

# Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine expert, and life coach Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. So this is a really challenging time for those of us who have our eyes open to the state of the world. Since the inauguration, I have been holding a lot of space for myself, my friends, my family, and of course, my clients in Anchored and The Somatic Studio because there's a lot of understandable fear, grief, anger, despair is a word that's been coming up. And I want - while I do not in any way claim to have all of the answers, what I do know is how to feel feelings.

And I know that the more we are able to actually hold space to feel these challenging feelings instead of either pushing them aside, buffering against them or letting them devour us which isn't always like actually feeling them, right? Sometimes when the despair just takes over, we're in this dorsal spinny spin or it's that freeze where we feel like dorsal and shut down and despair and, oh my God, everything's terrible, but also simultaneously like revved up and anxious. They're not nervous system moments that support us in being, well, supportive to ourselves, our communities, our friends, our families, marginalized folks.

So many folks are being pushed further and further and further into the margins. And so I think it really behooves us to hold space for all of the feelings for ourselves and for the people we love. And so, as folks with emotional outsourcing habits, I'm gonna generalize here to say that many of us, and I've met so many of us over these many, many years of doing this work, I'll say this generously, we don't have the bestest skills at holding space, right? We try to like shut feelings down in ourselves or others because, well, because of the reasons we're about to go through.

So I am going to do a series where I talk about allowing our feelings, letting ourselves feel our feelings. I'm going to talk about why the things that get in

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

our way, and as always, I talk about these things as a way to offer some compassion, some empathy, so that we can have that moment of like, of course I did. Of course it makes sense that this is my go-to protective way of living, of getting through, of surviving when things feel as chaotic as they are purposefully feeling.

I'm thinking of Naomi Klein right now and like, this is a tactic, right? Making things feel really chaotic, throwing all these executive orders at us, shutting down websites and censoring. The more we can stay grounded, present, intentional, the more we actually have our eyes open, the more we are centered in our hearts, the more we can help.

And I think also remembering that we can't control the huge forces at work, but we can be people who do mutual aid, we can donate in our communities, we can teach people to read, we can volunteer at the food pantry. We can put our hands and our hearts and our minds to work in our local communities. And the more of us who are doing that, there is a groundswell, right?

I also have been reminding myself of the millions of people who just didn't vote, as well as the millions of people who voted against the Mango Mussolini. We're not alone. Those of us who believe in justice, who believe in equity, in equality, in diversity, in fairness, in kindness, in protecting communities, in protecting immigrants, in protecting the undocumented, the unhoused, protecting the earth. There are a lot of us. And so this is the moment where we get to turn towards one another.

And again, in order to do that in the most effective and efficacious ways, I want to encourage us to set aside time to take the space, to orient, to ground, and to learn once again, really, how to feel our feelings in a profound way. And so, let us talk about how to allow yourself to feel your feelings.

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

If you, like so many of us, have been avoiding your feelings in the last few months or since 2016 or since the day you were born, right? Or if you've – one of those people – I hear this a lot in anchor. People come into the community and say, I'm just really bad at emotions, which you're not. No one's bad at emotions. It's just, it's a muscle you need to flex. It's a skill you need to build back up.

But anyway, I want to remind you that you're not alone. So many of us struggle with this. I know I did in the past before learning about somatics and doing somatic practices and thought work. And I want to say it really clearly, there's nothing wrong with you.

You as a mammal, as a human, as a tender little animal are perfection. Just like beginning, middle, end. Done. Done and dusted. And you, like so many of us, have likely learned over time, from your family of origin, from the societies, cultures, religions, schools, etc. That you have been a part of, that feelings might not be safe, helpful, manageable, okay to have.

So today we're going to start this series by exploring three reasons why this happens. One, the fear of being overwhelmed by emotions. Two, not having the tools to process emotions. Three, how trauma and survival responses shape your relationship to feeling.

And I am using emotion and feeling interchangeably here. They're technically not interchangeable, but like, whatever. Let's just get to the good part and like learn how to do this, and then we can parse our etymologies and look at the semantics.

So we're going to look at where these patterns come from, why they make so much sense, because they make so much sense. And of course, because this is *Feminist Wellness*, your girl's a nurse practitioner at the end of the day, we're always going to look at remedies. So of course, we're going to end with talking about what you can do to gently, ever so gently,

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

tiny kitten step, gently build the capacity to allow your emotions step by step. Let's dive in.

One, the fear of being overwhelmed by emotion. I have 1,000% been there where I'm like if I allow this sad, whoo, it's gonna just overtake me and I'm gonna be forever sad. So if you think about feeling your feelings, it can feel like or the story you can have within you is like it's like opening a floodgate, like you'll drown in sadness or anger if you even crack the door open. And so that is what we're talking about, this fear of being overwhelmed by emotions and trust and believe it is a wildly common experience.

So here's why this fear makes sense. If this is how you relate to your emotions, then maybe when you were younger you didn't have the support you needed to feel big emotions. Little babies, little kids, they need grown-ups. They need bigger animals to help them regulate their nervous system, to model for them, show them, guide them through big feelings.

If there was no one around to say, "Baby, it's okay to feel sad. Tell me more. Or, let's sit with this together. Or, wow, it sounds like you're really angry. Tell me everything you're angry about right now." Without that support, especially if you heard the opposite, if you heard to like cut the feelings out, you're being a bother, they're not okay, your nervous system did what it had to do.

One of the things I'm careful about in my language is the difference between chose to and had to. But when we're little kids and we're not supported to be with the big feelings, what the nervous system has to do, like has to do to not be overwhelmed and like totally lose it, is to shut those feelings down, like flipping off a breaker switch.

This is deeply connected to how your amygdala, the part of your brain responsible for detecting threats, functions when emotions feel overwhelming. If the amygdala senses a threat, whether physical or emotional, it sends an alarm to the rest of your brain and body signaling

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

danger. The prefrontal cortex, which helps regulate those responses, may not have been fully developed or supported when you were a children, leaving those alarms to blare unchecked.

But here's the thing, my love. Emotions don't last forever, and they're not meant to, right? I know we forget that in the moment, but the more we can remind ourselves while we're grounded, while we're oriented, while we're present, hey, let's rewrite that neural pathway, that neural groove, that story that says, this could overwhelm me forever. And instead, we can remind ourselves that they rise and fall like waves.

Research shows that most emotional responses naturally dissipate all by themselves within 90 seconds if we don't resist or fuel them. And I'll put links in the show notes for you because my nerds love their science. Who doesn't want a PMID when someone's like saying science? Give me the PubMed ID, right? Gimme, gimme. So yeah, 90 seconds. That's great, right?

So when your nervous system has the capacity to ride the wave, when you are doing the work of being present and staying with your feelings, then you don't get stuck in it. Then you are able to flow with it, to surf it.

My dad was a surfer back home in Mar del Plata in Argentina. Actually, side note, my parents met, she was a beach bunny, he was a surfer. How freaking cute is that?

Surf the feelings. Just picture yourself on a little surf board. Oh, I'm feeling this anger that makes me want to punch this person in the snout. I am breathing through it, right? We're going to get into more remedies, but like I am in this sad, I am in this despair, I'm in it and I'm riding the wave of it.

And you can see this in little kids because they haven't yet learned. Those who are in supportive environments, they'll just let themselves just like cry and cry and then like they'll snarfle and be fine and then they'll just cry and

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

cry, and then they'll wipe their snout and get snot everywhere and then just be fine.

There's waves to emotions, and when we are supported, we know how to ride them. Now, as adults who are not supported and have maybe never been supported to have our full feelings, we get to do that work of building that capacity. And that's what we're working towards one small step at a time. That's what I do with all of my clients is work to build that capacity to be with our feelings and to not let those waves take us under fully, but just to ride them.

Two, not having the tools to process emotion. So this one's so important. Most of us weren't taught how to feel. Think about it. Did anyone show you how to notice sadness without trying to fix it? Or how to sit with anger without lashing out or shutting down?

So for most of us, the answer is no. Instead, we learn to avoid emotions altogether. Maybe you were told to toughen up or stop crying, or maybe you were praised for being calm or easygoing. So if that's the thing that gets you praised, why would you show your disdain, your upset, your sadness, your frustration? You're no fool. You learn to hide your feelings to get love or approval.

And so when you don't have the tools to process emotion, it's not just that you avoid them, like we were just talking about, it's that they can come to feel impossible to manage. Which of course, as always, is not your fault, my darling. It's a skill you were never given the chance to learn. But what's amazing, of course, is you can learn it now and can take responsibility for processing your emotions.

My nerds, nerd alert, here's what's fascinating. The brain's insula, which helps us to understand and interpret our internal body signals, like noticing a racy heart or a heavy chest, plays a huge role in processing emotions. When we're disconnected from our own internal bodily signals, whether

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

through avoidance, shame, a simple lack of practice, the downward impact and effects of trauma, it becomes way harder to name, feel, and work through emotions because you're not connected with the sensations within, which is again like in The Somatic Studio, in Anchored, with all of my clients, it's one of the first things that we work on is reconnecting our story and our experience of emotions with felt sensation and mapping our own nervous system so that we can get those little signals from our body and can make sense of them instead of pushing them away, ignoring them, or misunderstanding them.

Because the good news is emotions aren't problems to solve, they're sensations to feel. And learning to feel them gently and safely is a skill you can absolutely build. I know because I've done it and because I've walked thousands of people through the process of building that skill set. It's pretty amazing.

Three, speaking of trauma, how trauma and survival responses play a role. So let's talk about trauma. It's often the biggest reason people avoid their feelings. You've heard me say it before and I'll say it again. Trauma isn't what happened, it's how your body reacted. So trauma isn't just about big, catastrophic events, it's also about the everyday experiences that left you feeling unsafe, unseen, or unsupported. Yeah?

So when you've experienced trauma, your nervous system is wired to protect you from danger in, I don't want to say in a more potent way than other nervous systems, but that's kind of what I mean. Because it can often mean staying hypervigilant or on high alert or shutting down completely, like a turtle retreating into its shell. Dorsal shutdown.

And this is where the HPA axis, hypothalamus pituitary adrenal axis comes in. Trauma often leaves the stress response system in overdrive, flooding your body with stress hormones like adrenaline, noradrenaline, and eventually cortisol. These keep you in a constant state of fight, flight, or



## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

on the other side, the turtle side, freeze, making emotions feel like threats rather than experiences to move through.

Because when we're in these chronic states of fight or flight, when it sort of becomes our new baseline, or we're so checked out throughout our lives, the body has very little, the window of tolerance or capacity is quite small, but let me say it this way. It's like our bandwidth to put up with one more annoyance, one more problem, one more feeling is just, it's just blown.

And you know, it all makes sense because at one point in life, emotions might have been threatening or like the situation that left you holding, having, mmm, swimming in big feelings might actually have been a threatening experience on the emotional, spiritual, energetic, like whatever level. And so your body developed these reactions, these survival skills that kept you safe when you didn't have the tool support capacity, humans around, resources to handle big emotions.

But now, and I don't want you to get mired in this, but those same protective mechanisms, those same protective patterns of survival skills might very much be what's keeping you stuck. I look at that as not a problem because once you recognize that you're stuck in mud, like you can use a different mechanism to get through it. But if you don't realize what's keeping you stuck, how are you going to get out of it? Makes sense to me, right?

So building safety and capacity in your nervous system, what we talk about all the time here on *Feminist Wellness*, is the first step to changing this pattern. It's not about forcing yourself to feel everything at once. It's about gently showing your body it's safe to feel this tiny little part of an emotion one moment at a time.

So my beauties, let's talk about what it actually looks like to start allowing your feelings in a way that feels safe and manageable. Here's a practice to

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

try. One, orient yourself to safety. First and foremost, always, always, always orient.

I drive this home in all my practices, in all my programs, with all my clients, because it is incredibly important that if we're going to do any somatic practice, we do it from an oriented nervous system. So look around your space and you can simply just notice, right? Just notice what's present in your environment, what's here in the here and now.

If you want to have a more active practice, you can absolutely complicate it. That really works for some brains. Not for mine. I don't like making my orienting too complex. I like to just look around and see the things in my environment. But maybe a Virgo wants something else, right?

So notice five things you can see. Lamp, photo, mate, lipstick, earring. Four things you can touch. So I'm gonna look for textures. So I keep like this silly putty on my desk. This is really fun to play with. My glasses, they have a really nice like smooth plastic to them. This necklace, like, the chain itself feels really nice in my hand. And my mate, like, the gourd feels really nice.

Three things you can hear. I can hear the humidifier in the hallway. I hope it's not too loud on the recording. And I can hear the fan on my computer. Two things you can smell, mate, and that was loud, sorry, my hand lotion. And one thing you can taste, I'm going to put some of this lip balm on.

This grounds your nervous system and in bringing your mind, your body, your prefrontal cortex back online, this reminds your brain and your nervous system to be right here, right now, when and where you are safe.

Take a slow breath, inhale through your nose for four counts in 1, 2, 3, 4, hold for one, two, and exhale through your mouth for six. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. The long outward breath stimulates the vagus nerve, helping activate your parasympathetic rest and digest nervous system. This is the part of you that calms, regulates, ventral vagal grounds.

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

Three, ask yourself, what am I feeling right now? And I want to invite you to do this practice when you're in ventral vagal. So when things are pretty chill. When you're like taking a freshly toasted bagel out of the toaster and like it feels really good, it smells really good, you're very present to the cream cheese. And I'm being really serious.

As a nerd for nervous system science and our wellness, we don't want to start feeling our feelings if it's something we've not done or that's felt really scary. Please, please, please don't start with earth-ending despair. Please don't start with the rage of a thousand suns. Please start with bagels, start with kittens, start with neutral, start with like, right when you get in the shower and the feeling of that nice warm water hitting your skin? What do you feel? What's your emotion? Yeah? Start small, start easeful.

I don't want to in any way sort of say that joy is the easier emotion because for so many of us particularly in emotional outsourcing it's not, but what I am saying is start small. I think I've been quite clear, but I also really want to drive it home. So from there, once you've practiced that for a while, what am I feeling right now as I pour my coffee? What am I feeling right now as I walk to the bus?

When I'm feeling like kind of neutral, then we can start feeling in for sadness, for frustration. You don't have to have the name or like some word on a feelings wheel. It can be helpful, but it's not necessary. I'm gonna put a feelings wheel on the show notes page for this episode, so you can go download that. If you go to <https://victoriaalbina.com/311>, this is episode 311, which that's also bananas. You can download that.

Start to put a name to it. And if there's not a name, as long as you're connecting in with the sensation, which is our next step, bada bing, who cares? Let it go, right? We don't need words if we've got feelings.

So to that point, four, check in with your body, where do you feel this feeling this emotion? Maybe it's a heaviness in your chest, a tightness in your

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

throat, a flutter in your belly. Just notice. No need to judge, no need to fix. We're really just noticing and as much as you are able, naming.

Five. Pause and breathe again. Place a hand on the part of your body where you feel the sensation. Breathe into it gently, letting your body know you're here and it's okay. And I'd like to say this clearly, if your body was the site of trauma, this might not be a good exercise for you. You may want to stop at asking yourself, "What am I feeling right now?" And going into the body might not be available yet. You might just need to do more trauma therapy, do some more work before you can get to the point where checking into the body by going inside is tenable. And if that's you, cool, cool. Nothing's gone wrong. You're just at the part of the process that you're at right now. Okay?

So, here's the most important part. Before that perfectionist habit in your brain is like, "This isn't enough. I have to do more. I have to go faster. I have to dive in more." Nope. This is enough. I promise. I promise. You don't have to dive in deeper. You certainly don't have to solve anything. With the nervous system, the slower we go, the deeper the work. So it can just feel like, like I didn't really do much, but to your nervous system, that moment of presence is like building massive new bridges.

So just hear me that just building a moment of curiosity and connection with your feelings, with your emotions, with your body, it is already a wildly powerful step. You don't need to do more. And if it feels like too much, stop. Absolutely stop. You're teaching your body that it's safe to feel little by little and that's the goal. This is when we kitten step. Kitten step, tiny, tiny kitten step.

If you're new to the familia, if you're new to the podcast, I'll just define terms. I profoundly believe that baby steps are way too big. It's like, that's two and a half, three inches. Like, that's get out of here. That's too much change. It's too much change because science. Okay? And so we need to take smaller steps. So I want to invite you to take a newborn teeny tiny

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

kitten size step. That's the size of the step we take in this family and it works because science.

And if you're like, wait, I'm allergic to kittens, fine. Or kittens move too fast, fine. Turtles. Newborn baby turtle size steps. That's also available. Pick your animal. Pick your beast. Tiny, tiny. Can be lemming-sized. That's okay. It's all good. But no polar bear cubs. I mean, you do. You're a grown-up. Take a size step you want to take. But my sage council would be more hamster than elk. You know what I'm saying.

My angels, my perfect tiny tender, tender ravioli, this is where we'll pause for today. We've talked about the fear of being overwhelmed, the lack of tools for feeling emotions, how trauma shapes your relationship with feelings, making them feel very, very big and scary indeed. And so if you're listening to this and you're thinking, it's me, I want you to know you're not broken. You don't need fixed, there's nothing wrong with you. Your brain and body are doing exactly what they learned to do to keep you safe. And now you have the opportunity to gently unlearn these patterns and reconnect with yourself.

And this, of course, is a vital step to staying conscious, awake, aware, present in this sociopolitical moment on this planet. It's also a vital part of overcoming our codependent habits, our emotional outsourcing, our perfectionism, our people pleasing, and reconnecting with the three most vital human needs, safety, belonging, worth. And we connect with those through presence and intention. And those are found when we are in the present moment.

So next time we'll explore shame and judgment around emotions and how cultural and societal messages make it even harder to feel your feelings. Big ol' of course they did. Until then, my beauty, be kind to yourself. You are doing brave and important work and I am so grateful if you'd like to show me and the world a bit of gratitude I'd be so so so delighted if you could like, rate, subscribe, review the show on Apple Podcast wherever you get

## Ep #311: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 1)

your show. It helps to up us in the ratings and that helps to get the podcast in more ears. This is a labor of love. It is my way of being of service and I want it to get to everybody who needs it.

So thank you in advance for sharing it, especially if you are a teacher of any assortment, a therapist, a counselor. Thank you for sharing this show with your people. I can't tell you how much I appreciate it.

All right, my love, go have a beautiful day. Be good to you, take tender care of you. And 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 loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. Mwah. 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](http://VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar) for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.