

Ep #315: Allowing vs. Wallowing



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 B ea 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 we've spent the last few weeks diving deep into the importance of feeling your feelings, and we've been unpacking some of the sneaky and clever ways we unwittingly avoid doing it. Because let's be real, I can feel terrifying to face the full truth of our inner world, especially when the outer world, let's call it the outer world, the actual IRL world in which we live is scary and worrisome and angering. It just barely begins it, right? One of the things I hear over and over from my clients so often that it deserved its own episode is this. I'm game to feel the feelings, but I don't want to be selfish and get wrapped up in myself, and I don't just want to wallow in the feelings.

And I hear that phrase, "Wallow in it" a lot. I'm worried if I start to feel the big feels, I'll just get stuck in it and like, no thank you, not interested. So how do you know when you've actually felt your feelings all the way through? How do you make sure you're giving them the space they need without getting stuck in them, like a record skipping on the same sad tune. How can you know if you're actually feeling your feelings in a helpful way or if you're just splashing around in them like a toddler in a rain puddle, endlessly soaking yourself without getting anywhere?

It can be challenging to figure out at first, for sure, especially if you've spent years outsourcing your emotional regulation, shapeshifting yourself like a little chameleon on a rock, trying to fit other people's needs, scanning the room for safety before checking in with your own tenderoni heart. When you're learning to reconnect with your feelings, the line between feeling and wallowing can feel like one of those wavy fun house mirrors, hard to pin down.

And this work is about learning your own signs of wallowing. So I'll just share my take on it. And your homework, should you choose to accept it, is to see what it feels like in your body when you're letting a feeling move

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through and when you've crossed into that wallowing that feels like you're just ruminating and spinning and you can't get out.

Meanwhile, my hope is that this piece may be your bridge, the stepping stone between understanding the value of feeling your feelings and navigating the nuanced process of letting them flow without staying stuck. All of this work of feeling our feelings, all of them, is more important than ever, my beautiful, perfect, tender loves. We need to feel all the feelings, the so-called good and the so-called bad, the rage and fury, the sorrow and despair, and it's more important than ever now, right now, to feel all the joy, the happiness, the delight, to expand our capacity to be with the good and to let it land in our bodies, to actually receive it and not just do that old functional freeze, yeah, I'm grateful, yeah, that's good, but actually feel it because what we feel changes us.

And because if we don't, if we only make space for the hard, for the grief and the fury and not for the sweetness, we stay stuck in a cycle of dysregulation, bracing against life instead of fully living it. My beauty, our nervous systems were built for contrast, for the ebb and flow of activation and settling, for the whole rich landscape of human emotion. Which means all of it.

Regulating our nervous system is what we need right now. And it isn't just about coming down from stress, it's about expanding our range. The range, capacity to feel it all, to metabolize the pain and to let joy be a form of resistance. Because joy is resistance. In a world that wants us exhausted, compliant, in chaos, and locked in survival mode, daring to feel pleasure, ease, and delight is a radical act.

Expanding our capacity for joy means reclaiming our right to feel good, to rest, to take up space, to be in connection with communities, and to honor the importance of interdependence. And to do this not just in fleeting moments, but as a way of being. It means refusing to let the systems that benefit from our burnout win, but to engage with the liberatory quality of joy.

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So we build regulation, not just to soothe, but to strengthen, to give ourselves the resilience to feel deeply, to hold on to joy when it comes and to cultivate more of it, even in the face of everything that tells us we shouldn't.

So with that said, let's dive in. Let's start by talking about the emotional outsourcing connection. So my tender little gumdrop, if you've been living deep in emotional outsourcing habits, our codependent perfectionist and people-pleasing habits, you might not have had much practice in really feeling your own emotions. Maybe because you were so busy shapeshifting and trying to feel everyone else's emotions, monitoring them to make sure they feel okay.

Emotional outsourcing conditions us to bypass or numb our feelings entirely, to keep things really surface, no, I'm fine, really don't worry about me, or to drown in them. Why am I crying in the middle of the workday again? Right? This isn't just a behavioral pattern and it's certainly not a personal failing. You're not defective. You're not broken. It's a survival strategy deeply rooted in your brilliant, amazing nervous system.

When we've grown up in environments where emotions were dismissed, punished, negated, ignored, our neuroception, that subconscious sense of safety or threat, wires us to avoid fully inhabiting our feelings. Why? Because you're not an idiot. And because feeling your feelings might have meant risking rejection, conflict, or abandonment. Which, like, few things are scarier to any mammal, but particularly small mammals who are wholly dependent on the adults who are meant to be in charge of them.

Growing up in environments where emotions were dismissed wires your amygdala to interpret emotional expression as unsafe, especially if one or both of your parents were emotionally immature, histrionic, had huge emotional outbursts, or maybe the outbursts weren't huge but they were unreliable, right? Emotional expression unsafe. The prefrontal cortex, which helps regulate and contextualize emotions, may never have had a chance to build a bridge between feeling and integration of that feeling.

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Especially for humans socialized as women, our societal conditioning reinforces emotional outsourcing by teaching us to prioritize harmony over authenticity. We learn to make ourselves small in every possible way, to dismiss our true wants, our needs, and we come to fear emotional expression because it might upset someone else. And remember, we were taught to prioritize harmony over anything else.

Neither extreme, numbing or drowning, helps us process emotions in a way that brings relief, clarity, or growth. And that's the difference, my angel.

Feeling your feelings moves you forward while wallowing keeps you stuck. And if you're now like, yeah, okay, welcome to the duh express, I know that. Let's talk about how to tell the difference. So the line between feeling, processing, letting something move through you, being present and with the experience, and wallowing isn't about how long you've been in the feeling or with it or how intense it is. It's about presence, curiosity, and movement. Here's how to begin to spot where you are.

So one, are you in your body or are you in your head? And I want to, before we even get into it, just say, this comes up in Anchored all the time. I'll ask someone, how are you feeling? Like how are you feeling about this thing? And they'll say, well, you know, he's such a jerk and will tell me a thought. When we are smarty pants, when feelings haven't been safe, being actually in your body experiencing your feelings is like, it's a whole skillset, it's like a whole training, it's like, it's not just easy peasy, like maybe thinking or school have been for you. So give yourself a break if you're like, I don't know if I'm in my body or my head. You're in the right place. You're starting where you need to start. Give yourself a break. You heard?

All right. Okay, so let's talk about how to know. Well, feeling your feelings is a whole body experience. You're tuned into your physical sensations. So a flutter in your chest, a tightness in your throat, the ache behind your eyes. You're letting your nervous system guide the process, allowing the emotion to flow like a wave, which we've talked about. Rising, peaking, receding.

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Let's say someone at work dismisses your idea in a meeting. Feeling your feelings might look like noticing the heat rising in your face, staying with it, naming the anger, noticing the sensations in your body and taking a few deep breaths to stay present while the wave passes. Wallowing, by contrast, often feels disconnected from your body because it's a head process and you're stuck in your head, replaying the scenario over and over, how could they say that, why didn't I stand up for myself?

Your body might feel heavy, numb, or tense because the emotion and the stress activation cycle has nowhere to go. And if you're like, wait, the stress activation what? Go way back in the archive, listen to episode 17. It's all about it.

So when you're in your head, your prefrontal cortex, the rational problem-solving part of your brain, often goes, and this is a general, like this is a colloquialism, it goes offline. Obviously, it doesn't go offline. Like all the bits of your brain are doing their thing, right? But effectively, it's leaving the amygdala to loop on the threat. And your body stays in a stress response, unable to complete the cycle, right? Because that is a skill you haven't learned yet.

So notice there's nothing wrong with you. You've done nothing wrong. It's just a skill you don't have yet.

Two, is the emotion moving through you or sitting still? So emotions are meant to move. They're energy in motion, motion created by your limbic system to help you navigate life's challenges and experience life, right?

When you're genuinely processing a feeling, there's a sense of flow. You might cry, tremble, laugh, want to push on the wall, or you might feel the tension melt as the emotion shifts and releases.

So after a hard breakup, feeling your feelings or like opening the newspaper pretty much any day, feeling your feelings might look like letting yourself sob uncontrollably for 10 minutes. Then noticing the shift in your body as the sadness ebbs and a sense of relief returns.

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And I love to invite us to look at children, especially little kids, like two, three, they'll just sob. They'll just crawl in your lap, cry it out, and then sort of like shake it off, like a dog or a gazelle outrunning a lion. And then they'll just get up and be like, okay, I'm good now. It's amazing. And we can do that too. We just kind of like forget.

I mean, if you've heard me say we're taller toddlers once, you've heard me say it a million times, but we are toddlers. We're just a little bigger and we pay taxes.

So, if you're moving through an emotion and an emotion's moving through you, like a toddler running up to you, telling you they've hurt their finger and sobbing, then that's moving through. Whereas wallowing, on the other hand, feels stagnant. You might cry every night for weeks, but feel no lighter because the emotion isn't moving. It's stuck in a loop of unprocessed pain.

Neuroscientifically, this often stems from the amygdala continuing to fire without the soothing presence of your prefrontal cortex to bring perspective. This can also happen when we don't have co-regulating forces in our life, and this is perfectly normal when we're living in an oppressive state or in a genocide or in a war or under constant attack. Like, there are situations where you might cry every night for weeks. The thing to sort of keep awareness of is whether the sensation within your body changes after the sobbing. And to be very clear, you're not like wallowing if you're sobbing every night because you live in a war zone and it's not moving. This isn't a black and white thing, my angels. Like everything I talk about, there's a whole ebb and flow of gray.

So next, three, are you curious about the emotion? Emotions involve complex interactions between multiple brain regions, the autonomic nervous system, and various physiologic responses. When you're feeling your feelings, there's a willingness to engage with them, to get curious about them. This curiosity activates your prefrontal cortex, which helps regulate your emotional response and integrate the feeling into your larger sense of self.

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When you're moving through it and being your own watcher, which we talked about way back in the day in episode two, you're able to name the emotion. This is sadness, anger, grief, and you separate yourself from it. Meaning, you realize that you are a consciousness having a feeling, experiencing a feeling, and you are the consciousness watching your consciousness have that feeling. And so it's not as all-consuming. And you can notice where it lives in your body, and you can ask what it's here to tell you. You can be in curious conversation with it.

For example, if you're anxious about a difficult conversation, curiosity might look like asking, what's the worst case scenario I'm imagining? What's this anxiety protecting me from?

When effectively processing emotions, there's often a sense of change or progression. This may involve shifts in physical sensations, thoughts, or overall emotional intensity. For example, after a significant loss, healthy emotional processing might involve periods of intense sadness, followed by moments of acceptance or even brief positive emotions. This variability reflects the dynamic nature of emotional processing.

In contrast, when we're stuck in an emotion that typically involves a persistent, unchanging emotional state. It skips curiosity. You loop in judgment. Why am I like this? Or self-blame. It's all my fault. Or catastrophic thinking. This always happens to me. Which keeps the feelings stuck. This may be due to rumination, where the same thoughts and feelings are repeatedly expressed without resolution or new insights.

Neuroimaging studies suggest that rumination is associated with prolonged activation of brain regions involved in emotional processing, such as the amygdala, without corresponding activation of regulatory regions, like our old pal, the prefrontal cortex.

And of course, if you are a human living in depression, chronic depression, PTSD, CPTSD, baby, you're not wallowing, right? When I originally was thinking of this and writing this, I felt like I didn't need to say it because it felt like obviously I'm not talking about someone in the depths of a

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depression, but it really does need said, right? Because we can be so mean to ourselves and like, why am I wallowing? Well, you're in depression. And so graciousness, grace, self-love, self-care, all of those things are called for.

Four, Are you avoiding action? So feeling your feelings is part of a larger process. It clears the path for action, decision-making, resolution. Once you've processed the emotion, you can decide what needs to happen next, whether that's setting a boundary, asking for support, letting it go, or simply shifting your focus to something nourishing. Adaptive coping strategies.

Wallowing often disguises itself as processing, but it's actually a form of avoidance. You might think, I'm not ready to act, I need to feel this more first. But if weeks go by and you're still stuck, it's a sign the emotion isn't being processed, it's running the show. Wallowing often involves behaviors or thought patterns that may provide temporary relief but don't address the underlying issue or may even exacerbate it.

Examples include excessive self-criticism, social withdrawal, substance use, or any other buffer to numb emotions. Research in cognitive psychology and neuroscience suggests that engaging in adaptive coping strategies can help regulate emotional responses and activate brain regions associated with cognitive control and emotional regulation. Conversely, maladaptive coping strategies, so the things that once worked but aren't really working and kind of keep you stuck, may reinforce negative emotional states and keep us from resolving our emotional distress.

So, for example, after being criticized at work, feeling your feelings might lead to calmly addressing the issue with your boss, and wallowing might look like replaying the criticism in your head or talking about it to 400 people without ever taking steps to clarify or resolve it. Obviously, with that said, there can be hierarchy and power issues at work that can keep us from actually having a conversation, but I hope you get the gestalt of what I'm saying.

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So, question I get so much, how do I know if I've felt it enough? Well, let's start with saying there's no stopwatch for emotional processing. There's no like time limit. But here are some signs that perhaps you've given your feelings enough space to do their job.

So one, you feel grounded and present. Your body feels connected, your thoughts are clearer, like after a really good sob. Two, the emotional charge has lessened. The feeling may still be there, but it's no longer dominating your whole inner world or your sense of self. Three, you have clarity about what the feeling is telling you. You can name the need, the boundary, or message that it's pointing to and directing you towards. Four, you're ready to take a next step. Whether it's action or rest, because choosing to rest is taking a next step, there's a sense of like, okay, now what? Let me do a thing, right? And five, you can think about the situation without spiraling, meaning the story doesn't have the same grip on you.

So my love, my sweet, tender little gooseberry, if you notice you're stuck in a wallowing mode, try these tools to shift towards genuine emotional processing. And if you wanna hear a whole show about it, episode 275, embracing safety is a beautiful place to start. Episodes 276, 277, and 278 are all about embodiment and they're really helpful, yeah? They're really, really helpful because they help you to understand the steps it takes because there's so much we can do to get back into our bodies, back into connection with our bodies. And I know I needed a stepwise guide when I was doing this work, so I provided one for you.

If you've been hearing me or others talk about functional freeze, I got episodes for you. If you're like, no, I think I'm stuck because I'm like in this functional freeze, one foot on the gas, one foot on the brake. I feel revved up in the world, but frozen to myself. Episode 246, 247, and 248 are functional freeze, part one, two, and three. One is what it is, three is how it came to be this way, and four, nope, that was one. One, what it is, two, how it came to be this way, and three, the remedies, check those out. And episode 252, what to expect when you come out of functional freeze. Those could all be incredibly helpful.

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So I'm gonna give you a couple sort of quickie things to do, but this really deserves a big, deep dive. And of course, of course, of course, If you're like, nah girl, I'm like in it. I am chronically depressed. I keep ruminating. I keep going back to trauma. Like I'm spiraling. Get yourself a trained, licensed, skilled trauma therapist. Trauma therapist, trauma therapist. That's where you should go. EMDR is a great modality. I'm trained in somatic experiencing. Look for someone where it says SEP after their name. There are other great modalities, but those are IFS, internal family systems, those are my three favorites. For trauma, please get to care.

Meanwhile, what to do when you're stuck, one, Orient your nervous system. Always, always, always orient. Always. And if you're like, I don't know how to do that, head on over to my website. Go to BeatrizAlbina.com/315. This is episode 315. And there'll be a place you can put your name and your email in, and you can get a whole suite of meditations, orienting exercises, et cetera, for free, from me, because I love you. Thanks for listening to the show.

Two, ground yourself in your body. Place your hand on your chest or your belly if that feels safe and take a few slow deep breaths with a long slow out. And it is the long slow out that calms the autonomic nervous system and just calms you down in general. Yeah, so it's not the deep breath in, it's the long slow out.

If it feels safe to be in your body, see where you can land in your body. See if there's a place in your body that feels safe to be present in. And it can be the back of your hand or your elbows, or maybe your belly, but really feel into it and see what's available. Yeah, but show your body, I'm here, I'm present, Let's work together.

Three, move your body to move the energy. Shake, stretch, go for a walk. Whatever helps you to feel the emotion moving through. If it's something like a lot of anger, you might want to push on the wall, push on the desk, push. That can really help with anger.

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Four, journal the emotions story. Write out what you're feeling, what the emotion is trying to tell you and what you need. And if you're like, I don't know how to do that, that's okay. Don't worry about it. It's one of the many skills that we can do. It's one of the things we practice in Anchored. I coach all my clients in telling their emotions story and it's a skill like any other. I don't know how to fly a plane. Maybe you don't know how to journal your emotional story. Okay, we can both learn, except I don't want to learn to fly a plane. So caveat there.

Five, remind yourself of the bigger picture. Ask, what is the next kitten step sized step I can take towards resolution or care? If you're new around here, baby steps are way too big. It is, that is rude to ask yourself to take a baby step. We wanna take little teeny tiny kitten paw, newborn kitten paw size steps. Be gentle, be kind, small steps.

Six, reach out for support. So a co-regulation moment with a safe friend, a partner, a therapist, a pet, mother nature herself, Pachamama, all of those connections can help your nervous system to find its ground, find its balance, to land. And the more your nervous system is landed and connected and present, the more you can be intentional and can give yourself the space to sob it out, to let the anger out, to experience all the joy. But we only do that oriented, you heard?

All right, so in closing, feeling your feelings is an act of self-respect. It is a liberatory act. It is a revolutionary act. It is an act of resistance, my angel. For those of us with emotional outsourcing habits, it is a radical reclamation, a way to break free from the patterns that keep us disconnected from our own inner wisdom.

Let yourself feel, and then let yourself move forward. It's the foundation of your relationship with yourself and allowing yourself to feel grounded and safe with you and all of your feels, not eschewing any of them, not pushing any of them away, but saying all feelings are allowed here, they're loved here, they're respected here and honored here. It is absolutely life-changing.

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And once you can differentiate between processing and wallowing, you'll notice how much more spaciousness and clarity arise when you allow your emotions to move through you instead of drowning in them. And hopefully you can stop being such a meanie pants to you when the feelings come back over and over reminding yourself that that's what they're supposed to do. So we can feel another aspect of them, be present with another energetic within that feeling. Because science.

And don't you dare be mean to you if you're like, yeah, I have been wallowing. Okay, whatever, right? You don't have to make it mean anything bad about you. You get to choose what you want to make it mean. And for me, it just means that was the only skill I had. Now I'm doing something different. And I'll invite you to borrow that thought because it's a wicked helpful one.

So here's the thing, just as important as letting yourself feel your feelings is learning how to hold space for others to feel theirs. We're holding spaces, being non-judgmental, honoring, respecting, allowing. And it's just as important because the most core remedy to codependence is interdependence. And there's no interdependence if you're judging or like you're managing people's feelings for them or not allowing them.

So that is where we're headed next. Because as much as we resist our own feelings, we often resist other people's too, and keep it real surface or shut them down and all of that blocks true love, connection, friendship, true heart-centered relationship. Whether it's from a place of wanting to protect them, fix things, or just make the discomfort stop, it gets in your way more than it actually helps you.

So stay with me, love. There's so much more to explore, and I cannot wait to share it with you. Make sure you're subscribed to the show, following the show. If you're loving it, hit your girl up with a five-star rating and review, a little written review. It really helps to get the podcast into more ears. And we're just shy of a thousand reviews at the time of recording this. And I just, what a delightful milestone. So please be the one who tips us over into a thousand. I'm looking at you. Thank you, sweet pea.

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All right, my beauty. 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, 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 BeatrizAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.