

Ep #235: Were You Raised by Emotionally Immature Parents?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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Ep #235: Were You Raised by Emotionally Immature Parents?

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. I wanted to share one of my favorite episodes with you this week. This is an episode all about emotionally immature parents. It seems like the right thing to share after last week's conversation with Dr. Ellen Vora, which was so amazing. By the way, if you haven't heard it, I highly recommend it.

Dr. Vora is a phenomenal human, a phenomenal psychiatrist, and just overall an incredible human. I'm so grateful to have her in my life. So grateful. And so grateful to share a conversation with you all that really got me thinking. It got me thinking of four majillion things, like the frequency of our clothing, which is just wild.

But anyway, as it pertains to this particular moment in our collective lives, anxiety. Anxiety and depression. She talks about this really interesting framework between "false anxiety" and "true anxiety." How we problematize that language a bit, but also, it's what works. So, I was thinking about what one of the thread-throughs of anxiety is. Anxiety and depression are, with so many of my clients who are living as emotional outsourcers, with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits.

What has been a thread-through of anxiety and depression and self-doubt and codependency in my own life. Yeah, it came to things like self-abandonment. Yeah, it came to things like putting people first. But when we back it up, back it up, and back it up and look at the nervous system, as you know your girl is wont to do, we have to look at the family of origin.

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Yeah, of course, within the socio-political context, obviously; always and forever. Herein, very specifically, the emotional maturity of our caregivers, of our parents. If they were not reliable emotionally, if they were not dependable emotionally...

Sure, you may have had ballet lessons and karate classes and YMCA camp and swim camp or swim team, or food on the table, right? You may have had the basics, a new backpack and stuff, but if your family members weren't emotionally reliable, or were reliable to make you feel less than awesome about being yourself, or not being perfect, or not being who they thought you should be, that create this whole chasm in the spirit. This hole in your heart.

In my experience, it's one of the many root causes of so much of our discomfort in life, our dissatisfaction in life, and our striving and grasping for life to be different. Starting with ourselves being different. I obviously can go on about this topic for a very long time, but I won't.

Maybe I'll do a second episode, it's a really good one. It's a really juicy one. But for now, I'm going to hit pause on me talking about an episode I already made, because it's a really good episode and it's a really good topic, and I'm excited for you to hear it.

My love, if you are enjoying this show, please, please, please, head out over to Apple Podcast, or wherever you get the show, and give it five-star reading with a quick, little written review. A review can be as long as "show is good." You don't need to be really super deep, but obviously, if you feel very moved to write something prolific, I shan't stop you.

The reason I ask for that is because it helps boost the show's ratings, and that makes it easier for folks to find via search. I put a lot of love, a lot of

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work, a lot of time, a lot of money, a lot of research, a lot of thought, and a lot of heart into this show. Because, A #1, I love you and you're worth it. B #2, I love you and you're worth it. C #3, I love not just you, but the people that haven't heard the show yet, and I want them to find it.

So, please, rate it, review it. If you've already done that, please share on social media. Tag me, I'd love that. Share reels of mine. Share about the podcast. Share a screenshot of you listening to the show. It really, really helps. If you have friends who have podcasts let them know to have me on as a guest. I really want to spread the word because this is a free resource that I want in as many ears as want to hear it.

Alright, my darling, thank you. Thank you, thank you. Without further ado, because you know I love ado. I love to say, "Okay, now we're cutting to the thing," and then I talk for another 67 hours. But I'm not going to do it because this episode's way too good. Go enjoy it, and I'll talk to you soon.

My irises are coming up. It's so exciting. I love to go out in the morning and see their perfect green leaves poking out of the winter mulch, another little centimeter a day. I can't wait to see them when they come up. The dahlias are coming up too.

Springtime; I mean, to be real, it's like 37 degrees out, but still, springtime. So, my darling, today, we are going to take a look at a topic that can be a challenging one, and it hits pretty darn close to home for me and for pretty much every client who has ever walked through Anchored, my six-month program.

Because this is often the thing we grew up with. It's often at the core of our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits, and that is the topic of emotionally immature parents. So, yes, our parents are, generally speaking, older than us, and as children, we would understandably look to them for wisdom and guidance.

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But parents are fallible human people like us, too. They have their own baggage, trauma, and issues. They have their own upbringing, and everything they learned from the parents that came before them. Some are able to process their own emotions and experiences, are able to show up as emotionally mature, and are available for the young ones in their lives in a real and powerful way.

While for some people, raising kids, that is more than their nervous system has the capacity to handle. It's so much more than they can manage with the skills and tools that they got from their parents, and theirs, and theirs.

That is our topic for today. How to know if your parents were emotionally mature. If you are showing up to parenting from emotional immaturity. I'll be using the term "parent" here, referring to the adult human who was responsible for your care when you were a child.

That can, as always, 100% be an aunty, a tia, abuela, grandmother, foster or adoptive parent, or other caretakers, not just biological parents. But instead of saying all of that every time, we'll just use "parent" as a stand-in. Put the word in there that works for you and your experience.

So today, we'll talk about some of the telltale signs, and these are just a few, there's so many more. But unless you want a six-hour episode, we'll just go through a few of the signs that you may have been raised by an emotionally immature parent or two. They do tend to come in pairs, I've found.

While putting a label on it, it's not going to undo the harm you experienced or are experiencing now in this relationship, I find there's so much power in naming things and declaring "this is what was." Because there's often gaslighting to some degree when there's emotional immaturity. So, it can feel like, "Did I make it all up?"

When we can put the label on it, when we can see "that" really was, "that" really is, and we can declare, "I did nothing wrong. You did nothing wrong,"

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and from compassion and love and care simultaneously... That your parents are not necessarily - individual results may vary - but are not necessarily the villains here, we are simply stating, "Turns out I was raised by an emotionally immature parent."

We do that because it can help to bring clarity, understanding, and my favoritest thing of all, compassionate healing. Because awareness is healing, in and of itself, and awareness is the gateway to acceptance. In your own time, take action to heal the hurt that came from living in that situation so you can set healthier boundaries now. So you can change the relationship from your side of it. So the years that you have remaining with an emotionally immature parent can be the best ones possible.

So, as we talk about some signs that you may have been raised by an emotionally immature person, I'll invite you to pay attention to what resonates with you. Not only cognitively in your mind, but in your heart, and somatically in your body.

As you hear me go through the examples, just pay attention if that feels safe to do. Bring your awareness and your presence into your body. Do you get a rumbling in your belly as I share the examples? Do you feel a tightness in your neck? A heavy blue cloud in your chest? A tingling in your toes? What comes up in your body somatically?

When you notice your mind and your body saying, "This is it, this makes sense," just stay present to your own felt experience, which is the core work in somatics, to get connected with that somatic experience of being alive and seeing ourselves. Listen to what you really need. You ready?

Emotionally immature parents don't know how to regulate their nervous systems. So, they jump from ventral vagus, which is the safe and social part of our nervous system, to sympathetic activation, fight or flight. "Someone's attacking me. I've got to get out of here. Everything's wrong." Anger, frustration, anxiety, worry, stress easily.

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Or if they've been doing that for a lifetime and their systems are depleted, then they may drop down into dorsal; the freeze, foot all the way off the gas. "I don't care, just go out with whoever you want to go out with. I don't know, do whatever you want to do," checked out.

Because they are coming from emotional immaturity, they're not checked in with their adult self. They generally don't realize they're there. They don't know how to regulate themselves, and they often project their dysregulation onto their kids, which can sound like, "This is all your fault."

Because their lack of capacity to be with their feelings means that having an emotion is untenable. They often buffer, they outsource the blame and the shame, and their kids are an easy target. So, growing up this way, you don't learn how to regulate yourself, or how to be with discomfort. Definitely not to see discomfort as a place for growth and expansion.

Instead, for the emotionally immature parent and their child, discomfort or challenging feelings or nervous system experiences are something to be avoided, pushed down, suppressed.

I think if you did a study of the children of emotionally immature parents, you'd find an awful lot of belly aches, jaw clenching, chronic pain, along with a lot of unexpressed anger, rage, and sadness, and the buffering habits that come with not feeling safe feeling or expressing your emotions.

Another major sign of being raised by an emotionally immature parent is feeling emotionally lonely when you're with them. Which stems from their lack of empathy and their lack of capacity to connect outward with actual you.

Now, your parents may have done all the external parenting things; provided food, shelter, water, and education, and maybe even shuttle service to after-school activities. But that is different than providing for a child emotionally.

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When someone is available emotionally, they can, in a healthy and loving way, separate their emotional experience from someone else's. They can say, "You are hurting and I am your parent, so that's what matters most right now. I can hold space; I can be here for you because I can be okay for me."

Just as importantly, they can understand that they are in the parental role with their child, and if they're not actually okay, which is totally fine, they can honor their own feelings and can regulate their own nervous system or turn to another adult for co-regulation.

They can absolutely say to their kid, "Baby, I see you're hurting. I'm with you, this is hard for me too," or whatever is developmentally appropriate. Instead of taking things personally or making the situation about them, they can manage their feelings without asking their child to be their therapist or their de facto parent.

And without getting defensive or attacking, which can sound like, "I did my best, okay?" Or, "It's not all my fault you're upset with me," in a disregarding tone. Or, "Well, I guess I'm just the worst parent ever." You get the picture.

Even the most emotionally stable amongst us will have times when we can't be that person for someone else, and that's okay. But an emotionally mature parent can be there. They can hold their own emotionally so that their kids can be in their feelings most of the time.

That parent, the mature parent, can be there for the heartbreak, the friend drama, the unfair teacher, the growing pains, the 'he-took-my-Legos,' and all the other stuff that comes with growing up as these complex human beings that we are.

For the emotionally immature parent, this is too much to handle most of the time. They may shut down or blow up when you're in your feelings because they aren't emotionally stable enough. They aren't nervous system-ly

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regulated enough to make room for someone else's feelings because they're not making room for their own.

Like I said, they may drive you to soccer practice, but they're likely unable to help you process your team's losing season. They might order a pizza when your friends come over for a movie, but tell you, "It's not that bad," or, "Oh well, these things happen," or just say nothing at all when you try to talk to them about the fight you had with your bestie.

That lack of empathy and emotional maturity or nervous system capacity can also show up as a parent who operates primarily from their ego. Now, we love a good ego when it's in balance. Without an ego, we have no sense of self. No idea of who we are and who we are being in the world.

But that is different from having our egos hijack our personalities and relationships. When people are ego driven or egocentric because of emotional immaturity, the way toddlers are, they may act like divas, or they may act more like doormats. Either is a dramatic stance in which they are centered.

Divas pull all the attention to themselves and present with narcissistic tendencies or traits, habits. They are larger than life and steal the show. You may have an exciting announcement or news to share, and the diva parent will find a way to make it all about them.

They may talk over you, dismiss you, one-up you, or otherwise show through words and actions that they consider themselves to be more important. They may come to your party or graduation, your celebration, and all of a sudden, they don't feel well and need to be attended to.

Or they may create drama around who else was or wasn't invited to your big day. They might show up with an announcement of their own. They may hate the food and declare, "I can't believe you don't have anything here for me to eat. You know my sensitive stomach."

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Or they might say, “Well, that’s great, but by the time I was your age, I had done 473 more things than you will ever do.” Or they might promise to come and then just not show up. My baby, to say that this hurts, is an understatement.

The flip side of the ego-driven diva is the ego-driven doormat. When someone plays the victim over and over, and I’m obviously not talking about actually being victimized here, but when they play the victim; never holding boundaries, being passive aggressive, blaming others for all their hurts, creating drama in which, once again, they are centered.

That behavior signals ego overload, just as much as the attention-seeking diva. The doormat parent will take your sadness about an emotional hurt and make it all about them and how sad they are, or how disappointed they feel, trying to redirect sympathy to themselves rather than extending it out to their hurting child; no matter how old you are.

If your third grade BFF doesn’t want to be your friend anymore, or your husband leaves you after 25 years, either way, it’s all about how sad they are that that person is no longer in their lives. Both presentations ultimately come from a lack of self-worth, which may be a deeper symptom of their own insecure attachments or childhood trauma.

When these issues go unaddressed because of a lack of awareness, because of a lack of access to therapy or coaching or other supports, because of cultural, societal, or familial stigma around getting mental health support, or any other myriad of reasons why someone may not get emotional and mental health support, then all these childhood issues can follow a person into adulthood, and thus the role of parent.

Okay my love, I think it’s time for a little co-regulation break. If these descriptions are resonating for you, I want to invite you to take a few deep breaths. Let’s co-regulate our nervous systems. This can be much, I get it.

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So, if you felt or feel like your parent wasn't there for you, despite providing, just notice that. If they pulled all the attention to themselves through diva or doormat behavior, just notice the felt sensation in your body. Consider taking a few breaths. If it feels safe to, I'll invite you to consider allowing yourself to sit with the discomfort, or whatever other feelings may be coming up for you; anger, sadness, disappointment, rage. See if you can feel safe within yourself, and stay with them for just a moment.

If it's supportive, breathe with me; slow breath in, long slow out. And if you need to pause and take some more breaths, or otherwise move your body to connect inward, do it. I'll be here when you're ready. If your nervous system is sending signals of dysregulation, I'll invite you to hop over to VictoriaAlbina.com/ventralplaylist. And there, you can get the link to a playlist of my favorite, most ventral vagal supportive songs for free.

So, let's get back to it. There's one more really clear and important sign that you were raised by an emotionally immature parent. This is one I want to bring up because it's something you can do something about if you're still in relationship with that parent.

So many people raised by emotionally immature parents either were, and possibly, even as an adult, still are the person doing the lion's share of the emotional work in the relationship. So, let's get into that.

Now, some people happily declare that their parent is their best friend. This may be perfectly healthy in some cases, but it gives me pause when I hear my clients in Anchored say this. Our parents are likely to be 15 to 40 years older than us. In the parent-child dynamic, their job is to provide for our physical, mental, and emotional needs.

Their job is to be a stabilizing force as we come of age and find our way in the world. As the kids, we are the ones trying to make sense of the world, and along the way making all the mistakes that our parents likely made before us. A parent should be there to support, guide, and comfort.

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When our parent feels more like a best friend than a parent, particularly in childhood, it can be a sign that our boundaries have gone awry. For example, if you are the one to comfort your parent more than they comfort you. If you find yourself trying to mind read so you don't upset them. If you put their needs before your own.

If you pause before you share something real because you don't want them to have a hard time, or have challenging feelings. If you are the one always apologizing when the relationship gets off course, only to be met with accusations, blame, or refusal to take responsibility... then you are the one doing the emotional labor. And that, my love, is not your job.

Now, there's emotional work in any relationship, from being polite to the clerk at the store, to supporting your best friend through a breakup. Whenever we interact with our fellow humans, we do call upon our emotional intelligence and emotional skillset, and do emotional labor.

But when a parent is emotionally immature, they simply cannot do the work that is asked of them in the role of parent. So, who does that work fall to? Well, of course, little you and your inner children, who were parentified, or took on a parenting role with your parents, in childhood because it was asked or demanded of you. Because it was a way to be loved, cared for, validated, and to feel safe and worthy.

My love, it's important to know, if you are doing it with them, you're likely doing it elsewhere in your life. Am I right? Again, never blame or shame; we don't do that around here. Instead, awareness.

I like to draw attention to this aspect of being raised by an emotionally immature parent because you cannot magically make them mature or change your childhood. But you can start to do the work to see what role you have played in this relationship.

And from there, you can use your tools, thought work, somatic practices, and the work we do in Anchored, every single day to start to make

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changes. You can do thought work around why you think it's your job to do the emotional work. You can do thought work around why you're still doing it. You can work on setting and holding boundaries, not just cognitively through your mind, but you can start with your body.

You can leverage the felt sensation of a healthy, mutually loving, reciprocal boundary. You can experience what that feels like during guided somatic practice or in a somatic practice on your own. You can begin to lovingly take responsibility for what's yours in the relationship, and you can start to let go of what isn't.

Now, if you start to establish and hold boundaries, if you begin to decline to do someone else's emotional labor for them, if you really step into your role as the child in a parent-child relationship, you can likely anticipate some pushback, some resistance; the push from the emotionally immature parent to change back to who you were when you were easier for them to manage. In short, they won't like it.

Remember, people are not pleased when we stop people pleasing them. So, you don't have to be taken aback. You don't have to be surprised. You can predict this behavior. That doesn't make it easier, except, I mean, it kind of does in a nervous system way. Because knowing what's coming could help you to get ahead of it, so you can start to manage your mind around it and can choose thoughts in advance that support you in setting and honoring your boundaries with them.

And you can, through your body, remember your own resources. We talked about nervous system resourcing in Episode 135. You can align yourself with your own resources before these potentially challenging conversations.

So, you may be wondering, why was, or is, your parent like this? Typically, emotionally immature parents get to be that way because of unaddressed issues from their childhood. They may themselves have been raised by people who were emotionally unavailable, or they may have suffered

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stress, distress, or trauma that was never properly addressed. They didn't get the help and the care and the support they maybe didn't even know they needed.

Emotionally immature parents may have had insecure attachments to their own parents... We talked about attachment styles and theory in Episodes 129 and 135. Or they may be dealing with mental health issues, or substance use issues that make accessing empathy and emotional connectedness incredibly hard.

They may also have been raised with the same flavor of codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits you learned in childhood that led them to parent you the way they did. I think it's important to know that a parent's emotional immaturity comes from their own stuff, not from you.

You, little, perfect, just trying to figure it all out. You, being a kid after all, you didn't make your parents emotionally immature. They didn't speak to you or behave the way they did because of anything that you did. They showed up to the job emotionally immature.

You know what else that means? It means it is not, I repeat, *not* your job to fix them, or to even try. My beauty, my darling, my angel, my sweet teddy bear, that is their work to do. and just as important as it not being your job, it's impossible. You cannot fix it. You can't fix them. Because A #1, they're not broken. They have an operating system for life that doesn't align with the role of parent. And, because only they can change the way they relate in the world.

That's a sad thing to come into acceptance around. And as always, acceptance is vital here. Wishing they were different, hoping they'll change, babe, you're just layering pain on top of, likely generations, old pain. It doesn't serve anyone for you to continue to be their therapist, their teacher, their counselor, their coach, their parent, their friend, but not their kid.

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It just continues to enable them to stay in their emotional immaturity and keeps you in a form of emotional immaturity too, as you stay in judgment and non-acceptance of them being who they are.

This is when we lean heavy on the tool we learned in Episodes 113 and 133, “Of Course You Did,” and “Of Course They Did!”. If you haven’t listened to those two, listen to them next. There are great tools there, my tender ravioli.

Your job here is to keep doing the amazing work you’re doing to get to know and understand yourself better. To coach yourself, to attend to your body through somatics, to accept yourself and them with love, care, and compassion. And while you’re working on that last part, it’s okay to be angry about it. That makes sense.

It sucked to grow up with emotionally immature parents, and you really deserved better. You really did. But this is what was, what is. And the more you’re able to detach from them, to not take them personally, because it’s not about you. The more you’re able to love your inner children, and your adult self, up for making it through, the stronger and more mature you’ll get in your own life.

My tender, little buttercup, lo siento. I’m sorry. I feel along with you, in an empathic way, for whatever you went through. You get to keep exploring your own experiences, your values, so you can keep showing up as the intentional and authentic person you want to be in this lifetime.

For those of you raising little ones, or working on reparenting yourself, you know that all the ickies from your own childhood can come up in the course of parenting or reparenting. That is why the work that you are doing now to see your challenges and to work to address them can make a huge difference not just for you, but for your own babies, and for all of the children, siblings, cousins, friends, and friends’ kids that are in your life.

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There are some behaviors that we'll either intentionally or unintentionally pass on to the next generation. As you grow in your own awareness and start to own your choices, you have the chance to be thoughtful about what you choose to teach and pass on to the kiddos in your life.

If you're reparenting yourself, and your kids are grown or halfway there, and you're seeing yourself in this description of the emotionally immature parent, please pause before you beat yourself up. You parented based on what you learned from your parents, who learned from theirs, and theirs, and theirs. Beating you up now gets you nowhere, and gets your kids nowhere.

Likewise, blaming your parents and stopping there does nothing. Stepping into awareness, acceptance, and then taking action to live differently, to love differently, to think and feel and be, and to parent and reparent differently now.

And perhaps, to offer a heartfelt apology for those of you who are parents and see this in your own history. Perhaps you apologize for not knowing what you didn't know, when you didn't know, is an important place to start.

Remembering that words only go so far, changed behavior is what rebuilds trust. So, starting with that apology, it's an important place to start. Because my darling, we cannot change the past unless of course, you own a time machine, and then you do in fact have a couple more options, right?

But if you don't own a DeLorean and enough plutonium to fuel an onboard nuclear reactor which could generate 1.2 GW of momentary power required for temporal displacement of the vehicle while traveling at 88 m/h, then you get to start from where you are.

You get to remember that you can't heal hurt with more hurt. So, you can start to use thought work and somatics to change your relationship to yourself and others now. So, you can show up the way you want to from here on out.

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Will reparenting yourself, will parenting kiddos, will managing the relationship with emotionally immature parents suddenly become a bed of roses? No. It's still hard work. Life is still 50/50. But the more you're able to make thoughtful, intentional choices, the more likely you are to get the outcomes you want when you make those choices from mutuality, reciprocity, and interdependence for your own good and the good of all those you love.

Thanks for listening, my darlings. Alright, my beauty, let's do what we do. A gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. Remember, you are safe. You are held. You are loved. When one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. I'll talk to you soon.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you want to learn more all about somatics, what the heck that word means, and why it matters for your life, head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day my darling and I'll see you next week. Ciao.