

## Ep #191: Getting to Neutral



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Victoria Albina, NP, MPH**

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

## Ep #191: Getting to Neutral

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. This week I want to talk about a coaching exercise I love that's been super helpful in my life, and it's called Getting to Neutral. It offers us a framework for getting clear on how we perceive the world and ourselves, so we can decide how we want to relate to the world and ourselves.

We dive deep on this, in week seven or so of Anchored. It came up recently in the group, and the coaching and discussing we did around it was so helpful for all of my Anchored sailors that I wanted to share it with you, because I love you.

I also wanted to note that I am really leaning hard on the nautical theme around Anchored; saying Anchored sailors brought that to mind. I will only digress for a second. I'll be right back, I promise. So, I am from a beach town, Mar del Plata, in Argentina. I grew up in the great state of Rhode Island; greatest state in the union.

Two places that use a lot of anchors and nautical theme in their signage and logos and like, tourist trap stuff. I have two anchored tattoos myself; I've had one of them for like a decade. Oh, my goodness, what even is time? And, the other one for like, five, six years? No six, seven... seven, eight years. Ah, it's all a blur.

But the point is, I'm really leaning in on Anchored sailors and coaching ahoy, and I'm really into it. So, I've just felt the need to share that because it's cute, and it makes me happy. And I enjoy things that make me happy,

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like nautical motifs. All right, my loves, that is just about enough of my digression.

So, let's dive in. There is this saying that I just love, that a teacher in elementary school used to say all the time, she would say, "Your feelings aren't facts." I'll say that in not that accent; your feelings aren't facts. And, I believe that. I mean, our feelings are so vital, so important.

You know, I'm out here teaching somatics and nervous system wellness, I believe in the power of feelings. They must be felt and processed through our bodies somatically, which means through the body; Oh, never negate your feelings might tender one, they will come back for sure, that's what they do.

And we can also pause to recognize that our feelings, which are energy moving through our body, are the result of our thoughts. And, our thoughts are created in this beautiful dance between our nervous systems and our minds.

And those thoughts are directly impacted by our environment, our culture, our socialization, our social location. Our personal histories of stress, distress, and trauma. What we learned in our family of origin. What we learned from white settler colonialism, from the patriarchy, from late-stage capitalism.

Where I'm going is, that our feelings aren't facts because our thoughts are often not just not our own, but our thoughts aren't facts either. Our thoughts are habitual. They're what happens when our monkey mind, the old limbic system, gets in front of our mental typewriter and starts banging away on the keys.

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And, those monkeys don't always tell the truest tale. The thoughts they write and present to you to think, are based in your history; your past, the stories you've been told, the stories the world tells about you, and of course, your nervous system capacity.

And the most beautiful part of your thoughts not being facts, but simply being a sentence in your mind is this; you don't have to believe everything you think. It's a little mind-blowing, right? You don't have to believe everything you think. You can decide you don't want to believe a thought your mind is offering. You can change a thought your mind is offering.

And one of my favorite ways to decide if I want to do either of those things, or if I do, in fact, want to believe this thought, and live my life from it, starts with getting to neutral. Which is a thought exercise that you can use to evaluate your thinking and to come back into presence.

So, you can intentionally choose what you want to think and feel, about the moment at hand, by asking yourself if this, this whatever it is; this situation, this person this me, myself, this life occurrence. If this weren't bad or good, how do I want to think and feel about it? Isn't that so powerful? Gosh, I just find that so wildly powerful.

But, of course, I didn't always know this. I used to think that all sorts of things were inherently good and inherently bad; like all of us. To quote myself from Episode 147 on *All-or-nothing Thinking*, after working as a hospice nurse, I came to see that death can be a phenomenal gift. I can welcome it in for the people and animals I love, when the time is right.

That doesn't make it less sad, but it does make it less knee-jerk bad. In my many years as a nurse practitioner, I came to see that what might be a mind numbing, earth shaking, terrible diagnosis to one person, can be the wakeup call another person needs. And, can lead them to make beautiful

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and amazing changes that improve their whole life. And this, right in there, is the gift of getting to neutral.

You restore your own ability to decide how you want to think about a thing right now. Regardless of how you were taught to think about it. Regardless of how you've thought about it in the past. Because who amongst us hasn't thought death is bad. But is it always? From neutral, you get to decide.

And this is so important, because when we believe a situation is intrinsically positive or negative, good or bad, we block our own ability to choose how we want to respond. When we're reacting from habit, we'll always get the results we've always gotten; nothing changes. We stay stagnant and stuck, and can't grow our capacity and our nervous systems to show up differently in our lives.

Getting neutral is an especially important tool for us as emotional outsourcers, by which I mean, folks with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits. Because we go so quickly to all-or-nothing, black-or-white thinking as a way to protect ourselves from the discomfort of that liminal space, of the gray in between the black and the white.

Practicing getting to neutral gives you an opportunity to not leave your habitual thinking, which offers you a middle path, if you buddhistly will, and I will. And before that perfectionist part of your brain turns on and says, "Okay, I have to get 100% neutral," you don't. You can experience a benefit from this practice, whether you can go to 100% neutral about death, for example; about a breakup, for example, or not.

The middle path can be believing that automatic, autonomic thought, right, nervous system-driven thought, just a wee bit less, just for today. To loosen its grip on you, by offering yourself the chance to scooch towards neutral around a painful story you've always told about yourself. A painful belief

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about relationships based on your attachment style. Or, a new situation in your life that your brain would habitually spin into doom times about.

When you can start to see that maybe, just maybe, not everything is inherently terrible or inherently amazing, you give yourself the gift of choice. That maybe it's not the very worst, and maybe it's not all sunshine and roses. You give yourself perspective. And that's a really remarkable thing when you've been running on autopilot for a lifetime.

And, in so doing, you start to step out of that perfectionist habit that says 0 or 10. And you get to see yourself as a work in progress. As something just as equally neutral as anything else in life. You get to step towards acceptance when you step out of judging everyone, everything, and yourself, so immediately and harshly. Thereby, getting to neutral's a beautiful way to bring in more compassion and love for ourselves and others.

Let's look at an example. So, maybe you say yes to something or someone, when you really wanted to say no. But your people-pleasing got in the way; it's okay, it happens. But then, your monkey mind starts screaming at you.

“Aargh,” it says, “All of my emotional outsourcing thoughts and behaviors, all the codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing ways I move through the world are the worst, and they are ruining my life. I have to stop this now.”

Which, of course, leads you to self-blame and shame. And then, of course, you put all this pressure on yourself to change. You tell the story that you're inherently bad, that you should have figured this out years ago. You get pissed at yourself, your family, the world. And what does all that bring you, my love? Sounds like more stress, more ouch.

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What if you decided to think of your emotional outsourcing habit as neutral? Not good, not bad, but just what you've learned to do as a survival skill, as a coping mechanism. And so, it's been what you've been doing, because it's how you learned to get through.

From there, might you be able to find some more compassion and love for yourself? Might you, maybe, be able to see all the ways your habitual thoughts, feelings, behaviors have protected you when you needed them? And might that not bring some much needed self-love and compassion back into your life and your self-concept?

Well, I'll say this, it has for me; it's been wildly helpful for me. And it's one of the huge things we spend a lot of time, in Anchored, looking at our survival skills as gifts. You can't jump to there, right? Because then, you're just BS'ing yourself, so we don't try to. We go from "I have these survival skills, and they were terrible," to "I have these survival skills, and maybe it's possible, that just maybe, they're kind of maybe, a little neutral. Maybe."

And from there, we grow towards gratitude, love, and care for the skills we have learned to get through life. And then, of course, from there, we change it all, right? But we need to do that initial work to be able to make that change.

My nerds, I will also say, getting to neutral brings us back into ventral vagal; the calm, safe and social part of the nervous system. Where we do, in fact, make our best decisions from. When you stay in the story, 'this is bad, and I shouldn't be angry about this,' you go into sympathetic; fight-or-flight, and stay there.

When you believe your habitual thought, 'I'm the worst and I'm doomed,' you go to dorsal and you stay there. When you pause, do a somatic or body-based practice, connect with your breath, with nature, with

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Pachamama (the Earth), and return home to yourself through presence, then you regain your brain.

And I do mean your literal cognitive capacity, that isn't available outside of ventral vagal. And from there, from ventral vagal, you can choose how you want to respond to anything life throws at you. You don't have to be ruled by your habitual thinking or your automatic, autonomic nervous system response.

For example, let's say you're at a big department meeting, and a colleague calls you out; you can choose to see that circumstance as a terrible affront. You can spend hours and days thinking about what you might have done to spark such behavior. You can take it personally, can make it about you, and collapse inward into how terrible you are. Or, you can get furious, you could feel hurt, you could spin in all of that; all of that is available to you always.

Or, you can choose to pause and to get neutral about it. By labeling that interaction as a neutral thing that happened. And then, from there, from taking the judgment and the adjectives and the 'how dare she' out of it, then you can ask yourself how you want to think and feel about it. And in that process, you regain your agency, and can start to make intentional decisions.

From neutral, you can also bring in compassion for others. And you can zoom out and get a broader and, in a way, more mature view of the situation by contemplating all the things that may be. Perhaps your colleague's behavior was simply a product of her own thinking; her history, her trauma, her viewpoints, how she was taught to communicate at home, and what she's learned by being in your company about how one should communicate there.



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Perhaps it has nothing to do with you, but rather, has everything to do with her own thoughts about you or the world; about her ability to regulate her nervous system or not, how she was raised, whether she has cramps or gas that day, because she could maybe have both they do tend to... they're little twinsies; the cramps and the gas. But it's true, right? Maybe she felt like garbage, and so she reacted in a garbage way. Right?

By pausing, when choosing to take a little stroll through neutral, you can open up space to take that more objective look. To think about what might be happening for the other, and to assess your role, if any, in the situation from a more objective place. And from there, you can respond thoughtfully.

If you did, in fact, make a mistake then you might want to come correct about that; I'd recommend it. And you can do that from neutral without making the situation a personal indictment of your worth, or hers. Because when we get caught up in, 'I'm a bad person, she's a bad person, they're a bad person,' we just perpetuate the shame and blame cycle without creating any real way of moving forward. By getting to neutral, we can see and reflect on what's our part, and what isn't.

Remembering, that as emotional outsourcers, we have one of two habits, usually. We either tend to eschew all responsibility, right? It wasn't me, right? It's their fault. And then, we blame others for our behaviors, for our choices, for the results in our lives.

Or, we tend to take everything on as 100 bajillion trillion majillion percent our fault, because we're terrible and bad, remember? Right? And getting to neutral interrupts that habit, which is a marvelous gift to give ourselves; not to throw ourselves or anyone directly under the bus.

And when you pause to contemplate the situation from the calm of neutral, and thus, ventral vagal, then you can take appropriate action from that

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energy. Which, let's be real, tends to work out a lot better than from freaking out in sympathetic, or shutting down in dorsal.

If, to return to our example, this colleague who called you out at this department meeting, was, in fact, out of line, then from presence and calm, you can speak with her; you can speak with your boss, you can speak with her boss, you can speak with HR, if you need to.

You can advocate for yourself. You can take care of yourself. You can do what you need to do to have your own back, while also simultaneously allowing yourself the time and space to feel all your feelings. All of that is so much more available from neutral.

Meanwhile, when we're just reactive in our same old ways, then the old neural groove in our mind that leads us into our previous cozy, habitual thoughts spirals, will get activated and will start to take over. And, can keep us from actually doing what is needed to step out of those cycles. Can keep us from speaking up when things are actually not okay and need addressing. Can keep us from fomenting change in real ways.

The list of reasons why you might want to try on getting to neutral is lengthy. There's a lot of good that can come from it. There's a lot of neutral that can come from it, that's for sure. Then, you can decide if it feels good or not.

While there are many reasons why you may want to try on getting to neutral, why it may be beneficial for you, I want to be explicit and clear here, my darlings, to say; not everything in life is neutral. And you never, ever, have to think about anything as neutral, ever at all.

I'm offering up an exercise that you can choose to use when it's helpful. I'm pausing to be super-duper clear about this, because in some coaching

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circles, the language that's used is, that everything is neutral. Wow, that really, that does not sit well with me. I am actually 0.000% down with that.

There is not a world in which I believe that violence, abuse, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, all the -isms, and phobias based in discrimination, those are not ever neutral. Those things are very, very bad in my mind.

And I'm totally down with having that line in the sand, based in my integrity and values. Believing that those things are abhorrent, wrong, bad, that's not something I want to change; I'm not going to apply this exercise to it. So, please don't think about something as neutral, unless it is of service to you and your goals to do so. And, is in alignment with your values and your integrity.

So. Well, how do you do this? You may be asking, first. You make the choice to try the sun, to experiment with it, like the nerdy little scientist you are. Then, you choose new thought patterns, and you practice it until it becomes your new norm.

We've all had a lot of conditioning that certain events are inherently good. Getting married is good and inherently bad. Getting divorced is bad. So, don't expect your internal narrative to change overnight. Instead, be gentle, my darling.

The first step, is to observe your own thoughts. And by doing so, to remember that you are not your thoughts. Mindfulness practices and meditation are great for this, and teach you to watch your own mind. To see your thoughts as they arise and then disappear, while staying connected to your body.

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Till you can start to see that thoughts are just creations of your mind. And, you don't have to follow them for belief. Mindfulness and meditation also help you create a pause, a space between a stimulus, a seemingly bad situation, and your response to it. And here, I love the Viktor Frankl quote, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

In that pause, you can practice getting to neutral. If meditation isn't your thing, then just hold on to the idea of bearing witness to your thoughts and feelings every day. Pause throughout the day and ask yourself; what am I feeling in this moment? What's the thought leading to this feeling? What state is my nervous system in, that is leading to this that being on repeat here?

And as always, my tender raviolis, we start small. I don't recommend you start with what seems like a colossally bad situation. Or, when you feel like you or a loved one are in crisis. Start with the small stuff until thinking in this new way becomes routine.

For example, tomorrow morning; this cup of coffee is neutral. How do I want to choose to relate about it? Let's say tonight at dinner, one of your kids is unhappy about what's for dinner; if this situation is neutral, how do I want to relate to it? You could ask yourself. Let's say someone bumps into you in line at the drugstore. Instead of knee-jerk thinking; what a rude, inconsiderate, self-absorbed jerk. Take a deep breath. Long, slow out.

How can you make this situation feel neutral? Well, maybe you can go all nerdy and call on physics. This was just object A colliding with object B. Or, maybe you can tell yourself; I have no idea what's going on with this person. But it certainly has nothing to do with me. It's not personal. I don't even know him. It's just a thing that happened. If that situation is neutral; how do I want to relate to it?

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Remember, you always have the option to make anything personal. To get upset and ruminate on all the ways and reasons someone is rude, or unjust, or wrong, or whatever. But why? How will that make you feel? Does it change what happened? Will it change the other person? What's in your own best interest, in this moment, getting pissed or getting neutral? Is this worth ruining your day over?

Is it worth going into sympathetic activation over, and thus spiking your adrenaline and cortisol? Which, by the way, thins the lining of your gut. Potentially leading to more leaky gut, more depression, anxiety, more heartburn, or auto immune symptoms? Do you want to go to there? Or, do you want to choose option B? Pausing and getting neutral about it.

Let's take another example. Let's say your date breaks up with you. The first and most important thing, feel all your feels, always. Then, you get to ask yourself; if this moment, if this occurrence, if the situation is neutral, how do I want to relate to it? How do I want to think about it and thus, feel about it? Is it all doom and gloom? Is there a potential positive here?

You're much more likely to find a potential positive or a benefit from neutral, than from the pit of despair. And listen, of course, stay in the pit as long as you need to. And then, remind yourself, when you're ready, that another path exists. Neutral is always there waiting for you with love and care.

Take your own time getting to there. When you need to, feel your feels first, my love. No self-gaslighting or bypassing around here, please. Neutral is waiting. And my love, I'm starting with these examples, because the magic of practicing on moments that don't really matter in a deep way... Though the breakup, that could be, you know, I didn't say if you've been dating for two days or 25 years, but let's say it was two days, right?

So, the reason we practice on banal, sort of quotidian day-to-day things, is because in doing so, we start to rewire our neural pathways. So, that when

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bigger feeling things, like the breakup after 25 years or whatever, or things we're taught socially are 'big deals' happen, then you'll have more practice and experience with pausing and choosing to get neutral.

So, you can choose the thoughts you want to have, versus just living on unintentional or societal autopilot. I'll invite you to practice this as often as you're able. Starting with minor annoyances and inconveniences, or things that are pleasant or positive.

The key is not to overthink it, but rather just to start. And to start by just inching away from the doom spiral, to see if perhaps stepping into neutral could be helpful as a way to give yourself some perspective. Because if you're stuck or spinning in painful thought patterns, believing that the world and your circumstances control you, you are going to feel anxious and stressed out, at the mercy of the world. And you're not going to be able to focus on and make the changes you want to make, to live your best life and to be of service in your communities, and for the collective good.

My beauty, it's so common to believe that to feel differently, we need to first change the circumstances of our lives; I'll love myself when I'm a thinner, or when my digestion behaves. I'd be happy if I had a new job. Everything would be better if I was in a different relationship, or if I stopped emotionally outsourcing.

These are all just stories we tell ourselves. There are, in fact, times when it does behoove us to change our situation; that's real. But here's the thing, you really can feel differently in life, regardless of the situation. And your capacity to make a change, increases exponentially when you try on getting to neutral about it, first. When you come into acceptance about facts. Bring in compassion, curiosity, and care. And, don't choose to let your old thought habits rule your life for another day.

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Thank you so much for listening, my darling. I hope this show has been supportive for you. I'll invite you to try on getting neutral. Drop me a line all about it; [Podcast@VictoriaAlbina.com](mailto:Podcast@VictoriaAlbina.com). Send me a DM on Instagram®. I give good 'Gram [@VictoriaAlbinaWellness](https://www.instagram.com/VictoriaAlbinaWellness).

Let me know how it's going. Let me know your thoughts and feels on this practice, and what it has helped you to create in your own life. It's been a game changer, for me and for my clients in Anchored.

Speaking of Anchored, if you've been enjoying the show, and you are ready to take everything you're learning here and make it actionable, get coached by me, on all the things that are coming up in your life. So, you can make real, lasting, sustainable change using thought work, breath work, and of course, nervous system-based somatics, or body-based practices, with an old school nervous system nerd, such as myself. The time is now, my darling.

Head on over to [VictoriaAlbina.com/anchored](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/anchored) to learn all about the amazing transformations that have happened in the lives of previous Anchored sailors. And the same transformations that can happen for you, in your beautiful life. Thanks for listening, my love.

Let's do what we do. A gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe. You are held. You are loved. And, when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. I'll talk to you soon.

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](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/masterclass) to grab your seat now.

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See you there; it's gonna be a good one!