

Ep #207: Healthy Anger (Part 2)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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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 well in your heart, in your mind, in your body. In these winter months, here in the northern hemisphere, when we get to hibernate a little, go internal, listen deeply, and reconnect to our wonderful and perfect selves.

I am excited to share that a *Feminist Wellness* milestone passed me right by in the last few weeks, which is that the show has hit over a million downloads, 1,025,000 to be exact. And it's just so exciting. I feel very proud of this show. Of the work I put into it week after week to show up and to show you what's possible for you. To share remedies, not just problems. To remind you and show you that your life can be the life you dream of.

I find it very invigorating that so many of you are downloading the show, you're sharing it on social media. And if you do, tag me @VictoriaAlbinaWellness; that you've subscribed, left ratings and reviews. It really means the world to me, and I'm so grateful. Thank you.

Last week, we talked about the beautiful human experience of healthy or sacred anger. Healthy anger is how our nervous system responds when our boundaries have been crossed. When our autonomy has been disrespected, or when we see others suffering injustice.

It's an activation inside of us, that "fight" response from our nervous system, that is bent on one thing and one thing only: survival, safety. Even though those of us raised as girls or living as women have been told time and time again not to get angry, that we're overreacting, that it's unbecoming, it's not ladylike. I'm here to say that's sacred anger.

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Anger that alerts your body to a real threat is a beautiful thing that needs to be expressed, or that pent-up energy within our nervous system will come out sideways. In ways that aren't aligned with our dignity and our integrity, which we talked about in Episodes 163 and 164, all about the self-abandonment cycle.

Which is a cycle that those of us who are living as emotional outsourcers from codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits tend to live in. Of course, what we do with that anger is another podcast in and of itself. But step one, my loves, is all about getting in touch with, loving on, befriending, and accepting the part of ourselves that is angry.

Seeing our sacred and healthy anger for what it is, self-love and self-protection, resentment prevention. And, in fact, a gift to ourselves, those we love, and indeed the world when we let it out in thoughtful ways.

Today, I want to talk a little more about what it can look like when our healthy anger gets short-circuited, when we are cut off from the self-protective fight response in our nervous system. If you see some of what I describe here today in you and your behavior, that's kind of awesome.

Because what it means is that you are building “you” awareness, awareness of yourself. And with that increased awareness; based on gentle self-love; compassion, curiosity, and care are the three C's we talked about here a lot; we can start to ask ourselves the sort of questions that can lead us to adopt healthier, more loving ways of interacting with ourselves, and thus the people around us.

And if you listen today and you think, “Nope, that's not me,” that's great, too. And maybe you can choose to apply what you hear here to the people in your life, to bring in more compassion. As long as we're listening honestly to ourselves, there are no wrong answers here on *Feminist Wellness*.

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After we do some of that initial groundwork; work, groundwork work; I'll go a little deeper into the connection to feminism and the patriarchy and the role our socialization and conditioning play. And us minimizing our experience and expression of anger, which is an important part of fully understanding why it can be so challenging to connect with anger in a healthy and productive way.

So, when we're thinking about our emotional response, and specifically our anger response, to events that happen in life, a gentle guiding question I love to ask myself, and my class in Anchored is; what part of you is holding the emotion? What part of you, what energy within you, is feeling it?

Is it one of your inner children who doesn't have the emotional or developmental capacity to hold the energy of anger and tends to burst from it in a tantrum or a rage? Is it a teenage part who gets sullen and withdraws when you feel anger?

Or, is it the embodied, whole adult you who can understand their emotions and can pause, breathe, and step into watcher mode, as we talked about way, way, way back in the day in Episode 2, and can express that anger in a loving way instead of a lashing out, hurtful way.

When an inner child, as discussed in Episodes 22-26 and 153, is holding the feeling, it may be coming from a shame-based place. From a narrative that we are wrong or bad when the environment is unstable. Or when someone else's mood shifts, which is a normal and natural response for a child to have.

Remember, children's egos make them the center of the everything. And it's developmentally dangerous for dependent animals, like kiddos, to blame their caregiver. So, of course, as children, we blame ourselves and make other people's feelings about us.

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Let's say, that when you were young, you told your caregiver, your parent, a million times that you wanted privacy when you get dressed. And no matter how many times you told them, they would come into your room without knocking regardless of your state of disrobement. They'd tell you that it's not a big deal. Bodies are natural. And all sorts of other justifications for disrespecting your stated boundaries.

You may have felt, in your mind and body, all sorts of healthy anger. You may have felt that warmth in your low belly, that nervous system response from sympathetic activation, adrenaline and cortisol-fueled fight-or-flight that says, "Absolutely not."

You may have felt your little fists curl up, your little foot stomp. And you may have felt the urge to tell them, perhaps not so politely, to, "Get out of my room." But that may also have been considered completely unacceptable.

Maybe in your family of origin. the only people allowed to voice displeasure were the adults. And maybe they didn't do it so suavely or kindly. Maybe you got the message that when they got mad, it was justified. But when you showed anger, it was deeply uncool, or even unsafe. They would take it personally, get passive-aggressive, make it about them, and shut down your natural self-protective responses rather than just listen and adjust their own adult behavior.

Their comfort became your responsibility, especially if your parents were living in emotional immaturity, which we talked about in Episode 167. In that case, if we have been handed the job of managing other people's feelings, and feel like it could interfere with our survival if we upset the proverbial applecart. If our anger response has been short-circuited historically, all that pushing away, yelling "No" energy has nowhere to go.

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And so, that energy gets stuck in our bodies; it's physics, its science. And our brain and nervous systems will be left holding the bag, needing a way to make sense of and process how we're feeling and how it maps onto our world. Especially if we can't verbalize how we really feel, and if we can't let that anger energy out, safely.

Fast forward to adulthood, of course, we throw plates and punch walls and break things. And, of course, we shove it all down and pretend, "I'm just fine, thank you." Which leads us to talk about one common response that I see, especially in humans socialized women who are emotionally outsourcing, and that is the fawn response.

This is the increasingly recognized third "F" of our nervous system response to threat; fight, flight, and fawn. Where fawn is to appease and placate, to pretend it's all good. People talk a lot about fight-or-flight. And fawn is finally getting more attention because it's a common nervous system response, a conditioned and socialized one. Especially in humans raised as girls and living as women because we are trained away from healthy anger and into blaming, shaming, and thus harming ourselves.

And, of course, we're going to do a whole show on the fawn response because it's a big deal, and your nerd wants to talk about it. There's going to be a lot of science. So, make sure you're subscribed to or following the show, so you don't miss a thing.

I want to invite us to take a moment. To do some self-reflection here. And if it's helpful for you to write down or audio record your responses, go for it. If you'd rather just reflect, think, feel, let's go to question one.

What was your childhood experience of anger? You can think about this broadly. How did the people around you show and manage, or not manage, their anger, their upset, their frustration, their disappointment? How about you? What perceptions or narratives about anger did you pick up from not

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just your family, but your peers, the media, your teachers? Take some time to reflect on younger “you’s” experience with anger so we can next see how that still lives within you.

Which brings us to our second question. How do you manage frustration, annoyance, irritation, anger, upset, in your own life now as a grown-up? Again, give yourself time to really reflect. As adults, we likely have complex and varied responses based on the context, the who, what, when, where of how those feelings come up. And we are more able to respond in some settings, and are more reactive in others, based on our individual lived experiences.

And based on how full our emotional and energetic cups are on that given day. That is to say, how regulated our nervous systems are. And that's normal and natural. And we talk about the things that can fill up and drain our cups in Episode 190, “When It's Not Just Your Thoughts.” Take as long as you need to reflect, and if it works for you, write down or otherwise record a response.

So, now that we've taken some time to tune into ourselves and our experiences, I want to go a little deeper into the non-flight nervous system responses that we're talking about today. As human mammals, we shut down, flee, and fawn, as ways to attempt to manage our internal environment when we realize we can't source safety from others around us in that moment.

We shut down in dorsal vagus. We cry instead of yelling because we were socialized to do that. And sometimes we yell too and lose our cool in explosive anger because we don't know how else to let that energy out.

When we are disconnected from our self-protective anger and lose contact with that in our bodies and our nervous system because it's been shut down so often in childhood and throughout life; when we are disconnected

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from the life force energy that is our healthy, righteous anger; we don't feel fully safe within ourselves. And so, we believe that we need to source safety from others.

Because of the codependent story that says, "We need to manage our external environments, the people, places and things around us, in order to feel safe. So, we learn to attempt to control others to feel better in ourselves. To seek safety from others because, along the way, we lost that connection within us.

This split form of anger leads us to one, distrust of self. Which I think is the first and most important place to direct our work. To begin to rebuild trust in ourselves, both mind and body. Because we end up with a deep disconnection from ourselves that leaves us always thinking our feelings, instead of feeling them and experiencing them in our bodies. Thinking that someone else having a shift in their mood means that we are in danger.

And we believe that still, as adults, when it's not usually true. Honoring that it may have been in childhood. And so, we adopt perfectionist thinking to try to always be perfect so no one can say we messed up. We learn to people-please in an attempt to keep everyone always happy with us, so we don't trigger their anger, and they don't trigger ours.

Two: This split form of anger leads us to codependent thinking and behaving. Feeling like we deeply need somebody, "I'll die without them. I won't be okay without them and their love," even if their love is not really what we need. So, we put up with and tolerate things we would never accept from or for a friend.

Three, anxiety. The more we're disconnected from our bodies, the more we've lost access to that grounding energy within ourselves. The more we experience relational hyper-vigilance in our nervous systems. Which means we're always on the lookout for and come to expect danger from the world

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because our anger and self-protection hasn't felt safe to experience in the past.

So, we come to distrust our biological bodily impulses to fight-or-flight, and we ended up fawning. We look to others in all ways to tell us what's real, what's true, what's good, what we want, and need, how we should feel. So, of course, we're anxious; that makes a lot of sense. Our safety, stability, and emotional wellness lives outside of us instead of within us. Talk about inadvertently handing over our agency and control.

Four, boundary issues. Saying no directly, or setting limits. Establishing or holding boundaries feels like a super dumb and unsafe move when other people control our feelings and safety. Again, this makes sense. And so, the story goes, "I'm a bad person for saying no." Again, because we don't want to spark anger in ourselves or others. So, we self-abandon, again and again, because our inner children and nervous system believe it's safer than someone else having a feeling.

Five. Finally, and of course, there's loss of connection with self. When we are split off from our anger, we lose contact with ourselves. And I hear this a lot. My clients in Anchored say that they don't know who they are, that they lost themselves in a relationship, or fear that they'll do that, again. That they often don't know what they want or need, or don't feel like they can ask for it.

And this applies to everything from not knowing what to have for dinner and feeling stressed or anxious about making small and large decisions. Because, again, they don't want to have what they call negative feelings, or provoke them in others.

Important side note, I don't believe in positive or negative emotions or feelings; all emotions are teachers. Listen, I could go on and on. But instead, I want to bring to light how so many of the tendencies that get in

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our way, the codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits that we live with, can be understood in the context of healthy anger and how reclaiming that anger can help us to heal.

And, of course, this wouldn't be *Feminist Wellness* without my calling out the patriarchy, which impacts humans of all genders. So, whatever gender you identify with, patriarchy is messing with your life too, my beauty. When we look back, historically, we can see how humans socialized as women have been taught that we are dependent on men for protection and safety.

And for a lot of history, we were. It wasn't even until the 70s that women in the U.S. could open their own bank accounts. Right? So, this isn't just some far-flung history. And these stories tell us that we must keep the men folk happy in order to survive.

I recently polled the folks in Anchored, my six-month program, around this to see if it resonated in their life. And so many shared experiences of their moms saying, "Don't anger your father. Just be quiet, or your dad will get grumpy. Oh, your dad had a hard day at work. You kids, be quiet now." Right?

And so many of us don't push back, we don't speak up, and we don't show up in our truth, because we understand that there may be real consequences for doing so, especially for our inner children. And, obviously, I mean, I say obviously, because I know me and my brain. But obviously, in my context, I'm not just talking about heterosexual relationships here because this is beyond gender, as what's in your pants.

It's often about gender as a role, as an experience. And that sucks, once again, for humans of all the many genders living in the patriarchy. All of this is doubly, quadrupling, 1 millionly true for women and humans living in marginalized bodies and racialized bodies.

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The imperative to keep others happy and not angry is multiplied manifold by intersecting identities and the history of those identities. And this story makes humans, particularly women, black women, other women of color, trans folks, femmes, queer folks, and on and on, believe that we are less than. That we cannot have control over the environment in which we live.

Because for so long, it was true that our safety was controlled by men, especially white men in power. And we were led to believe that our voices and desires don't matter, aren't correct, our emotions are a problem. Because for a long time, it was all true within those systems. And so, we learned to protect and placate the masculine. To perform the role of the good, safe woman living in falsehood.

And, of course, that leads to rage within. To feel that hiding yourself is the only option to survive. And if this isn't the case in your romantic relationship, right on. But what about at work? In your family of origin? While going through TSA at the airport?

Broadly, and generally speaking, and this is a generalization, masculine mammals show up with, "Hey, dude, what's up? Yeah, I just got to catch my flight." While feminine mammals show up with the smile, the placating "Hi, how are you? Just trying to get to my flight. I hope it's not a big deal. I hope I don't inconvenience you by having bags and a ticket and needing to go through the X-ray machine."

All of that is fawning energy. The attempts to not have emotions, to not show emotions, especially not to be angry, to go along to get along, to not be seen, because not being seen is so much safer than being seen ever was.

And, of course, this wasn't always the way everywhere, and it's just about "white" to claim that it is. I'm thinking of Amazonian warrior women, Celtic warrior women, and warrior women of all stripes, back in the day.

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And when we zoom out, we can also remember not just the historical setting, but that in our own bodies, when we're denying one feeling, we're often denying so many. And the patriarchy demands that women be quiet, caretaking to stay small for self-protection.

This is a lot to take in. It's a lot to process that so many of our struggles, despite what our families and societies have told us, can come in part from a lack of connection with our sacred, healthy, and self-protective anger. And we've been trained to be disconnected.

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that if we connect with our anger, all will be well, and we'll never have moments when our inner children pop up, or when our codependent habits rear their heads; no, my friends, if only it were that easy.

Instead, what I want to remind you is to have compassion for yourself, and for all the many reasons why you've shoved these feelings aside. And, as always, to show you that there are so many entry points to healing. That reconnecting to, listening to, and respecting our healthy anger is one road that can help us heal and bring our more whole self into the world to help and support ourselves and others.

So, what are the remedies here? Well, contextualization is a vital first remedy. It's not you, it's not that you're broken and need to be fixed; it's that you live in a system.

Next, I want to invite you to ask yourself, which of these externally imposed thought patterns around anger, stories like, "It's bad if it's from you. It's only acceptable from men, from parents, from authority figures." Whatever is in your mind as a narrative, which of these thoughts and ways of being, that we were trained to be in, which of them serve you? And which don't, anymore?

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Which do you want to continue to live into and to believe? And what thoughts and somatic, or bodily experience, do you want to change for your evolution and growth?

When we start to get clear about what we want to hold on to, perhaps the conviction that it's ideal to listen in and catch our anger before it turns into aggression, for example. And what we want to let go of, like the idea that anger is a sign of some personal flaw or defect in ourselves. These can guide us to do conscious thought and somatic work based in this newfound clarity.

So, we can move forward with more intentionality, more presence, more loving self-awareness. And so, I want to invite you to get curious. When strong feelings come up, especially anger, we can pause, take a beat, take a breath, and can ask ourselves; what's going on?

What yellow flag is our nervous system waving at us? Has a boundary been crossed? Can we note and name the feeling there, "I am angry because..."? And can we do that before we start to police ourselves? To self-shame and blame? To deny our birthright to anger? Just notice.

And if it's challenging for you, I have one beautiful somatic practice I want to share. This is one of my favorites because it's so simple, so accessible. And I'm going to be teaching/talking about moving our hands. If you don't have access to moving your hands, if you don't have hands, I want to invite you to visualize this in your mind's eye.

So I want to invite you to put your two hands in front of you. Take your thumb, then you're slowly going to tap your thumb to each of your fingers and count your fingers. So, thumb touches first finger, and you say, "One."

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Thumb touches second finger, and you say, "Two." Thumb to third, "Three." Thumb to fourth, "Four." And come back: Thumb to pinky, "Four." Thumb to ring finger, "Three." Thumb to New York finger, "Two." Thumb to index finger, "One."

We do this to calm our nervous system when we're all worked up so we can take that breath, can take that beat, can come into our adult self. If something makes you angry and you get a flash of sympathetic and then go right into dorsal; you're checked out; you're not present. Do it quickly to bring some activation energy in, so you can let it out in a healthy, safe way.

So, that's thumb to index finger 1, second finger 2, ring finger 3, pinky 4; 4-3-2-1-1-2-3-4-4-3-2-1. Go fast if you want to activate your nervous system, so you can respond in a loving way. And slowly, if you're feeling activated and want to bring it down. It's such a simple tool, please teach it to everyone you know. Please share about it, because it really helps to regulate our nervous system so we can take responsive, adult, loving action.

And if you continue to do tools like this, to write it all out, to get in touch with it, and it's still challenging for you to name it, right? If you feel that anger come up, and you fall into your old patterns 100 times, my beauty, you've still made progress, because now you're noticing it.

And if on the 100 and first time, you share your feelings, and the other person doesn't like it, that's A-#1, a win. And B-#2, isn't actually yours to manage if you know and trust and believe that you were being kind in sharing what's up for you.

When you learn to hold space for all the parts of yourself, including the angry part, and can accept and give love to you, you can learn to shift from aggressive reacting into safe, healthy anger and responding. Simply

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stating, "I'm angry because..." without blaming or shaming the other. Instead, you just name what you feel and why.

And you can slowly start to recognize the resonance of your own past within that anger experience and can come to name that, too. You can start to see what of your emotional response is you projecting, and what part is really because someone just crossed a line.

So, too, if you go, not to aggression but to shut down, you can start to name it and can hold space so you can come back into presence with yourself. By doing this, by noticing, listening to, and experiencing your anger as the friend that it is, you are expanding your nervous system's capacity to be with what was previously frozen in your nervous system.

And can start to find healthy, loving ways to give your nervous system the release, the outlet, that stuck energy needs. Which may be some gentle movement, some faster movement, some dance. Could be drawing, could be dancing, could be going for a run.

So, I'll ask you, how safe do you feel to express your own anger? To feel it in your body? To feel and express your emotions? To be with your feelings without wanting to change them? Without judging them? What do you need in order to feel safe and comfortable feeling your feelings? And honoring your truth, your anger, your joy, all of your feels?

You may not have an answer right now; that's just fine. Let your mind and body sit with those questions. And over time, with attention and patience, the answers will rise to the surface. Just like healthy, sacred anger, our bodies and minds hold so much wisdom that we can tap into when we give things time, space, and attention through mindfulness, meditation, somatic practice, and thought work.

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If you want my coaching and guidance to step into feeling your anger in safer, healthier ways... If you want to remember how to feel safe and grounded in your body when someone else has a feeling, be it anger or any other, you're going to want to join us in Anchored.

My six-month somatic, thought work, and breath work, coaching container for humans just like you, who are living with the resonance of growing up in codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing households. Where we became detached from our own feelings in order to protect our tenderoni hearts.

It is possible for you to live in a different way, and I have got the holistic, sustainable blueprint to get you to there. And I'd love to share it with you in Anchored. Head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/anchored to learn more and apply now.

We have a group starting up in just a month, and it would be so amazing to have you join us, to have you grab one of those last remaining spots. VictoriaAlbina.com/anchor

My love, thank you for listening. Thank you for your desire to heal your life, to live in a different way, and to start to begin to connect with and express your healthy sacred anger.

Now, 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

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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 gonna be a good one!