

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

B a Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine expert, and life coach 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. Today, we're continuing with the theme of feeling our feelings. And we're starting a new series that's all about something so many of us struggle with, why we shut down other people's feelings and what to do about it. And this series is also for you if you've been on the other side of it. If you're like, I try to share my feelings but they shut me down. This is for you too. Because the more we can understand others, the more we can understand ourselves, the more we can have compassion, the more we're interdependent, the more better the world. Right? Right.

So if you've ever found yourself saying things like, don't cry, it's not that bad, or less obviously found yourself sort of rushing to fix someone's sadness, anger, frustration by, like, managing them, trying to do for them, trying to change their experience, trying to get them to not feel their feelings, this episode is for you. We'll explore the deep-rooted reasons this happens, not to judge or shame ourselves or anyone else—we don't do that around here—but to understand what's driving these patterns so we can start to change them.

I'll share that I started thinking about this topic more in depth about a year, year and a half ago, when two people I really love made it clear, and they made it clear time and time and time again, but I kept giving them the grace, like we do when we love people, but they made it clear that they did not have the capacity to allow me to have my feelings. You see how there's no judgment in there? I'm not like, they were poopoo heads. They just didn't have the capacity, right?

So on several occasions, I would share my own experience, thoughts, feelings about a situation or person that they knew nothing at all about and was met with their strong opinion, which I hadn't asked for. Their analysis,

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

rebuttal, their negation of what I was feeling, their opinion on a matter and circumstance they pretty much knew nothing about, in the process telling me that my thoughts and feelings, what I was experiencing and going through, how I was responding and reacting, was wrong and they knew better. They knew what I should have said, what I should have thought, should have felt, they would sort of explain away this other person's statement, experience.

Like, they were more focused on showing me what I was doing wrong and what they knew better than actually holding space for me. And so each time felt like an admonishment, because it was. And I felt myself shrinking away from them. Slowly retracting trust, putting up walls to protect my tenderoni heart, shifting out of talking about me and into that old protective, I'm fine energy to not risk being bit again.

And the worst part is I didn't want to pull away. I didn't want to feel like I had to armor up or keep my feelings and my experiences tucked away in some private, hidden part of me just to stay in connection. I wanted to be close in a real way. I wanted to trust them with the full, honest, unfiltered version of me. The me who feels things very deeply, who processes out loud like a lot of other kids for whom English is their second language, also folks with ADHD. I process out loud. Not because I want you to fix it, but because I'm in process.

I didn't need agreement. I didn't need them to say, oh, you're right. I also didn't need them to fix anything or tell me I was right or wrong. I just needed space, a pause, to be held, to have a moment where my feelings were allowed to exist without being overridden.

Instead, what I got was a wall of opinions and corrections that made it clear my feelings weren't actually welcome with people who, ironically, but this is all too common, did an awful lot of like new age spiritual hand-waving about safe space, facilitating healing, etc. But weren't actually holding any kind of space, for me, much less a safe space.

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

And when we learn over and over that our emotions aren't safe in a relationship, we do what humans do best. We adapt. We take care of our tenderoni. Some of us speak loudly to it, name it, scream, how dare you? Others of us shrink, withhold, contort ourselves into the shape of what's allowed, even when it costs us the very connection we are trying to preserve. So regardless of what your nervous system does in these moments, it's so helpful for us all to learn how to regulate ourselves, how to stay grounded, how to stay in ventral vagal when we are sharing and when we are hearing so that we can do our part to work to build more loving, just, caring, kind, interdependent community in a real way. Today we'll focus on three big reasons why it can be so hard for us to hold space for others' emotions.

One, discomfort with our own feelings. Two, fear of vulnerability and emotional intimacy. Three, social conditioning to fix emotions.

As always, we'll end with an actionable remedy to help you build capacity for holding space starting in your body. So if you're the one who's not allowing others to have their feelings, if you find yourself saying, well, actually, I mean, I bet she didn't really mean it, or, oh, man, my kid did something way worse, or otherwise inserting yourself into conversation to fix things, this series is for you, my love. Let's dive in.

Let's start with a simple but powerful truth. If you have not made space for your own feelings in your body, in your mind, in your world, it can be incredibly challenging to hold space for someone else's. When someone expresses sadness, anger, fear, it's like holding up a mirror. The emotions reflect back feelings you might not be ready or able—we honor that, right? Capacity in the nervous system—to confront in yourself.

For example, imagine your friend is crying about a breakup. If you've been avoiding your own grief from a past relationship, their tears might feel unbearable. Your nervous system might hit the proverbial panic button, this is too much. And without realizing it, you might say something unwittingly

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

dismissive like, you'll find someone better. Not to hurt them, but to soothe your own discomfort without even realizing it.

A nerd alert! This reaction is rooted in how your insula and anterior cingulate cortex work. These parts of the brain process emotional pain, yours and others, and if your nervous system doesn't have the capacity to hold that much emotion, it might react by shutting it down. At its core, this isn't about being unkind on purpose. It's about survival skills. Your body is saying, I cannot take this on right now. And so it's trying to protect you the only way it knows how, probably in a way that was modeled for you in childhood.

Now let's talk about vulnerability. Because allowing someone else to feel their feelings unmitigated by you requires a level of presence that can feel incredibly risky to some nervous systems. For folks like us with emotional outsourcing habits, codependent perfectionist people-pleasing habits, intimacy and vulnerability can feel like walking through a landmine.

Thoughts like, what if I say the wrong thing? What if I can't help them? What if this bad energy, bad mood, bad feeling, bad emotion lasts forever? What if I get pulled into their pain and can't climb back out? These kinds of thoughts are your brain's way of saying, stay safe, don't get too close. This is scary to me. And that's your sympathetic nervous system kicking in, right? Our fight or flight.

You might feel your heart race, your breath quicken, or your muscles tense as your body prepares to fight, flee, or that mixed state we talk about, freeze, which is part sympathetic, part dorsal, in response to the perceived anger of emotional closeness.

For example, if your partner expresses frustration with their job, you might jump in with solutions. Not because you're a fixer by nature, because we don't play with that here, right? We don't use those kind of labels. We don't say, oh, it's just instinctual. Oh, it's just who I am. It's just how I am. I find

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

that really limiting and not helpful. I don't think you're a fixer by nature, right?

But you might hop in to fix out of habit because their frustration feels like an unsolvable puzzle that could be dangerous to you, your wellness, your peace, your home, your everything. And so it feels easier in the moment to offer advice, to try to solve it, to try to fix it than to sit with the discomfort of not being able to fix their pain.

But here's the truth, my love. Intimacy isn't about solving someone's problems. It's about sitting beside them in the storm, even when it feels messy or uncomfortable. I'll add that the more messy, the more uncomfortable, the more it behooves us to not dive into solving, fixing, changing, but to really just hold the most gentle loving space possible.

And that brings us to zooming out and looking at the bigger picture, which is society's obsession with fixing feelings. Think about it. How often have you heard phrases like, don't cry, cheer up, look on the bright side? These messages teach us from a young age that emotions are problems to be solved or inconveniences to be brushed aside. This is especially true for people raised as women. We're often expected to soothe others' emotions while playing down or choking down our own. And let's not forget the toxic positivity culture that tells us we should focus on the good and good vibes only no matter what.

I mean, it's no wonder we feel compelled to silver-line someone's pain instead of holding space for it. Here's what this could look like in real life. Your best friend vents about feeling stuck in her career. Instead of saying, that sounds really challenging, tell me more, which is like, to me, a very helpful, loving, sort of neutral response. You're reflecting back what you heard. You're engaging. You're not putting you in the situation. But we don't learn to do that.

We're taught we need to fix, so we jump in with solutions. Because we want to feel important. We want to feel helpful. Oh, have you tried networking?

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

Maybe it's time to update your resume. I'm really good at resumes. You want to send it to me? I'll take a look. And listen, these responses come from a well-meaning place. And at some point, those are helpful things to say when the other person wants that. But when a person's just sharing their feelings, it can leave the other person feeling unheard, unsupported, unimportant, and like you're trying to make you and how you can help them the primary thing and not holding space for them and their experience.

So what's the key reminder here? And it takes a while for this one to soak in, right? I really get that. In Anchored, it's incredible actually. So Anchored is my six-month program and I'll see people come in and we in month one, month two, into month three being like, I need to fix this emotion, I need to change this.

And then slowly as they do more somatic practice, more thought work, more breath work, as we hold more loving space, we shift into realizing that emotions aren't problems to fix. They're experiences to feel, which we've been talking about here for the last however many weeks. And listen, feeling your feelings sucks. I'm never out here BS-ing. Feeling all the anger, feeling the sadness, the grief, the terror, like, come on. And the alternative is worse in my life, in my experience, with my clients.

Fighting your feelings does nothing except keep you stuck in the feelings you're fighting and then also full of stress hormones. So the take-home is this. Emotions aren't problems to fix, their experience is to feel. And if you're like, oh my god, how do I do that? Listen to the like three, four episodes before this one. I go into so much detail. This is like our jam starting out 2025 because there's a lot going on that we don't want to feel, like aka fascism. And well, you don't feel fascism, but you feel a lot of feelings in response to fascism. Right? And it behooves us to feel it all. So in controlled, sustained, supported ways, so we can get out there and be agents for change. So, well, that was quite the tangent.

Mama went off script on that one. So reeling it back in, let's dive into remedies. How do we actually start allowing others to have their feelings

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

without jumping into fix, minimize, change, negate? Well, it starts with building safety and capacity in your own nervous system, which is one of our main themes around here.

So I'm going to walk you through a five-step practice. You can do this at any point anywhere and as always with all of the practices I offer here on the show and everywhere else that I'm showing up in the world, I want to invite you to practice this while your nervous system's like feeling chill. While things are good, things are easy, you're not worked up about anything, right? So that you can start to create a facility with this experience that you can then apply when there's like you're worked up, right? Or when there's a challenge to your nervous system capacity. So try this while you're just super duper chill, okay?

Or in response to an emotion that feels easier to handle. So if anger feels easy, like you don't jump in to fix that, do it with that. But if joy or happiness or contentment feels easier to handle and you don't try to negate that or change that in others, do it with that. Okay? Start where it's warm, start where it's easy, and then go to where it's less so.

So step one in my world always, pause and orient to safety. So, when someone shares a big emotion, and sometimes it's not even a big emotion, it can just be emotion and an emotion that's challenging or a story, something that feels challenging for you and your nervous system, your first habit, not instinct, not nature, habit might be to fix your silver lining. Instead, we're going to pause. Look around the room and find something that feels grounding, comforting.

Maybe it's the texture of the chair beneath you, the sunlight on your skin, the steady rhythm of your breath. Maybe it's the feeling of your own skin under your hand or the texture of your sweater. Maybe you twirl your hair and feel your silky hair. Let your body settle here for a moment. Let something physical in your environment give your nervous system something to sort of land on. Yes, you're not just floating around in the past, in the present, in the future, in the where am I, land here.

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

Next, we're going to name what we're feeling. So ask yourself, what's coming up for me right now? Maybe it's discomfort, a need to fix, or even anxiety. Gently name what's coming up as a way to create a little more space between your experience and what's actually going on in the room in the other person.

Next we're going to see if there's a feeling word that comes up. And you may not have access to that at first or after a year. I send everyone a little feelings wheel when they join Anchored because we need that resource to like have access sometimes to the language of feeling when it's super new to us. So, ah, feeling into my body, I feel anxious, I feel nervous, I feel worried, I feel angry, I feel irritated, I feel frustrated. Right? And we're saying I feel, not I am. We're creating a little cognitive distance between ourself and the feeling.

Three, practice grounding touch. If the other person's emotions feel overwhelming, if it's like that moment in Aliens where the alien just like comes out of Sigourney Weaver's chest and that's how it feels for you when that desire to, well, you know what you could do? Well, you know what? What you should do is, right? If that feels like, oh, and if their emotions feel overwhelming, if the moment like you're like, oh, this thing wants to, like, rip through my chest and make itself known in the room, consider maybe placing one hand on your heart and the other on your perfect round belly.

And by the way, because science, your belly is supposed to be round, especially if there's a uterus in there, you're supposed to have a fat pad over it. I'm gonna just like always find any moment to remind us that bellies should have a little roundness to them. And yours is perfect. Place one hand on your heart and the other on your perfect, perfect belly. Take a slow, deep breath, and remember in this family, we're nervous system aware and thoughtful. We take a slow breath in, long slow out, feeling the warmth of your hands as an anchor. This can help your nervous system to ground and regulate. It's ventral vagal supportive when we do that long, slow out.

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

Then feeling your own warmth, your own holding can remind your body, I'm safe in this moment. That's all we're ever aiming for. Right? I can be here. It's okay to be here. Right? Because we lose presence and that takes us into habit. And then we're saying silly goose stuff. We don't want to be saying that negates our friend's experience and we love them and we want to allow their feelings, right? Right.

Four, reflect their experience. Instead of jumping to solutions, try reflecting what you hear. And my friend, Juana, shout out to Juana. She's just amazing in like every possible way. And so Juana does this really thoughtful, loving thing. She's amazing at reflecting back what she's heard you say in this way that just makes you feel like she's a thousand percent present. And I've noticed that she does this really smart pause that I imagine is her, and I should just ask her, and I shall.

Once I finish recording, I'm going to text her and be like, hey, Juana, is this what you're doing? But she's giving herself a moment to pause and to actually be thoughtful about what she wants to say and to process what she's hearing. And she's Canadian so she's probably pronounced it process and I love that for her.

So you're like, hey, Sunny, whatever I'm having, whatever feeling. And she goes, yeah. So I'm hearing that that sounds painful. Or, oh, yeah, I can see why you'd feel that way. And so it's the yeah, so, like some variation of that, that's creating this spaciousness in the air and I think is her like, okay, wait, what am I hearing? And like, walking through it and making sure she's hearing it correctly and like, checking in.

And it's such a beautiful tool to give ourselves a pause. Because when we pause, we step into presence. And what do we just say? When we are in presence, we can show up, we can allow, we can be with. And we're not in habit, right? We're in intentionality and so phrases like that sound so painful I can see why you'd feel that way I'm hearing you say that this is a really stressful lonely time for you I'm hearing you say that coming to this event

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

was really important to you even though it was challenging in these other ways.

I'm hearing you say that you're feeling really distressed by the way you heard that child talking to their parent. I'm hearing you say. This shows empathy without trying to fix or change their experience. You're not getting all up in it. You're just honoring what they're sharing.

And for those of us particularly who have been negated or who felt like, I never really felt like what I thought or felt or wanted or needed particularly mattered growing up. And so it can be just so powerful and beautiful to just have that really simple reflection.

So, after reflecting someone's experience back to them, and this is something I learned in somatic experiencing training, we did this in sensory motor psychotherapy training as well. It's simply to ask if you're getting that right. And oh, it can be so life-changing. Right? "I'm hearing you say that it was really upsetting to hear that kid be so cruel to their parent. Am I getting that right? Is that what I'm hearing you say? Am I hearing you say that?"

And it's just such a beautiful way to really, really send home the message that I'm here with you. I'm listening. I really, truly, deeply care about you, your experience, your thoughts, your feels. I'm here for you. I am a true, real friend. I'm here for you.

And finally, after holding space for someone else's feelings, take a moment for yourself. It can be really draining, especially if this process of active listening without butting in is new for you. After the conversation, take a moment to check in with your body. Do you feel tension anywhere? Is there any holding? Is there anywhere that might need some shaking, some stretching? What about a few cleansing breaths to release any lingering energy? Check in with your body, see what you need, and give your body what it's asking for.

And if you're listening and you're like, you know, I actually have been more on the active listening and not the negating or disallowing side. Thank you

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

for listening in. Thank you for building your compassion and care for the people in your life who don't have that capacity in their nervous system, who don't have those skills, who do have these habits. We're going to keep diving into this for the next few episodes. And I think it's really vital for all of us to really think about how we do and don't allow each other to have emotions because it's one of the most vital parts of creating a profound and real connection with the people in our life and we need each other now more than ever.

So my love, we're going to pause here for today. We've talked about why it's hard to let others have their feelings, whether it's discomfort with our own emotions, fear of vulnerability, or the social conditioning that tells us it is our job, incumbent upon us, to fix everything. Right? Because it reflects badly on you as a mom, as a parent, as a boss, as a friend, if everyone around you is not happy, right? In Spanish we call that *afán de protagonismo*. How do you even translate that?

It's like you're the protagonist. Not in this like main character energy thing that's going around, but in a like, you're the protagonist meaning it's on you it's about you if everything's not *Chiche bombón*, as the Uruguayans say, right like if everything's not a perfect per your own rubric and we got to shake that out we gotta let that go Because this isn't about trying to make everyone appear the way you think they should be or feel the way they should be or think or experience life the way they should be.

And this process we're talking about engaging in of allowing others to have their feelings, it's not about being perfect at it. It's about creating a little more space, like a kitten pod's worth of space for your feelings and theirs to exist side by side without judgment.

So next time, we're going to explore how systems of oppression and emotional burnout shape these patterns and what we can do to start unlearning them. Until then, take gentle care of yourselves. You're doing brave and beautiful work, and I'm so proud of you.

Ep #316: Why We Shut Down Others' Feelings (And How It Starts in Us)

So my beautiful love, 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