

## Ep #274: The Cost of Being Defensive



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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## Ep #274: The Cost of Being Defensive

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 woke up this morning to the most remarkable and glorious chorus of birdsong, and it has such a palpable impact on my entire day. I tend to be a chipper one, as you can probably tell. Just having that connection with nature, with something so much bigger than me, but also so much smaller and cuter... very cute bird... just feels amazing.

Talking about that, I'm looking out my window. I'm orienting my nervous system. Beautiful thing to do frequently. The other day, we had this wild, outrageous rainstorm. A few hours later, I was here in my office. I was looking out the window, and there was a raptor; a big, dark-colored raptor. I couldn't tell from here. I also do need to go to the optometrist; vision was a little fuzzy, I've got to say.

But it was either a hawk or a vulture. Anyway, sunning its wings. Spreading its wings out and drying them in the sunshine. It was just one of those moments where I felt so small, but so big. So unimportant, and so important. Just like a part of it all.

I've got to say, that has been the greatest gift of somatic practice. I used to race around life like a chicken with its tiny head cut off. At other times I do that, too. But more often than not, I'm moving with a different slowness that comes from within, from within my soma, my body, my bones, and it just feels amazing. A shout out to slowness.

So, this week on the show, we're not talking about slowness at all, that was just me rambling at you and telling you what I've been thinking about; which I love sharing. This week, we're going to talk about defensiveness, because

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I've seen it coming up, coming up for people in my life; for clients, for friends. I think it's a really important thing to talk about.

I also can't believe we've gotten to 274 episodes about emotional outsourcing without my talking about defensiveness. That's kind of wild, because it's a thing that we do. And when defensiveness arises, I think it's a really important thing to pay attention to. To say, "Why is this here?"

If it's your steady state, it's one thing. But I'm generally not any more. It is not my habit these days to be defensive. I'm pretty good at taking feedback. I can roll with it. I'm often the first to be like, "Ooh, what's going on? Do I need to make amends?" Where my stance is like, "How can I make this right?" And not, "How can I defend?"

It definitely was not before, but if I find myself being defensive now, I'm like, "Ooh, something's up. Something's up. This is not me. This is not my beautiful life. This is not how I show up in the world." So, having our little Spidey-sense, our antenna up to defensiveness can be really helpful. They can really clue us into when things just aren't right in life, and might really serve us to course correct.

Because it's not just about a habitual knee-jerk reaction. Defensiveness is the result of a very nuanced and complex interplay of our thoughts, emotional and physiological responses, that come out when it feels like our, capital S Self, who we authentically are, is being called out and is under attack.

As human mammals this protective mechanism is deeply embedded in our evolutionary history. Ah, when we think back to the savanna of evolution, lightning-quick reactions were crucial for survival because cobras, lions, etc. While those instincts to slash with claw and tooth at anything that feels like an attack still lives within us, these instinctual reactions are generally, these days, not triggered by actual, IRL (in real life), physical threats.

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But rather, as so many of the survival skills we look at here in *Feminist Wellness*, this reaction, this defensiveness, this slashing back, is brought on by criticism or critique or words or an offhand gesture or an offhand statement, or someone rolling their eyes or something not truly dangerous, that either is an attack or feels like an attack, right? It's brought on by words that hurt, for reasons that others would agree with but often not. You know what I'm saying? It's touching *your* tenderoni.

While getting defensive is painful and unhelpful to you and your relationship, there are parts of you, inner children, who believe that getting defensive is the only way to survive.

So, like we do around here, we're going to celebrate this habit. Celebrate it, it's kept you alive. Yay. And then, we're also going to talk about how not to do it.

Again, it's human to get defensive. Though, saying that I'm realizing I haven't actually interviewed many other species about it. Yup, my Chihuahua, Ziggy Stardog, does one majillion percent get defensive. He doesn't get defensive, he stays defensive. Anyway, it is human and Chihuahua to get defensive, and it shows up in similar but different ways in each of us; given our history, cultural context, individual temperaments, on and on.

If you have a history of hopping to defensiveness, you might feel some kind of way about it that doesn't feel great. Like, you might be shooting that second arrow... which we talked about way back in one of the very earliest episodes... and you might be feeling shame, guilt, self-recrimination, selfjudgment, etc. about it.

I want to start us off with my 'clarion cry for the ages' towards ever greater compassion, curiosity, and care for ourselves, and our survival skill habits. The more we can get curious, instead of shutting down or getting defensive about getting defensive, the more we can learn and grow, right?

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If you're ready to stop moving through the world feeling primed for an attack and a quick defensive maneuver, it's important to understand that being aware that you have had the habit of lashing back, that's not ever going to be enough to put it to bed. Instead, we need to think systematically, and to look holistically at ourselves and how we do.

By examining defensiveness through psychological, neurobiological, and somatic lenses, we can not just gain more understanding, we can develop strategies to do it less and thereby eff up our lives less and less.

As always, I'm not out here to teach you to shut that energetic of self-protection down, but rather, I'm all about you and me and everyone we love having more intentionality about when a moment truly calls for Grrr- and when it doesn't. When a softer attack could help. When you could actually meet the moment with more vulnerability, not less, and could say something like, "Ouch, that hurt my tender, sweet, little tenderoni heart."

Said more eloquently, this process we're about to embark on is not about eliminating defensive reactions or the defensive impulse. Instead, it's about integrating this energetic in ways that enhance personal growth and improve relationships, our wellbeing and our interactions with others.

Like all of our survival skills, self-protective mechanisms, at its core, defensiveness stems from the psychological terrain shaped by our past experiences, beliefs, and emotional experiences of life. It's especially linked to times when our self-worth, and thus the validity and value of our actual self, meaning who we really are, *that* is what felt under attack.

And sometimes, it not only felt under attack, often for so many of us growing up in emotional outsourcing, our authenticity was under attack. Who we were was criticized, rejected, was made out to be a failure, right? There were times when it either felt like someone was coming at us, or they actually were. Especially when there was emotional immaturity, unavailability, or lability in adult caretakers.

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And so, of course, because you're no fool, your brilliant body, mind and nervous system marks these moments. And when something happens that has the same flavor, tone, or tenor of a moment, when your self was on the chopping block, of course we want to shield ourselves against future emotional injuries. I mean, of course, we do; whether they're real or fear.

Yet, while defensiveness can serve as emotional armor, protecting our tender self-esteem when it's the only option, like when we're children, it can also trap us. Keeping us stuck in yucky-feeling dynamics, constantly feeling attacked and on guard, and cutting us off from truly beneficial exchanges that might initially seem intimidating or activating but can ultimately be healing if we stay with them. Which I want to say out loud, is not always easy, but can often be fruitful.

Listen, the irony of all of this is that it generally takes getting a lot more vulnerable to rewrite this habit. Which is what we're often trying to keep from feeling when we lean on defensiveness, right? It's often the irony of this. Like, if you just actually do the thing you're scared of doing, you're protecting yourself from feeling, then you'll feel way better in the end. Annoying irony, right?

So, we need to understand that there's this intense interplay between defensiveness and self-esteem. When we don't feel good about ourselves that can amplify our defensive behaviors. Every harsh word or tone, any potential criticism or challenge, can feel like a personal attack on our identity when our relationship to our identity is tenuous.

Through low self-esteem, self-regard, self-worth, whatever term works for you, when that's what you're working with, then you can feel like you have to protect your tender underbelly by hearing attacks when no one is doing it.

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On the flip side, though, a seemingly robust ego might just be a facade for deep-seated insecurity, flaring up defensively at the absolute slightest provocation.

Therefore, like so much of the work we do here, it starts with and circles back to strengthening our sense of self as a crucial part of managing not just defensiveness, but our ability to trust in ourselves, writ large. Thereby cultivating a more balanced perception of ourselves, acknowledging both our strengths and the areas where we want to grow, so we can be our most favorite version of ourselves more and more often. Less reactive and more responsive. Yeah? Yeah.

So, let's talk about this neurobiologically. The more I feel like 'I'm broken, messed up, there's a problem with me,' based on a habit, the more comfort I find in the science, right? It's like this deep exhale of, 'Oh, it's not me, it's science. Yes, I get to take personal responsibility. Absolutely. *And* it's not that I'm uniquely effed up or anything, right?'

Luckily for us, nervous system science and Polyvagal Theory provide a framework for understanding how our nervous systems influence our emotional and physiological states via the vagus nerve. This theory... and I'm going to go 101 here, for just a second. We've got a lot of new listeners lately.

This theory distinguishes between the sympathetic state, which prepares us for defensive actions, and the parasympathetic state, which facilitates relaxation and openness. The defensiveness that comes in sympathetic is us gearing up for an absolute attack: Heart rate goes up, pupils dilate, we're ready to throw down or bolt. Our senses are sharp. Our emotions are heightened. We're ready to attack, or respond to lion attacks.

Meanwhile, in parasympathetic, the storm is calm, our heart rate and breathing slows, digestion resumes. Essentially, parasympathetic is telling our body it's time to chill out, right? It's the other side of the 'cobra attack'



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coin. The interplay between different neural pathways also sheds light on why defensiveness can be so quick and overpowering.

This was really helpful for me to understand back in the day, and I'm going to talk about when I was super defensive in a moment, but I felt like I could never get ahead of it. I thought there was something wrong with me or broken about me, that it would just happen so quickly. But again, it wasn't me, it was science.

So, our brain's limbic system, where our amygdala, our fear center lives, is responsible for emotional programming, and can override the more rational prefrontal cortex in times of stress. The hijacking, by the emotional brain, can lead to defensive reactions before the rational mind has a chance to assess the situation. Which is why it's hard to thought work or mindset work yourself out of defensiveness.

As always, knowing how biological and mammalian this is, really helps me cultivate patience with, and compassion towards, myself and others when defensiveness comes up. Because it helps me to recognize it as a natural, albeit often inconvenient, and not great feeling. But it's a natural aspect of our brain's functioning. More on Polyvagal Theory all over the show, but particularly in, specifically, Episodes 48 and 174.

So, at the level of our nervous systems, our bodies are seeing an attack and are reacting in the blink of an eye. Meanwhile, the body holds and expresses what the mind often conceals. Which is why somatic work, working with the body to explore it, in its wholeness, can be so helpful. It certainly was for me.

When we are deep in our emotional outsourcing, we have, generally speaking, lost touch with ourselves and our bodies. We are reacting instead of responding to life. We aren't embodied. Meaning, we are living from the neck up instead of being super present in our bodies and lives.



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One of the gifts of somatic awareness, or presence... and this is the focus of the work we do both in Anchored and the Somatic Studio each week... is to remember the somatic or bodily sensation, hints our bodies give to us, to let us know what's up. Before we get to the point where it's way too much and we go all Vesuvius on it.

For example, let's slow it down. What do we mean? Your body, in a certain moment, might start to feel a little tight. You might start to feel a little antsy, a little buzzy in your shoulders, a little stiff, a little tense. You might notice that your heart rate and your breathing are starting to get a little shallow and speedier.

Eventually, these experiences, these sensations, will add up and your vision might get narrower. You might feel like a pit in your tummy, a constriction in your throat. You're getting defensive. You're getting angry. You're getting into sympathetic. Your body is getting worked up. You're having more adrenaline dumped into your system, right?

These are just examples. Your experiences, your sensations may look completely and wildly different. Individual results may vary. My goal, and the goal of the somatic work I do with my clients, is really to be able to map our own nervous system so that we can feel what 1 out of 10 feels like. So we can feel what 2 and 3 and 4 feels like. So we know when to intervene on our own behalf to help regulate our nervous systems.

Or if someone needs to hear about it, "How can I do that in a way that is aligned with my integrity?" You know what I mean?

So, that's the work. It's to, not protect, but sort of prevent the emotional and relational damage that comes from going to 10 out of nowhere.

I want to say, if you're listening and you're like, "Girl, I don't know what I'm feeling," I get it. I was there not that long ago. There's nothing wrong with you. Many of us who grew up in homes with emotional outsourcing,

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meaning codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits, learned early on that being present in our bodies, aware of our feelings and sensations, was not a very smart idea.

And so, we lost touch. We lost touch with the connections in our bodies. Yeah. And so, it's normal to be there.

So much of this work is about learning how to get back in touch with ourselves through the sensations in our bodies. As always, we're going to talk about some remedies, some ways you can start to get back in touch with the sensations in your body.

Finally, when we're talking about where these things come from, so many of our defensive habits come from a deep desire to regain the three things we lack in emotional outsourcing: Belonging or connection, worth or validation, and safety. T

he human drive to seek connection is powerful. We are pack animals and we show it most when there is a risk of losing connection. A big driver for getting defensive is the worry that if you admit doing something wrong, if you say, "I did eff up there," then you're putting the relationship at risk and you'll lose it. You'll be abandoned, rejected. You'll die cold and alone on the mountaintop.

We believe we are self-preserving when we say, "I didn't do it. I'm perfect and lovable. I'm pleasing you. I'm a people pleaser, and you are my people so don't think I'm bad or wrong. Oh, my God, don't go." Defending. Defending.

The thing is, that the subconscious driver for defensive language, which often comes across as mean, aggressive, intense, itself often attacking, is actually a cover up for a sweet and tender, small, little kiddo, baby sweet pea desire to not be left alone in the cold, dark night. It just comes off in a way that makes everyone feel like monkey poop.

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And of course, the irony is that the ego seeks to protect itself through denial. Which ultimately destroys the relationship, because it's all about ego protection, avoidance and abandonment. When relationships are about true connection. Healthy relationships, relationships that lasts, right?

That comes from being vulnerable, open, real. Taking responsibility for the impact and intention behind our choices and words. And sitting in the discomfort of sometimes not being perfect. Yuck, I know. But it's also the only way through, that I'm seeing; having done this work for a hot minute now.

On that same tip about belonging, often we get defensive when it feels like not just our sense of self but our worldview is under attack. So many of us find belonging through our worldview, through our identities. And when that's questioned, tooth and nail yeah?

I think it's pretty clear what the consequences of getting defensive are, but let's take a moment to visit it. Because I have seen defensiveness as such a significant barrier to personal development. We block off learning because we don't look within, we swipe outwards, and that keeps us deep in that emotional outsourcing holding pattern.

So, let's go back to our definition. I define codependent living as “chronically and habitually sourcing our sense of safety, worth, and belonging, from everyone and everything outside of ourselves, instead of from within.”

That's what we're doing when we get defensive. We're doubling down on having an outward, outside focus for our lives, while also strengthening a non-existent binary duality of ‘us versus the world’ which actually doesn't exist. The energy expended in maintaining a defensive stance can be substantial and friggin’ exhausting. Diverting our resources from creative and constructive pursuits. Locking us in a cycle of reactivity that stifles innovation and adaptability.

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Environments that require learning and adaptation, like professional settings or personal relationships, a defensive attitude can limit our potential. Leading to stagnation and dissatisfaction, and to people just not liking or trusting us. It can lead folks to expecting the worst from us, to not sharing constructive criticism with us because they know we're going to fly off the handle. And all of that is a wicked bummer.

I will also say, as primary care provider, functional medicine provider, as a coach, when folks get defensive, it keeps them from being helpable, right? So, if I say you know, "Hey, your hemoglobin A1C, one of the markers of diabetes, is up. Tell me about your diet." And you're like, "I haven't been eating sugar." Oh, baby, how can I help you? How can I support you? How can I take care of you? That's legit, my job, in that setting.

When folks come to coaching, and fight for the thought that's making them feel bad, "Well, I just can't change how I think about him," well, baby, then I guess I can't help you. Right? So, whether we're talking about those professional relationships or romantic ones, defensiveness can severely impact the quality of our relationships.

When we're defensive we don't hear what said. Rather, we hear what our fears and insecurities project onto the situation. This mis-hearing can lead to miscommunication and conflict, as the other person's words or actions are interpreted through a lens of threat and competition rather than understanding and cooperation.

That sounds an awful lot like the lessons of the patriarchy, white settler colonialism, and late stage capitalism. Am I right? Those systems want us to feel separate from one another. To put stock in property, not relationships. To defend ourselves, instead of listening to each other, and connecting, building community and mutual aid. It is wild how deep all of that conditioning penetrates into our psyches.

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In intimate relationships, defensiveness can create a climate of chronic contention and withdrawal. And this 1,000,000% happened when I was in an abusive marriage. I felt I had to walk on eggshells. I did if I didn't get yelled at, right? I had to choose every word very carefully, and could never dare to communicate openly. Because sharing what I really was thinking and feeling would absolutely trigger a defensive reaction, which would turn into a full-on attack, screaming, threats; the whole nine.

And so of course, of course, this dynamic erodes trust and intimacy. Replacing it with a pattern of conflict, silence, hiding, that prevents deeper connection and drives folks apart.

The good news is that relationships, even ones that don't serve us, offer fertile ground for working on defensiveness. They provide continuous opportunities for noticing how we react. Testing new ways of responding, and experiencing firsthand the benefits of lowering our defenses. Or intentionally creating space to care for our tenderness with boundaries, instead of the brick wall of defensiveness.

In a supportive relationship partners can help one another recognize and modify defensive behaviors. I'm so glad and grateful to be in that kind of relationship now, and I know it's possible for you too. Pinky promise. For real.

In order to step out of any survival skill habit, we need to be able to see it. To practice recognizing our own patterns. Journaling, in particular, has been very effective for me and my clients in tracking our defensive reactions. By recording moments when defensiveness arises, and then what we do about it, how we feel in our bodies, how we typically react, we can start to see the patterns.

Now, so often, we just write down, "How I effed up today." I get it, but I really want to encourage you to celebrate yourself 10 times as much as you rag on yourself. It's important to see where we are experiencing life and

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showing up how we don't want to, but if we're not pausing to celebrate, then we're not giving ourselves the grace.

And when we do notice, when we are stepping into intentionality and openness, that can reinforce positive change, motivate continued effort, build confidence and resilience. And those are essential qualities for transformation.

Developing somatic awareness, as I was talking about, is incredibly important. Because it gives us that moment of connection, with the prelude to defensiveness, which allows for a moment of pause. That is a crucial gap, that pause where choicefulness resides. Where we can decide to engage differently, and opting for responses that are reflective rather than reflexive.

We can decide that we do want to take a breath. We do want to walk away. Or we do, in fact, want to tell someone where to shove it. We get to make that choice choicefully, intentionally, and not just because our brains got hijacked by our lizard brains.

So, how do we do it? Well, we do it slowly, gently, slowly, gently. If you're not following me on Instagram... 'I give good 'Gram'...

@victoriaalbinawellness, I have a couple of reels where I talk about how we can cultivate that somatic presence. I talked about it here on the show all the time.

Practices like free dance. We dance at least once a week in Anchored. It's amazing. Meditation, yoga, tai chi; any mindful movement or intentional stillness that encourages bodily and breath awareness can be incredibly helpful. Grounding practices.

You know what? I'm not going to tell you what it is, let's do it. Yeah, let's take a moment. Grounding is particularly effective in retraining ourselves to

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pause, because it gives us something to do when we're like, "Oh, I'm going from 1 to 2 to 3... Oh, right. When I hit 3, I pause." So, grounding.

I want to invite you to either close your beautiful eyes, if it is safe to do so, or lower your gaze. Take a moment to notice where your body makes contact with the world. That could be your feet on the ground, your feet folded under you on the subway platform, your seat in a chair, your thighs against the edge of the couch, the airplane holding you up, the bed in which you're snuggled feeling snuggly.

Redirect your attention from the swirling thoughts of life being lifey to the here and now. And know, as you come into awareness and connect with the ground beneath you, with the air on your skin, the clothing that's touching you, the feeling of your hair on your ear, this moment, this breathing, this awareness, this presence diminishes the intensity of the defensive response.

And in coming into grounding presence with yourself it enhances your capacity to engage with life more mindfully and less reactively. Taking one more breath here, long, slow out, and fluttering open your beautiful eyes. See how quick and easy it is to ground? Beautiful, right? Yeah.

When we focus on our bodily sensations, and observe them without judgment, allowing them to pass, we reduce the intensity of our emotional reactions and the impulsivity of our defensive responses, which creates a buffer between stimulus and response where we can make choices.

So, let's talk about some remedies to reduce defensiveness. Before we dive in, I want to say it clearly, please don't demonize your defensiveness. Please, do not will it all away. Don't beat yourself up for it. Because, my angel, we do need to protect and defend ourselves sometimes. We've talked about this just the other day, in Episode 272, "Misguided Compassion".



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Sometimes we don't recognize when we're tolerating b.s. or being mistreated, or when we need to stand up and say, "Basta! Enough! Ya fue! Enough." Instead we just keep rolling, over and over. It's such a huge theme for us in our emotional outsourcing mindsets, and it hurts us so much. So yeah, we need to know when it's time to protect and defend ourselves. When to say no.

For me, the biggest shift has come in being intentional, thoughtful, choiceful, and present in my life, writ large, so I can more actively evaluate any given moment. And can say, "Yeah, that's all right. No, I will not be talked to like that." What I just said was, that wasn't me getting defensive, it was setting a limit with someone, to take care of myself and the relationship.

I can do that with a solid firmness that comes from presence and self-trust, without tipping over into defensiveness. And so, that's available when we are present in the moment.

So, how do we cultivate that capacity to respond instead of reacting? Well, of course, cognitive reframing, aka thought work has been endlessly helpful for it, for me. There are a thousand podcast episodes where I go into detail about every single aspect of the thought work protocol. We spend six months in Anchored, not just studying it, but applying it and really practicing it. So, I won't go into endless detail.

I will just say, shifting your mindset is vital. If you feel chronically attacked, and you feel like any feedback is a critique of your entire self-worth, you're going to be defensive, right? So, mindset. That work is vital and it's not enough. We need to bring our nervous systems and somatics in, to work with and hold space for the emotions that come up with our habitual painful thoughts. And if we don't do that, the work is not, in my experience, sustainable.

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When we combine thought work and somatics, that's change that will last forever. This is where we can bring nervous system work in. If we go right up into sympathetic, fight-or-flight activation when we get defensive, then shifting or down shifting into parasympathetic, ventral vagal complex specifically, to counterbalance this defensive stance is a pretty smart move. And the beauty of it is that it's more than a quick fix.

So, yes, it will help you in the moment, but every time you do it it's a profound retraining of our body's reaction to stress and perceived slights. Which cultivates a durable state of calm and groundedness and presence that decreases the likelihood of a defensive eruption. Because it helps your body to feel safer both in the world, and safer knowing that you will unequivocally have your back no matter what comes.

While you're working on that greater-felt safety thing, which takes time and practice and process, for sure, techniques like deep diaphragmatic breathing can be particularly effective in managing acute defensive reactions.

So, by focusing on slow, deep breaths, followed by a long exhale, and that part's important, we activate parasympathetic. Which down regulates fight-or-flight response. These physiologic shifts can dramatically reduce the immediacy of our defensive impulses, which creates that clearer space from which to respond.

Moreover, somatic practice can also enhance our emotional granularity. That is our ability to identify and differentiate between various emotions, which is completely missing for most of us when we go into "Aargh," right? That skill is crucial in managing defensiveness, because it allows us to understand precisely what we're feeling and why. Which can demystify and lessen the impact of emotional triggers.

While we're in that process of working to reconnect somatically, be with and down regulate our nervous system, improving our communication skills is

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vital. Active listening is something many of us in emotional outsourcing don't do, because mean and harmful words were hurled at us so often, or slights or jabs...

Maybe it was discreet and subtle in your house. Like, "Oh, wow, you got an A-. Your sisters always get A's. But hey, I'm sure you did the best you could." And you're like, "Did you just cut me right now? I feel hurt, But I don't... What?" So often we listen really passively. I've done polling in Anchored; this is a very common thing.

So, check yourself. Are you fully concentrating when others are talking to you? Are you half zoned out? Are you checked out? Are you just "Uh-huh, Uh-huh"? Are you there?

And then, when you do respond, are you responding from yourself? From "I" statements, saying what you feel? Like, "I feel hurt. I feel upset." Or are you going for the jugular?

Another thing that's been really helpful in my life is having a game plan. We talked about this in Episodes 27 and 28, "Conversational consent" I don't ever call a friend and go, "Oh, my God, Alessandra, you won't believe what happened." I go, "Hey, girl. Hey, do you have some space to hear about..." a topic? And if not, my girls know to let me know.

And so, when we are creating that spaciousness, we are getting a check-in so that we know that the other person is ready, willing, and able to listen to whatever we need to share. Having a good game-plan agreement in our conversations can really help us to feel safer in our nervous systems, so I highly recommend it.

My wife, Billey, and I shared a conversation here some weeks ago. If you go to [VictoriaAlbina.com/podcast](http://VictoriaAlbina.com/podcast) you can search there our "good Fight Club rules." So, check those out. See if that's something you want to insert into in your life. It can be really, really helpful.

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Because when we come back to it, defensiveness is at its core about safety and belonging. Right? Right.

Finally, I'll say this. If your nervous system feels chronically activated and effed up in one setting, and literally no others, I want to invite you to get curious. One of the things we do so often, is we beat ourselves up. We assume we're the problem. We let others convince us we're the problem. We think, "Oof, if it's all me. I'm effed."

Back when I was in that abusive marriage, I was being wildly manipulated and gaslit, and I was told pretty much daily that everything I was doing, thinking, saying, being, was wrong. I got really defensive in that relationship, all the time. Because I was actually being attacked all the time, in both subtle and overt ways.

So yeah, I started reacting in a way that didn't serve me or the relationship, that wasn't in my integrity. And honestly, looking back, I don't think I could have done it any differently, given everything I was managing then, and how few social and nervous system supports I had.

The answer for me was, yeah, to do everything I recommend here. Anytime I'm recommending stuff on the show, it's coming from my experience or my experience with my clients. I'm not just making it up. So yeah, somatic practice, deep therapy, lots of coaching, somatic experience and communication skills training, yoga, dance; all of it was vital.

And the thing, because this was the only relationship, the only place in my life where I was defensive, my friends pointed it out... So, what was the thing that helped me fully step out of defensiveness? It was leaving. Getting myself the hell out of there was the most important thing I did to change my reactivity.

You can ask anyone I know; I don't go into defensiveness now. It's just not my jam, because I don't feel attacked. Both because I worked with my mind

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and body to feel safer. To rewrite those old cassette tapes saying that anyone disagreeing with me or giving me feedback or critique or criticism is an attack. I no longer believe that, so it doesn't feel that way.

And I don't feel attacked because I actually am emotionally, physically, financially, spiritually, sexually, energetically safer now. So, yeah, maybe it's you, but also, what if it isn't? Just get curious, that's all I ever ask. Get curious.

My loves, this has been a long one. We've really taken a deep dive, and I'm glad we did because the process of overcoming defensiveness is about unlearning and rewriting deeply ingrained habits. Recognizing the cost of defensiveness not just to our relationships, but to our own sense of self and our ability to navigate the world.

By consciously choosing vulnerability over defensiveness, we open ourselves to experiences that, while potentially and likely quite challenging, are immensely enriching. This vulnerability is not about naivete or weakness, it's about a strength that fosters genuine self-exploration and transformation. This journey towards less defensiveness is not just about improving ourselves, it's about enriching our interactions with ourself and the world.

Each step forward not only benefits us personally, but also contributes to a more authentic and compassionate connection with others. Embracing this path of curiosity, patience, compassion, can lead to a more open, connected and fulfilling life. It certainly has for me.

This transformation, while complex and potentially challenging, is profoundly rewarding. Offering a richer, more nuanced way of relating to ourselves and others. And my love, you deserve a life where you don't feel like you're being attacked all the time. Where you don't feel the need to be defensive. You deserve that, for reals.

## Ep #274: The Cost of Being Defensive

Thank you for joining me, my love. I hope you've enjoyed the show. If you have, I'd be so grateful if you could head on over to Apple Podcasts, or wherever you get your shows. Make sure you're following or subscribed. A lot of people just go in and like download it or listen to it each week, but make sure you're following or subscribe, so that way it automatically goes to your phone. Automate, right? There's no need for you to take extra steps.

Please, if you could just take just a little moment to leave a five-star rating and a written review I would be so grateful. It really helps other people to find the show. This show is very expensive for me to put out. It takes an awful lot of my time and energy, and I love doing it. I want to make sure it gets into as many ears as possible, and for as many folks to connect with it. It is my act of service. So, please, help spread the word. Share on social media, rate and review. I'd be grateful if you did.

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

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](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar) for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day my darling and I'll see you next week. Ciao.