

Ep #161: Conflict Doesn't Have to Be the Worst



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With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, and Life Coach, Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome my love, let's get started.

Hello hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. So last week, we talked about conflict and our concurrent disdain for and the subconscious penchant for inciting conflict as folks with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits.

This week, we'll be talking about how to have a healthier relationship with conflict. So if you didn't listen to last week's show, I would recommend that you pause this one, go listen to last week, and then come on back. It'll make a lot more sense, I promise.

So this week, we will be diving in to talk about how we can make conflict, particularly in relationships, with the people we care about in our lives feel a little easier, a little lighter, a little safer to traverse.

Last week, we started with the dictionary definition of conflict as a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one, which as I said last week, feels like very heavy language indeed. And I think we can really shift our relationship to conflict both internally, within ourselves, and in community.

We can rethink conflict as conversation. We don't have to make it so heavy and dire for two people to have differing opinions or points of view. This is not to say that we have to agree with others and their opinions, that we have to condone what they're saying, or even be okay with it if it's not aligned with how we think about the world.

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And herein I'm thinking about politics more than anything. As a queer Latinx immigrant with a Master's in Public Health, there are lots of opinions out there, particularly in the last two years that I very much don't agree with. Very much don't.

And I also don't have to get argumentative or make someone else having thoughts that I don't agree with into an argument or conflict. And I choose often not to go to there with individual people. Because I value having peace in my heart more than I want to convince someone, anyone of my point of view.

That is, I can accept that they have their thoughts that I do not agree with and I can share mine with calm and equanimity. And I can choose to spend the energy that I would otherwise spend trying to convince someone that being racist, sexist, misogynistic, homophobic, anti-science, transphobic, ableist, et cetera is wrong and that they are wrong.

And I can spend that energy building community. Supporting activists, feminists, those working to make the world a more just and equitable place. So I do speak up when someone says something that I find offensive or problematic, and I'm not out here to get into conflict or some lengthy back and forth, especially if someone is dug in and doesn't want to hear me. That's not how I want to spend my time or energy.

If you want to be hateful, be hateful. I'll let you know I disagree with you, I'll let you know that your words for example may hurt my heart. But I'm not out here, I'm not down to debate my humanity or anyone else's humanity, right to live, right to play sports, right to exist in their bodies safely. Not down for the debate. Not down for conflict around that either.

So with all of that hot mess said, today, I want to focus on interpersonal communication and conflict moments that come up in relationships, like

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partnerships, friendships, family relationships. Relationships where you do want to come to understanding, where you do want to build trust and connection, where you do want to stay connected with yourself and steady in knowing you have your own back.

Knowing that you aren't going to cave and you aren't going to attack, you aren't going to get defensive, and you aren't going to appease. So you can begin to think in new ways that allow you to realize that someone saying they didn't like something you did, someone wanting something different from what you want, someone just being themselves is not necessarily conflict or a problem unless you make it into conflict or a problem.

And of course, the perennial and vital caveat, I'm not talking about situations of abuse here, my love. Not at all. So one of the ways that we tend to think about and relate to challenging conversations is to avoid them, to sweep it under the rug, to pretend we're okay, to people please and try to sidestep having the conversation if we don't believe we have the skills to have that conversation in a way that feels doable, bearable, or okay.

If we don't believe that we'll have our own backs, if we don't think we're worthy enough of protecting, defending, taking care of. So that action of avoiding is never going to get you to the peace and calm that you're looking for.

In fact, taking any action is not going to create peace and calm for you until you change your thoughts and feelings. So if it's your habit in a conversation, a conflict to appease and placate, if that's the action you're taking, which sounds like, "It's okay, fine, whatever you want, forget about it, I shouldn't have brought it up, I'm not upset, I'm not mad, it's fine, I'm fine," whatever you do to avoid conflict, it's not going to go away if it's still in your thoughts and it's still in your mind.

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Let's be real about it, you're going to spend the day ruminating about it or talking your friends' ears off about it soon enough if you're not actually dealing with the core issue. And the same issue in whatever relationship we're thinking about here is likely to come back up or to come out sideways if you don't address it directly.

So shifting our relationship with challenging conversations and conflict is truly vital if we want to have healthier relationships with the people we love. And it's also really important to remember how challenging this whole shift can be to think about conversations instead of conflict.

And it's challenging coming from where we come. And it's important to remember that humans socialized as women in particular are taught to not engage in conflict, that it's not what good girls do, it's not ladylike, it's not polite. And come on, history has shown us we're unlikely to be listened to if we bring up our concerns anyway, right?

So add that to what we talked about last week, how many of us are uncomfortable with or fear conflict because of our childhood experiences with challenging conversations because of how conflict was modeled for us as kids, in addition to all the cultural and societal messages we receive about whether it's okay and safe for us to have opinions and to make them known.

And so of course this whole issue can feel really complex. So, we start with our thoughts. Before the conversation even begins, remembering that we can use our prefrontal cortex, that executive function part of our minds to choose our thoughts in advance.

Because if you're starting a convo from thoughts like, "This is going to be really unpleasant, this is going to be hard, this is going to be so painful," then think about it, my darling, you are walking into it from a worked up or

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shut down place to start with before you've even opened your mouth or sat down.

So I recommend starting with thought work to get your thoughts cleaned up, tidied up, to see your habitual thinking and to ask yourself the perennial question, do I like this thought and what it's creating for me, before you even start having the conversation.

Because if you don't, your brain will try to keep you from having those conversations because of your stories about how those conversations will go. So you need to pause and to really tidy up those thoughts.

And of course, my nerds, the desire to be well seen by your community is a very human one, a mammalian one. We want to be liked by the people around us because it makes us believe we'll be safer when danger comes. So that's understandable. Give yourself the grace. Be gentle with you.

And the work is to learn how to have your own back so you can feel safe internally and can come to the conversations you once labeled as hard, painful, challenging, with your back up less. More available to hear the other person and to connect in with what you and they need to say.

So your boss or a date says, "We need to talk." Your parent or your adult kid says, "I don't like the way you said that to me." Someone you love says, "Hey, you really crossed a boundary there." You and your BFF totally misunderstand one another and you stand them up by accident.

It's vacation planning time and you and your date have wildly different desires for time off, or your uncle says something racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic at the dinner table. Or any number of moments happen where your heart jumps into your throat because it may in fact be conflict time.

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I'll share with you the things that I do to help myself to stay present, calm, grounded, and able to have a more loving conversation instead of jumping to conclusions that doom is neigh just because real talk is called for.

So much of healthy conflict for me is in the prep. And this is work I recommend you do as soon as you can so you can start to understand yourself and your habits in real-talk conversations so you can start to show up to them as your most favorite self.

One, learn how to ground yourself in your body. Nothing good comes from trying to have a real-talk conversation from an activated or shutdown nervous system. Some of the things that are grounding for me are movements like figure eights, which we do in Anchored, breathing in and then breathing out long and slow, orienting, which I teach in my free meditations.

You can get those right at the top of victoriaalbina.com. There's a little bar. You can click it and you can put your email in to get a free orienting exercise. But really, learning how to ground yourself in your body, how to feel at home in yourself and present in the room before the conversation starts has been an absolute game-changer for me.

Two, learn about your own nervous system habits. Learn how to map your nervous system. If your nervous system tends, when something is challenging, to go into fight or flight, to get sort of more ramped up, more anxious, more worried, or to get aggressive and push back, know that.

If your nervous system tends to go towards dorsal, which is shutdown, foot on the brake, slow it all down, disconnect, which is what my nervous system tends to do, be prepared for that response to come to the fore as well.

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And again, this is not because there's any problem with any nervous system state, but it's just to say when you know where your nervous system is likely to go, you can prep the person you're talking with and you can prep yourself and be ready to meet yourself to bring yourself back closer towards ventral vagus, where you can have the most loving and most connected conversation.

Three, remember your family dynamic role. So if you were the fixer, the clown, the appeaser, be prepared for that habit to rule the moment when there's real talk. Four, get real about your habits in this relationship or ones like it.

Do you tend to appease? Do you tend to people please? Do you tend to fight dirty? Like jabbing, insulting, calling names. Do you tend to globalize or catastrophize and to use statements like, "You always do this, you never do the dishes, it's obvious you don't actually love me?" Or do you tend to get anxious and clingy?

Get to know yourself and your own habits in challenging conversations so once again, you can get ahead of them. You can know where your mind, your body, your inner children are likely to go. And you can lovingly, caringly take care of yourself before you go down that road.

Five, understand your attachment style. So episodes 129, 130, and 135 are about attachment styles. And when you know, again, your attachment habit, if you tend to go towards avoidant, anxious, what kind of insecure attachment you head towards, then you can know where you're likely to go and you can support yourself so you don't have to go to the extreme of that habit without your own intentionality.

Six, do not pass go without establishing or bringing to mind your clean fight club rules. So these are another term for boundaries. But it's a little

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different than boundaries actually. So boundaries are me saying what is and is not acceptable for me and what I will do if you do the thing that I said is not acceptable.

So if you do x, then I will do y. If you yell at me, then I will leave the room. And so clean fight club rules are mutually agreed upon boundaries. Mutually agreed upon rules of engagement. For example, neither one of us will raise our voice and these are so important because it allows our minds, our bodies, our inner children, our limbic system, our nervous system to relax.

Because you don't have to be as hypervigilant, as on alert when you're having a heated, a real-talk conversation with someone because you know that there will be, for example, no swearing at. So you don't need to be on the lookout for that.

And of course, if you're having a conversation with someone where you don't have clean fight club rules, I would highly recommend pausing and saying, "Hey, I just want to be really clear before we get into this that I have the following three or four rules and I'm not available to continue this conversation unless you can agree to not swear at me or call me names in this process, not raise your voice," and whatever else comes up for you. Respect the rules of a timeout.

These are just some examples from the top of my head, but I will encourage you to think about what is top of mind most important for you. So we are going to pause here because there's a lot to this. And next week, we will go deep into my clean fight club rules.

But for now, think about what those might be for you. Think about what is really important for you in helping you to stay in ventral vagal, to help your inner children to feel grounded, safer, okay when you are having real talk.

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Alright my darlings, let's do what we do. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. I'll see you next week my darling.

If you've been enjoying the show and learning a ton, it's time to apply it with my expert guidance so you can live life with intention, without the anxiety, overwhelm, and resentment, so you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive intimate group coaching program, so head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there. It's going to be a good one.