

Ep #224: Receiving and the Trap of Independence



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. Receiving. Receiving love, care, support, kindness; that's our topic for today. Receiving, across the board. Really letting it in has been the deepest work of my lifetime.

And of course, it's still a process I'm in, because your gal is a human after all. As a human with emotional outsourcing habits, codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thinking; that's what falls under the umbrella of emotional outsourcing if you're new to the show. I was living from that same unworthiness wound so many of us are subconsciously guided by.

From that belief that we are somehow unworthy of love and care unless others think well of us, are happy with us, etc. It can feel really challenging to receive good things because we believe that we are supposed to be taking care of others all the time, so that we can gain their approval. Which we then mistake for safety. Right?

We live with outward focus. So, taking goodness in, especially asking for it, forget about it. Instead, it sounds like, "Hey, you did a great job. Oh, I had great helpers." When really, no you didn't. You did 99% of it yourself. "Oh, hey, I love your skirt," is met with us saying, "Oh, it was on sale." Whatever, like that matters. You had the good taste to buy it, right? "Oh, you're so generous," is met with, "Well, really, it's the least I can do." Even though you spent three weeks working your butt off on it.

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“Hey, can I help you carry that?” Is met with, “Nah, I got it,” While your arms are full and you feel like you might actually snap in half at any moment. “Hey, babe, I'm making myself lunch, you want some?” Is met with, “Oh, I'm okay. I'm fine. I'm okay. “Oh, I just don't want to bother you,” while your belly grumbles so loud it can hear it four counties away.

Many of us don't receive the kind words, gestures, actions that are offered, because on this deep level we don't accept or believe that someone could care about us. That it could be okay for us to receive. That someone could really give to us, could meet us. And one reason why, is that we don't meet or see ourselves.

We don't give ourselves care in the deepest and most realist ways, because we are busy being chameleons and shapeshifters. Living from false selves the way we learned to, to get through childhood and through life. That smart survival skill often comes around to, well, to kind of bite us in the butt. And definitely keeps us from getting the help that every one of us actually needs.

Many of us just don't let it in because we aren't used to it. I know I had very limited capacity in my nervous system to receive. And being in partnership with my amazing partner, now has given me a gorgeous daily opportunity to practice, to work with my nervous system to create more safety. And with allowing myself to be truly and deeply seen, which is a vital first part of receiving. And as the part that my nervous system found the most ‘no thank you-able’.

Oh, it felt so unsafe to be seen, as a child, growing up. It just was not a smart idea, because I had this deep knowing that I would not be accepted for me, that I would be criticized for me; told I was too fat, too loud, too gregarious, too much, too ridiculous, too silly, on and on and on. And so, I hid me away. And dove deep into that story that I had to do it all for myself. In many ways, growing up, it felt like I did, right?

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And that continued to play on through all of my adult relationships. And on that tip, of just not being used to being offered kindness in a real, reliable, safe, or dependable way. I was watching that HBO show *Succession* the other day; I know I'm late to the party and I'm cool with that. The oldest of the children, Connor, goes, "The good thing about having a family that doesn't love you, is you learn to live without it." Ouch.

And I think that's part of what's up for so many of us. It may not be that our parents didn't love us, our families don't love us, because I know my family loved me, for sure. For most of us, it's the way we were shown love didn't work for us, doesn't resonate or land, the ways we were parented didn't meet our needs.

We were raised by emotionally immature parents, or we were met with the intergenerational codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits that can keep love from feeling genuine, safe, and freely given. And that all adds up to us not feeling safe or secure, even okay, receiving love, especially as card-carrying, badge-wearing over functioning givers. Right?

So, we can recognize that one of the big reasons, many, many, many of us don't feel safe or okay receiving love, is because we learned in childhood that it was smarter not to; in childhood, or at some point in growing up, in some really pivotal relationship. Where we were in an attachment with someone who wasn't showing up in a way that felt safe or good or just wasn't giving. I was in a relationship for a very long time with someone who was a take-take-taker.

Yeah, so we learn. We learn. Part of it is somatic and is in the nervous system. Our nervous systems get accustomed to a comfort zone. That's called the "window of tolerance" or "window of capacity" in the nervous system. And it feels unsafe physiologically, in our bodies, to push out of that comfort zone, of that nervous system capacity, until we have the skills

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and tools to do that. And most of us don't, right? That's what I spend a lifetime teaching people, is how to have those skills and tools.

So, survival skills, nervous system setting, and then beliefs. Let's talk about some of the top beliefs that block us from receiving. So, one: I am unworthy of love and care. This belief can develop from childhood experiences, like we've been talking about, of neglect, even benign neglect, right? Like, nobody meant to not pay attention to you. It's just what was.

Or emotional unavailability, like we talked about on Episode 167 "Emotionally Immature Parents". It can also come from that brutal taskmaster that is perfectionism, and the fantastical thoughts that tell us we must be 100% perfect in order to be worthy of good things.

And yes, under the bus you go, patriarchy, white settler colonialism, and late-stage capitalism. Tuck yourself right on under that bus, my darling, for really reifying those stories, those beliefs, that we must be perfect to be lovable, to be worthy of care.

Belief two: That my needs and desires are not important. This is as emotionally outsourcing as it gets. Right? This subconscious belief is such a doozy, and it underlies our codependent and people-pleasing habit of prioritizing the needs of others over our own. Often because we fear that asserting our own desires will result in rejection or abandonment. Which, it very well may have in the past. And which also, doesn't mean it will again in the future.

Belief three: I must be self-sufficient and not rely on others. This belief often arises, one, from growing up in a puritanical way of thinking. Hi, great State of Rhode Island, all of New England, most of the US, right? "Self-sufficiency is like this..." It's moralistic, right? It's this badge of honor, "Oh, I'm so self-sufficient," which is just crap, right? Like, no one is self-sufficient; we're going to get to that in a second.

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And it can also come from these codependency patterns, where we feel the need to control and take care of others, while denying our own vulnerability and need for support. Because in a way, it feels safer, right? Because no one can disappoint you if you don't want or need anything from them. I get the logic, I totally get the logic, and have lived from it. But it's just such a false narrative.

Number four: If I receive love and care, it means I am selfish or demanding. Emotional outsourcing, especially perfectionism, can lead us to believe that taking care of our own needs is a sign of weakness or self-centeredness, which are painted as bad things. Creating this constant inner struggle between self-care and self-judgement.

Layer in religious or cultural stories about how it's only terrible, selfish women who take care of themselves when their families don't have every little, tiny, perfect thing perfect and taken care of, and yeah, of course, we end up feeling really bad receiving. We've been taught and taught and taught that good girls, good wives, good women, are givers not takers. Oof, big sigh, right?

There's a whole strain of thinking, all of these beliefs lead us squarely into the gaping maw of the trap of independence. Independence, it gets good press, but I don't think it should. I think stalwart independence is really problematic, and not good for us or the planet or the world. And we have come to believe that it's the opposite of codependent, but I actually believe it's not. It's just as much of a sign of emotional outsourcing as being super enmeshed with the people in our lives.

When we find receiving challenging and stressful to our nervous systems and inner children, we start to tell stories about ourselves and the world to put a buffer between us and the possible pain of either support actually not being there, or not being quite how we want it. When we've been disappointed before, on and on, we say, "Oh, I got it. I don't need anyone. I

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don't need other people. I'm really good on my own. I can figure it out if I work harder. I need to work harder on me.”

And this is the trap of independence. Because this outlook can be mistaken for the point of view of someone coming from a beautiful energy of embodied autonomy, knowing themselves and being able to receive love and lean on folks and just choosing not to in a particular moment. But do not be fooled when the language is, “I don't need anyone.”

Or that quote from *Succession*, “The good thing about having a family that doesn't love you is you learn to live without it,” those absolute words are what made my little eyebrows go up. That's when I start to question what the “what” is, because we all need someone, lots of someone's in fact.

The opposite of codependence is not radical cut off, I am a rock, I am an island, and I feel no pain independence. And I can see how the popular story of codependence paints that exact picture. It makes us feel like it's a sign that there's something wrong with us if we ask for help, lean on others too much, get too much support, or are “gasp” needy. This is why a redefinition of codependency is so friggin needed.

Which is, after all, exactly what we're doing here. Because when we tried to live by the old definition, all about enabling and tit-for-tat, who's doing what for whom, and focus on building this impervious self, who doesn't need validation or other people ever, ever, ever, ever, because you are a rock and you are an island, then we don't let the love in. And that sucks.

Not just for you, but also for the people who want to love you. It's lousy for all of us all around. My goal in my work is to support my clients, to support you in living embodied lives. Meaning ones where you aren't just living from the neck up. Instead, you are inhabiting your body. You are present within and with yourself, and you can actually feel your feelings and can support yourself.

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And supporting yourself, to me, means not just doing everything for yourself by yourself, while also doing everything for everyone else, it also means reaching out and asking for help. Asking for validation. Asking for care and love, and allowing yourself to receive it. Because, my darling, we are pack animals, and it is natural, normal, and human to need each other.

And it's vital in fact, especially on a nervous system level. We are built to turn to one another when our nervous systems get dysregulated or out of whack, to coregulate. Which means that my body calms yours and vice versa. We aren't meant to go it alone. And that's the lie that we learned both from growing up in emotional outsourcing, and of course, the patriarchy, etc.

Those forces seek to separate us from ourselves and our bodies and from each other. Because we are way more powerful and dangerous to the powers that be when we are embodied and unite. Right? And this whole rugged, individualistic way of thinking has one majillion percent seeped into the white wellness world, where the imperative to focus on just self-care and self-healing rule the roost.

And yes, we do need to learn how to take care of ourselves and do the work of healing ourselves, and that work needs to happen in community. We heal together, my beauty, especially from emotional outsourcing because codependency, perfectionism, people pleasing, these are relational issues that need re-relating in community for their healing.

So, the work is both to be able to regulate your own nervous system and to begin to practice allowing yourself to ask for support from others. To begin to open yourself up to saying yes, to receiving love and care when it's offered. And self-trust is a huge part of that. And we'll touch back on that in just a moment.

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But first, I'll say this, this work must be titrated. Meaning we need to go slowly, drop by drop. When I was doing my master's in public health, I was super into the public health nutrition courses I taught, and I even played around with getting a PhD in Public Health with a focus on nutrition. Anyway, I was super into the deep nerdy science of it and the policy wonkiness, and I also completed a Certificate in the Management of Complex Humanitarian Emergencies.

And one of the things we learned, is that when you're doing refeeding work with folks who've been quite literally starving, it's not to overfeed them. To start low, and go slow with both food and water. To not overwhelm their bodies that are in shutdown survival, actual, literally, starving mode.

That's the logic behind why I teach "kitten steps"; that we move slowly in this healing work, and it's super applicable here. When it has not felt safe to receive, I don't recommend jumping in the deep end and asking your parent, who is never emotionally available, if they could listen to you talk about something really challenging. Please, don't do that to yourself.

Instead, allow yourself to ease on into it gently and slowly, starting with people and creatures, like pets and plants, who you feel pretty darn certain can and will show up for you, and work up from there. Nerd alert, my love's. When we look to developmental psychology, we understand that kids do what they do for very smart attachment-based reasons. Because they know that they are small, and that they need larger mammals to help keep them safe.

Kids are also trapped in their homes. They have no option but to stay because they are small, and can't do things like drive cars or have jobs. They are fully and truly physically dependent on their caregivers. So, kids, in all of their brilliance, scan the scene and do what is most smartest for their survival and thrival.

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And that often means giving up parts of themselves, turning their back on themselves. And deciding that maybe they don't actually need the care they actually do. And they start to act as a false self. One that doesn't have needs. One that doesn't have wants. "Oh, I'm fine. I'll eat anything. I'll go anywhere. I'm easy. I'm the easy kid. I'm the good girl. I'm the easy kid."

They do that if they believe that will keep their attachment figure, the person in the parent role, from rejecting them, from abandoning them, from not loving them, not thinking they're complicated or demanding or needy. They abandon their needs. And that's some heaviness right there, that follows us into adulthood. And over my many, many years of working with us emotional outsourcers, that's often the track I see leading us to say, "I don't have wants. I don't have needs. I'm cool. Thanks very much."

And so, we need to start this work of learning to honor our desires and needs, and begin to receive once more. We start it with mourning, with grieving. Because, my beauty, it sucks that you and I didn't feel safe having wants and needs as kids, as humans, as people in this world, especially human socialized as women. That's some garbage, and it deserves a damn good cry, says I.

We often don't give ourselves the time and space we need to have our feelings. It goes without. It's the whole trope, it's the whole thing, right? We don't receive love from others, and we're not receiving it, in a for realies way, for ourselves either. And this is where you get to start. This is the kitten step. It's allowing yourself 10 minutes in the hot shower to cry about the fact that 'little you' didn't get to feel safe having wants and needs.

Really let yourself be there with it, and bookend it. This is another really important skill from my somatic experiencing training, "pendulation". Start by connecting in with something loving again; pet, plant, human, doesn't matter. And return to something loving, kind, calming, grounding, ventral vagalling after.

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So, have a friend set up, who you can call before and after your good cry. Snuggle your pet. Snuggle your stuffed animal. Pull out a picture of a time that makes you genuinely, fully happy and look at it. Feel into it before, go have your cry, and feel into it after.

And from there, having let yourself and your inner kiddos have that good old sob fest, I want to invite you to do something that's going to sound a little weird at first, but it's me, you're used to that. And that's to celebrate your inner children. They were so brilliant and did everything they could to keep us in the good graces of our attachment figures, even when that meant turning our backs on ourselves and our needs.

C'mon on, such smart kiddos! I really do want to invite you to thank them for keeping you from thinking it was okay to receive love and care. And I mean that, because they were just trying to keep you safe. So, I wrote mine a beautiful letter, got them treats and flowers, and snuggled them in my mind's eye because they did such a good job.

And once they realized that I was earnestly celebrating them and I wasn't mad at them anymore, it became a lot easier to work with them, so they would allow for change. We work a lot with our inner children in Anchored, which starts at the end of June.

From there, we get to do the work of rewriting those limiting beliefs we discussed earlier. And this is where we bring in thought work and the think-feel-act-cycle. So, we can shift our thinking about ourselves in the world, while also realizing that these are deep old stories that drive these kinds of disconnection with self and our basic needs.

And these stories tend to live in our bodies and our physiology, not just our minds. And need attending to somatically, through the body, not just through mindset. We need holistic solutions for problems that impact us on every level of our being. Right?

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So, here's some steps, some of her remedies. One: You can't fix if you don't know what to fix, right? We need to start by recognizing our limiting beliefs so we can begin to challenge them. Take a moment to identify the beliefs that have been holding you back from receiving love and care; and I do mean pen to paper. And this is likely to be a sob fest, too. It sure was for me.

And with that said, if you feel nothing, if you are numb, that's okay too. You're in dorsal, right? The shutdown, disconnected, frozen part of the nervous system. Nothing's gone wrong. There's nothing wrong with you. You're not broken if you're not crying; I promise. I've had that thought before. It's just where you're at. And it just shows that somatic work is likely to be incredibly helpful for you. Because, oh my darling, we need to unfreeze that block of ice around your heart.

So, once you've made that list, take a moment, reflect on the origins of those thoughts, and honor just how valid those thoughts felt when you didn't know any differently. Start to imagine what the opposite thought might be. In Anchored we work heavily with “belief bridges”, which is the process of supporting yourself to get from the limiting belief to the new belief. And it's powerful work, for sure.

I'll invite you to write down what that end goal is, so you can start kitten stepping towards it. And as always, if you want help and support in that kitten stepping, you know where to find me, and how to join Anchored.

Two: Practice self-compassion and self-care. Start prioritizing your own wellbeing and needs, in the teeny, tiny ways that your nervous system will let you get away with before it sounds the alarm bell. Set aside dedicated time each day, and this can legit be one minute, two minutes; start small. And engage in activities that bring you joy and relaxation and connection with self.

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Cultivate self-compassion by treating you with the same kindness and understanding you extend to your dear friends, to your family, to everyone. And then, once you've treated yourself like you treat that dear friend, then take a moment and connect with that dear friend. Because once again, we need each other.

Which brings us to number three: Seek support and community. Connect with like-minded individuals who understand your struggles and can provide support. Consider joining groups, like Anchored, specifically tailored to addressing somatics, codependency, people pleasing, and perfectionism.

Because it's so powerful and so healing to see, here, feel, that you are not alone. And to practice receiving love from folks who get what it's like to find asking for and receiving support and care super-duper cringy. When we decline, love and care, we create distance between ourselves and the people we love. And when we allow love in, we deepen our loving. It's a gift to the universe. So, seek out community. Ask them for love, give love freely, and see how everything shifts.

Four: Establish healthy boundaries. Learn to communicate your needs and desires effectively. Practicing 'no', when something doesn't align with your values or priorities, as a way to open up space to say 'yes' to others supporting you. Remember, setting boundaries is not selfish. Though I'm also not opposed to you being selfish. I love it when you're selfish.

Setting boundaries is an essential act of self-care and self-respect, and it is vital resentment prevention. Boundaries are good for you and for the people you love. We talked all about it in Episode 5, Episode 41, and kind of all over the place, like, in most episodes. Because boundaries are wicked important.

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Five: Embrace imperfection and self-acceptance. Challenge the notion of perfection and embrace the beauty of your authentic self. And start small; perhaps your toes are just a delight. Revel in them. I mean it. I mean it. Start to consider that possibly, just possibly, you are worthy of love and care just as you are, because you were born worthy. And that is a fact. It's a very much fact, indeed, actually.

And my beauty, I want you to hear it from me again and again and again, you never have to perform your lovability. And not having needs is not a real way to perform being lovable, anyway. So, embrace those needs, my darling, they're pretty magical, I say.

Six: Start building self-trust, like we talked about in Episode 78, "Minimum Baseline Thinking". Because if you speak your needs, or open yourself up to receiving love, and you get a big old no, or it doesn't go the way you wanted it to, your brain is likely to jump right back into that neural groove it is so practiced at thinking, and might tell you, "See? I told you so. When we receive, when we are open, things are terrible."

And it might tell you that you cannot be trusted to take care of yourself. And my beauty, that's just not true. You are on your path; you are learning how to open your heart. And I want to invite you to bring your focus back on trusting you. That you're doing a beautiful thing for you. You're taking care of you in this powerful new way. And how other people respond to that, react to that, how they show up or don't, has nothing to do with you, your wants, and your needs.

And finally, number seven: It behooves us to accept that we can't do everything alone. We're not built to and we don't have to, either. I know. I know. I know. It's challenging, for sure. And it's so important to take the time to breathe into the fact that we are mammals that depend on other mammals. It's just the science, my darling, tender ravioli, and it doesn't

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mean anything wrong or bad about you or me. It's just how we are. We need one another.

And it's healthy and beautiful and wonderful to receive from one another, while also knowing that you do have the capacity to take care of yourself in many ways. It all comes down to balance, to interdependence based on autonomy, reciprocity, mutuality, and shared humanity.

If you're new to the concept of interdependence, it is *the* remedy to codependence, to emotional outsourcing. And we talk about it in so much detail, in Episodes 193, 196, 218, and sprinkled around in so many others. My darling, interdependence is possible. It's a wonderful, magnificent thing and it's possible for you.

I know it is, because I overcame 35+ years of emotional outsourcing and nervous system hot messery and wicked codependency. And I live a beautifully interdependent life now, with a wonderfully regulated and regulatable nervous system. And if I can, so can you. Pinky promise. It really can feel safe to receive, actually it can feel really, really, really, really wonderful. And that's what I want for you, a life that feels wonderful.

So, my darling, if you're curious how I did it. If you're curious how I went from being a wild and persistent emotional outsourcer, to living the way I live my life now, full of joy, gratitude, peace, calm, presence, and with a way regulated nervous system. If you want my expert advice to get from not having needs to honoring your needs in a real way, you're going to want to join us for Anchored.

Anchored is my flagship six-month somatics, thought work, and breath work coaching program. It is a community-based program, because we heal relational wounds with relationships. You get powerful live coaching from me, which I've got to say, is a rarity. By the time folks' businesses are the size that mine is, they are often just CEO-ing and are not coaching. So,

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in Anchored, you get real, live, coaching with me, every single week for six months.

And every day in the private community, which is not on social media. We have a private Slack platform where you can get coaching from me every single weekday for six months, and can connect with this beautiful and loving community. And they're intentional spaces to practice asking for your needs to be met. To practice meeting others, saying no to meeting others, and releasing guilt.

It is a beautifully crafted and designed program to meet you where you're at. To give you the nervous system and polyvagal science tools you want to support your growth. Plus, all the practice, all the thought-work skills, all the somatics you need, so that you can truly, sustainably change your life. Not for the short term. This is no quick fix; this is not a silver bullet. This is the real deal.

And at the end of this program, you will be living a life that is, what I hear every single time I talk with alumni, a life that is beautifully unrecognizable from where you were before you started Anchored. A life with deep, deep interdependence. And I can't wait to share it with you.

VictoriaAlbina.com/Anchored is where you find out more, you apply, and then my team will be in touch to get you on a call with me where we can talk about all of the details, the ins and outs, the hows and whens, the investment, the everything. We'll talk about it, you and me, and I cannot wait.

Alright, my darling, I will see you in Anchored. And until then, gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. 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, talk to you soon.

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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!