to be amongst the trees in a real way, to start a huge garden where I'll grow medicinal herbs and food, and oh my gosh, we're going to get a couple of dogs, which is so exciting. Dogs is the bestest. I mean, just the bestest.

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And we'll be keeping a place here in the city, but yeah, I'm excited. I'm excited for some more upstate trees, creeks, fresh air, less Wi-Fi exposure. I mean just like, all the things. So really excited.

But you're probably not here to learn about my garden plans. Or maybe you are. I'm definitely planting tulsi, sweet grass, sage, lemon balm. I mean, there's quite the list. Echinacea, I could go on and on, but I shan't. But I'll post pictures. I'll post lots of pictures in my stories on the Instagram, over at @victoriaalbinawellness. Make sure you're following me there.

You can keep up with our adventures. Either way, whether you're here to hear about my garden plans or to change your life. What we are talking about today are the twin topics of conflict avoidance and not speaking your needs, which are two sides of the same coin.

So, we talk about so many things on this podcast. How to apologize, how to reparent, how to engage in purposeful, intentional thought work, and the underlying idea that connects all of them, an idea that is both super simple and can be super challenging to live into every day is the reality that you are not what other people think of you.

You are not made up of other people's opinions, ideas, or desires. You, mind, body, and spirit, are so much more than all of that. Those thoughts, those ideas, notions and assumptions are thought energy. You, the essence of who you are is unique and beautiful, evolving and growing, born perfect and worthy of love.

So how does this relate to today's topic of conflict avoidance? Well, when we are stuck in codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thoughts, we are stuck in the thought error that our worth is based on other people's happiness, and other people being okay and other people thinking we're

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okay, in thinking that it is our job to manage other people's feelings for them.

And so when that's what's going on in your brain, then conflict or things that feel like conflict but actually aren't, like setting a boundary or saying how you will and won't be spoken to, what you want and need, using your voice for something as simple as saying what you prefer for dinner doesn't feel simple.

And it can feel dangerous to your sense of self when these thought errors are rolling around in your beautiful brain. Today, I want to encourage you, yes you, to begin to see the thought errors based on your experience for sure, that make conflict or asking for what you need or want feel like challenging things, so you can begin to see it all differently.

To see it less as a scary place to be and more as a chance to ask for more, to explore ideas, to expand relationships, and to grow. And of course, to use the thought work protocol to shift your thinking for your own good and growth. So how will we do this?

Well, we'll start by defining conflict avoidance, then we'll talk a little more about codependency and the connection between codependent thought habits and conflict avoidance. Lastly, as always, I want to put some remedies, some tools in your toolkit for what to do when you find yourself in a situation where conflict may actually be the better path forward, but those fears pop up.

So, what does it mean to be conflict avoidant? First and as always, I'll situate this conversation in our childhood experiences, our socialization, the systems of oppression that we're subjected to. All of these things external to you that have taught you not to speak up.

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And we need to flag here that these are all very smart reasons why your genius child self-learned that asking for what you want or speaking an opinion that someone might disagree with or have a problem with is a vulnerable making and thus, dangerous, dumb, or silly thing to do.

I get that. I get why your inner child would think those things, would avoid them like the proverbial plague. I get it deeply. And the healing work here is a thing we talk about often on this show. To work to hold the duality. You can both see and hear and give love to your child self, who may be screaming in the background, “Oh my gosh, don’t ask her what you need, don’t disagree, this is not going to turn out well. Keep quiet.”

And you can do the work to reparent yourself, to give your sweet inner little ones some big love, while simultaneously recognizing that your adult self is safe. And of course, I’m speaking generally here. Not about instances of abuse or actual lack of safety.

And you get to recognize that your mind is telling you and is believing something that simply isn’t true. That speaking your needs or opinions, potentially entering into conflict or disagreement is something you can’t or shouldn’t do. And nothing could be further from the truth.

Like we’ve talked about a ton here on the podcast, there are behaviors that we engage in because they make sense in the moment and resonate with our truest self. There are, however, times when we behave in ways that harm us by silencing or hiding ourselves in order to attempt to make others more comfortable because we are conflating other people’s thoughts about us with who we truly are, with our deepest self, with our worth.

In that vein, there are times when voicing a disagreement may not be what will serve you in the moment or may not literally be safe. And the more in

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touch you are with your body, your nervous system state and your energy, the more discernment you'll have about the right path for you in any given moment.

What we get to be mindful of are the times when we are avoiding conflict or disagreement because we are shrinking away, because we are having people-pleasing thoughts, because we are scared of what the fallout could be and we may be going to that worst-case scenario when the true fallout may simply be that someone else is displeased with you.

In those moments, the discomfort of having the conversation, setting the boundary feels worse than the discomfort of the suffering that you're used to. The suffering you've always known. The discomfort of staying quiet or small when you know you have something to say.

So let's pause, zoom out, and look at the thought work protocol here. So the circumstance, someone says something you disagree with or want to set a boundary around. The thought you may be having, and this may be totally subconscious or not, the thought is I shouldn't disagree. I need to be a good girl and not upset her. I don't want her to think I'm rude, I don't want her to think I'm trouble.

The feeling that may provoke for you and gosh, it could be one of a million. It'll be different for each of us. But ones that come to me are feeling anxious, small, sad, angry, resentful, or disappointed in yourself. That thought about not disagreeing, being a good girl, following your socialization, worrying what other people think about you could provoke any of those feelings in you.

The action you might take is to keep quiet, which means you don't get heard. You don't get to experience yourself as someone who uses her

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voice for her own good, who addresses things that don't work for her, doesn't speak her needs.

And the result, you continue to strengthen that inner story that your role on this planet is to stay in codependent and people-pleasing thinking, to keep putting others ahead of yourself, to keep playing small and to keep your mouth shut, swirling in the discomfort you've grown used to and the resentment that sits by your side.

This is a really challenging way to live, my darling. And it perpetuates this fear story that conflict or speaking up and being told you're wrong may be something you can't come back from or bear. So you hide your ideas, your desires, your wants, your needs, your concerns, and that, my love, is definitely no way to live.

So let's do what we do. Nice deep breath in and long, slow out. Alright my beauties, you ready? Nerd alert. So, when we dig a little deeper into the problems with conflict avoidance, science comes to the rescue to explain it. Our minds, bodies, and spirits are all connected.

When we hear something that we disagree with, let's say a political position or your mother's thoughts on your latest job, move, relationship, our bodies start to release hormones like adrenaline and norepinephrine to pump us up for the disagreement that may follow. Fight or flight.

When we don't engage in the conversation honestly and openly, when we hold our feelings in, our bodies continue to produce adrenaline and other hormones like cortisol that study after study has shown cause us physical harm, including higher rates of diabetes, hypertension or high blood pressure, depression, and even period troubles.

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And this is for realies, like, because science. Alternately, if we grew up being constantly shot down, silenced, hushed, told that children should be seen and not heard, made to feel like our voices and opinions and needs and boundaries don't matter, we might sink right into dorsal vagal shutdown, into playing possum, deer in the headlights, my blank defenses up, mouth shut, agreeing, which can look like the fawn response, appeasing and yes, I'll do a different show all about that.

But we stay quiet. We hush ourselves before someone else can tell us we are wrong. And that's painful in its own way too, my love. And continues to habituate your nervous system to experiencing life in this shut down place.

When we put on a fake smile, or in other ways push down or suppress distressing emotions, when we buffer against them in an attempt to stay connected to others, we counterintuitively can increase feelings of anxiety or depression and loneliness within ourselves by not speaking our truth, not living into our authenticity but rather attempting to people please.

When we avoid conflict or challenging conversations at all cost, we cut ourselves off from honest communication from others and from ourselves, which interferes with meaningful intimacy and living into our truth, honoring our truth. And remember, sweet babies, I'm all about you lifting you up, you attending to you, but remember, collective healing is vital and social connection is a truly, truly vital part of being a human mammal.

So, I can read your mind. And I know that some of you may have some objections already around all this talk of engage in conflict. So you may be thinking, "Well Victoria, should we go around arguing with everyone? Do we need to pick fights every time we disagree with someone?"

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And I'm going to go with no. No, I do not recommend that. And there is a difference between engaging meaningfully in conflictual conversations and picking fights. The difference lies in your why. Your goals and internal drivers.

Are you disagreeing because you're resentful and are not talking about the real issue but instead are throwing a false flag on the field with a jab or a sort of sideways comment? Are you disagreeing because you feel bad about yourself and you want to feel right for just a moment?

Are you stirring the pot because you are hungry, angry, lonely, tired, two drinks in, or hungover? Figuring out that internal driver, the reason why you want to share your opinion, set a boundary, ask for what you need, really knowing what's moving you is so important and it is possible when you are connected to yourself, to your true deepest self.

And you can get there with breath, connecting to your senses, your emotions, your body, and engaging in regular daily thought work. So, let's get to it. And three cheers for the remedies, my nerds.

Okay, so the first thing to look at is the story you have around the word conflict. What are you labeling as conflict? And why does that word keep you from moving in to speaking up for yourself? If setting a boundary feels like conflict, I want to invite you to look at that. Why would it be conflict to simply state what you want and need for yourself, your body, your children, your household, your pet, your life?

So that's step one. Take a look at what you think of as conflict and see what the stories are there for you. As I mentioned in the introduction, we often fear confrontation because the idea of someone disagreeing with us can feel scary. When we rest our self-worth on the opinions and ideas of

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others, we can put ourselves in a position of perpetual danger since well, humans tend to have a lot of thoughts and opinions and many are prone to voicing them.

What I work on a lot with my clients is detangling and disengaging our identities from the thoughts and opinions of other people. And this work can be challenging, which is why we work with coaches. These thought patterns are a challenging thing to break because they can be challenging to see. They're so often the water we're swimming in because we've been thinking these thoughts for so long that they feel like beliefs.

And when we do work on our thought patterns, we start to see that disagreeing with others is just that. Not agreeing. It's not any heavier, bigger, anything other than that. The other person has thoughts, you have thoughts, those thoughts are different, so you can talk it out.

And more often than not, come out perfectly intact if you stay focused on the content of the disagreement itself, rather than taking things personally or making them mean anything about you for having had those thoughts. When we keep the focus on the issue at hand, rather than turning it into a referendum on our worth, we can approach conflict and disagreement as an opportunity to explore our own ideas about the world and to grow more and more into our truest selves and potentially to foster even deeper connections with the people we love.

In codependent thinking and our relationship build on these thought patterns, this can prove so challenging because we have mistakenly convinced ourselves that disagreement is wrong and bad. That either we are wrong for disagreeing at all, or that we are bad if we put the other person in an uncomfortable position by disagreeing with them. That is the primary thought error here.

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Notice who you are centering in your own mind there. The other person. So, let's pause, take another big deep belly breath, and out. Check in with your body, see if there are places that feel tense as you listen to this. Places where there's ease.

Remember, all bodily sensations are welcome and perfect. And your body will respond as you start to see yourself in these statements, as it resonates for you. Just notice them with as little judgment as possible. Thank them for being messengers.

Now, after getting settled into our bodies, let's think about reframing disagreements and conflicts as being about ourselves, about our desire to communicate our thoughts and feelings and reset relationships that may have gone astray. We get to share what we think. We get to have our own thoughts and opinions, boundaries and needs, and other people get to have theirs.

And they can manage their feelings too and we aren't other people's keepers. When we learn how to step out of codependent thinking, we can start to live this knowledge on the regular. Not just in your brain, but in your body. Your thoughts are yours, theirs are theirs.

So, I've given you some big picture solutions, work on the thought patterns that keep up codependent, people-pleasing, and conflict avoidant habits, and that takes some work. It takes time and it takes effort. So, what do we do in the moment?

Well, when we are in a position to disagree with someone about something, when we're in that place where we want to set a boundary, ask for a need to be met, and when we feel that fear and worry rising through your belly, there are a few things you can do immediately.

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One, do what we do. Take those full body breaths, extend that exhale to blow out more CO2 than you took in oxygen. And I'll invite you to not worry about the other person. They probably won't even notice your big belly breaths, or they might assume you're taking time to think. It's not your business. You take your time, take your breath, get into your body.

Two, engage your senses. Use another sense like sight, touch, taste, or smell to get yourself back in your body. To help you in this, there is a free orienting exercise download I've made for you and you can find it on the homepage over at victoriaalbina.com.

You can also pop in some gum, you can touch something like your sweatshirt, your shorts, your arm, something with texture. You can touch the table and notice the texture. You can even do something like scratching your thumb with another fingernail. All these things are to help you get out of your head and to help you connect into your body and get present.

If you're feeling numb or frozen heading into that dorsal vagal shutdown, you can try using a little cold water on your hands, your wrist, your face, and start with just a trickle. Don't shock your body, baby.

If you're getting activated, you can try getting under the covers, holding something warm like a cup of tea, putting your face in the sun if that's an option, or using a scent like lavender, cedar, to bring your body back towards center.

And remember, no nervous system state is optimal, is wrong, is bad. They are all perfect. And we love and appreciate them all because they are all teachers. Next, I want to invite you to get clear on the content of your disagreement, your need, your boundary. Maybe take a moment to go to the bathroom to write it down, write it on a Post-It.

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Have it at the top of your mind and pull your mind back to that if you feel yourself go astray or to take things personally or if you find yourself going into attack mode, defense mode. And of course, I want to invite you to ask yourself if you really want to engage in this conversation, if it truly feels supportive and constructive for you and your relationships.

Baby, you don't have to pick up the rope just because someone else wants to play tug of war. You just don't have to do that. I know that codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thinking makes us think, oh, someone wants to get into it, I have to, but it's just not true.

And the question I want to invite you to ask yourself here is as always, why? Why do I want to engage in this conversation? Why do I want to avoid it? And then ask yourself if you like your reason why.

If, for example, you would rather not debate if racism is real because you know you stand on the side of justice and it's actually not debatable, it is a fact, or if you don't want to talk about a recent conflict with someone who goes into bully mode because you are feeling tender today and want to honor that, or if you just don't feel comfortable setting a boundary, asking for what you need or voicing your opinion because you're worried about the other person's reaction, well, that last one, that's when you might want to lean into it and support yourself in shifting your thoughts with the goal of having the smaller conversations about challenging things so you can start to get comfortable with that particular discomfort.

Baby, you get to choose. And I recommend you do so with intention and care. Not from a habitual way of thinking or wanting to avoid conflict like it's electrified lava. So you've run through this list, you like your reasons why. You then get to state your piece.

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So let's say that a coworker slacked on their part of a project but in front of the boss, takes credit for the work that you did. Ouch. Okay, take a breath, glance out the window, pop a mint, take another breath, and then focus on the content of the issue without making things personal.

It's not about you, it's not about them as humans. It's about the behavior. Your coworker has the thought, "We worked on this equally," but you have a different thought, "Actually, I did all the work." As best you can, stay focused on your ideas and share them. It's not personal, so there's no need to get defensive or to attack either. You get to simply state your truth.

You get to say what's true for you and you deserve to. If you choose instead to let it stand and not state your case, and your why is that you don't want to upset them or cause turmoil, when in fact they have upset you and you are feeling turmoil in response to their choices and your thoughts about it, well, then you only hurt yourself.

Whatever you choose my sweet beauty, make sure you like your why and that you are attending to your beautiful inner children, your body, and your mind. You can do this, sweet one. I know it's so challenging. And if this framework has been helpful and you want some more professional support to make this kind of thinking and acting on your own behalf your new normal, I'm here for you.

Head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass to learn all about my upcoming six-month course. It's a beautiful, amazing, small-group, high-touch program all about overcoming codependency, perfectionism, people pleasing, and it's just amazing.

[Victoriaalbina.com/masterclass](https://victoriaalbina.com/masterclass). Go check it out. Fill out a form there. You can get on the list to hop on a call with me. I cannot wait. Alright my

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beauties, let's take a nice big deep breath in and out. And remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well. 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.