

Ep #318: Reclaiming Emotional Space for Yourself and Others



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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. Today, we're wrapping up our series on why we struggle to let others have their feelings, why we have that like knee-jerk thing that makes us negate them, decline them the opportunity to express themselves, we opine instead of listening, and we're talking about how to reclaim emotional space.

So if you've ever felt torn between wanting to hold space for someone and feeling like you just can't, or if you've found yourself thinking, "How do I balance their needs and mine," this episode is for you.

If you're new to the show, welcome! Hello! I'm so happy you're here. This is probably not a great place to start. I'd go back 27 episodes. That's a random number I chose, but go back a bit. Don't start in the middle of the series. Work your way up. That's going to feel more better, I think. I love you. I'm glad you're here.

If you've been around here for a minute and you've been working on your emotional outsourcing, really understanding your own codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits more, then you're probably like, yeah, I do struggle with that. I want to take care of the people I love. I'm a kind person. I'm a generous person. I want to be there for them.

But also, what about me? I'm 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, and I've never really taken care of me. So there's this friction, this struggle, and it's super real and you're not alone. We talk about this in *Anchored* constantly, right? Like every day in the forums, I coach on this constantly as feeling in to what it feels like to find that interdependent balance.

So I just want to name that that's what we're always aiming for. So in this final episode in this series, we'll focus on two things. One, the cost of emotional suppression on relationships and connection. And two, how to

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reclaim emotional space for yourself and how to share that with others. As always, we'll dig into the psychology, somatics, nervous system, all the things that shape these dynamics, and you know where you're at. You're in *Feminist Wellness*. So I'll share remedies to help you make room for more presence, authenticity, and connection in your relationships. Let's dive in my love.

So let's start with a truth that can be hard to face. When we suppress emotions, whether our own or others, we create disconnection. Imagine your relationship as a bank account. Every time you validate someone's feelings, you're making a deposit. And every time you dismiss, silver line, or shut down their emotions, you're making a withdrawal. Over time, if there are too many withdrawals and not enough deposits, the account runs dry. It's math.

This doesn't mean that you have to be like perfect or endlessly available. But when emotional suppression becomes a habit, it can leave people feeling unseen, unheard, and not exactly emotionally safe with you, which are some of the deepest forms of disconnection we can experience as humans.

Moreover, when we layer in the complex forces of late-stage capitalism and patriarchal norms that tell us to prioritize productivity over emotional honesty, that keep us working instead of making time to be present with our friends, that keep us focused on things other than human connection, withdrawals can accumulate even faster.

Layer in emotional outsourcing and our habit of, well it's not really a habit, it's a survival skill, right? Of keeping our own emotions at bay, keeping them suppressed, pushing them away, which then of course leads us to push away other people's emotions because it's too much. It's too scary. It's too big, which leads people to not want to share with us.

I started this series a couple episodes ago talking about how I started thinking about this more and really working on it, writing about it, thinking

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about it, talking about it, because I had two friends who I really love, still love very much, but neither was able – well, they've not shown me that they're able to actually listen as much as they want to give advice or explain my feelings away.

And so they're not people I talk to anymore. And that's a real bummer for everyone. The withdrawals accumulated way faster than the remedies, than the repairs, than the deposits came into our account together.

So let's look at what this looks like in practice. Let's say your partner shares that they're feeling overwhelmed at work. Instead of validating their stress, saying something like, oof, man, I hear you, that boss of yours just won't let up on you, huh? Or, oh, honey, I hear you that you're stressed or, oof, that sounds like a lot. Anything validating, out of habit because them being stressed freaks you out, right?

Let's say it makes your brain start spiraling into they hate their job, they're going to quit their job or they're going to get fired and then we're not going to have that second income and then we're not going to be able to pay the rent and then we're going to be kicked out of our house and we're going to live on the street and then we're going to die cold and alone on a mountain top.

And your brain does that so fast. Amygdala so fast. Right? Because you're not in presence. You're not in intentionality. You're not in that moment. Right? You're not actively listening. So you say, well, at least you have a job. Or, hey, why don't you try time blocking? Are you writing down like your top priorities for the day? Or why don't you delegate?

You might mean well, and I trust and believe that you mean well, but what they hear, my feelings aren't valid. I don't matter. She's not listening. She doesn't care. She cares more about her opinion, her thought, her experience, than actually giving me space. And over time, this pattern can erode trust and intimacy, leaving both of you feeling distant.

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This disconnection isn't just relational, it's physiological. When emotions are dismissed, especially when it happens chronically in a relationship, then we don't get the signals we need via the vagus nerve, which plays a key role in social connection, in order to feel safe in our bodies, in the moment, in the environment, in the relationship. Instead, the nervous system may go right up into sympathetic arousal, fight or flight, or dorsal vagal shutdown, numbness, disconnection, checking out.

In this way, emotional suppression is not simply an abstract or cognitive error, it directly impacts the body's capacity for feeling safe, engaged, and resilient. In other words, emotional suppression isn't just about hurt feelings, it's about the body losing its sense of safety and connection.

Furthermore, in our interconnected, often inequitable social world, consider how structural pressures from workplace hierarchies to the relentless demands of neoliberal productivity, force many folks to suppress what they truly feel most of the day, for most days.

When the social context is imbued with oppressive norms, whether it's the expectation to be tough or the pressure to not rock the boat in patriarchal spaces, our nervous system internalizes these messages, making it exponentially harder to access a secure, regulated state.

This is why reclaiming emotional space isn't just a personal act, it's deeply political, a form of resistance against systems that prioritize control over authentic connection. Reclaiming emotional space is about breaking the cycle of suppression, both the suppression we've learned to apply to ourselves and the way we project that habit, that way of attempting to source safety onto others.

It's about creating relationships where emotions are welcomed, honored, and processed in ways that feel safe and sustainable. Where we hold space for the people we love instead of tying our wellness, our safety, our belonging to their emotional state. Right? Because it's this core key thing of

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codependent thinking. I don't believe that I'm safe. I'm okay if you are not safe and okay.

Meaning if you're emotionally upset, I deeply believe somewhere in my body that it's my job to regulate your emotions, to sort of control your emotions, to make sure you're not upset, make sure you're not angry, make sure things are copacetic. And it's only by keeping you in a balanced emotional state that I can feel. And we gotta learn to step away from that if we want to have big, open-hearted, interdependent, real relationships with real connections.

So let's get into remedies. Step one. Relearn the language of emotions. One of the biggest reasons we suppress emotions is because we've never learned how to name or describe them. To reclaim emotional space, we need to expand our emotional vocabulary. Start by practicing with yourself.

When you notice a feeling, try naming it as specifically as possible. Instead of saying, I'm upset, ask, Am I frustrated, overwhelmed, disappointed, angry, lonely? Getting into specificity helps your brain and body connect, which is key for processing emotions.

And by the way, nerd alert, there's a fabulous functional MRI study where they had folks in the magnetic resonance imaging machine with little electrodes on their head. They watched the way different parts of their brain lit up with affect labeling. Legit just naming how they're feeling and it helped calm them, literally at the level of the brain.

I should do a whole show. I'll do a whole show for you. And wow, that's like amazing to know, right? So head on over to my website, Beatriz, B-E-A-T-R-I-Z, Albina, A-L-B-I-N-A, dot com slash 318, the episode number for this show. You can download a really beautiful feelings wheel that I made just for you.

Go get it. It's free. Print it big. Keep it on your screen. So I send one to everyone who joins Anchored, and people will often make it like the screen for their phone so they can just look down and look at the feelings wheel.

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It's super helpful because sometimes we don't know the words. We don't have access to the words. So having them written down in front of us, sort of organized into sections can be so helpful. And again, it's free to go grab this feelings wheel and it's mine's really pretty. So go get it. Okay?

All right. So we start with naming it affect labeling and trying to get specific and then when we're holding space for someone else we try gently asking broad open-ended questions that don't insert our experience of them. You look disappointed. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, I would be overwhelmed if I were you. No, no, no. Slow your roll.

My love, how does that feel for you? Hey, what's the hardest part of this? Or Billey and my favorite, tell me more. We do that all the time, right? Oh, I'm upset because blah, blah, blah.

Oh, tell me more. And sometimes the whole conversation will be Billey going, oh, tell me more. And there's something about the really sweet tender, soft way she says it that will often help. If I need to cry, I'll just, blah. And it's really beautiful. And using open-ended questions that don't make assumptions, that don't interject you, project you, that don't try to solve it or change it or fix it. They invite the other person to explore their emotions without feeling judged, rushed, or put upon.

So expanding our emotional lexicon isn't just a matter of semantics. It's about forging a language that honors our full spectrum of human experience. This process also aligns with somatic practices, where tuning into nuanced bodily sensation informs our understanding of emotional states.

So, some examples. My client, Sarah, had a habit of brushing off her emotions with phrases like, whatever, I'm just, ugh, whatever. And she tried to do that in Anchored and I was like, uh-uh, nope, that's not going to fly in coaching either. And she wouldn't dig deeper because she didn't really have the skills and tools like so many of us.

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So during one Anchored session pretty on, we practiced naming feelings more specifically. And she realized in that moment of coaching with me, I'm not just upset, I'm actually feeling overwhelmed and unappreciated after being the one to plan my team's project again without any acknowledgement.

This specificity helped her to understand why she felt so drained and gave her clarity about her boundaries at work. She was able to tap into the felt sensation that came with those emotions. She's able to feel it in her body. And all of a sudden, that tightness in her throat she'd been feeling for three days made sense. It was connected to these emotions. And as we talked about it and gave her more support, it started to open up and relax on its own. So amazing.

When Sarah's best friend called to vent about a fight with her partner, Sarah almost defaulted to, that's so annoying. You deserve better. But instead, and this was I think about four months into Anchored, she asked, hey, what's the hardest part of this for you?

And she told us she was writing this in the – we have a private online forum where only the people in your Anchored cohort can see. And so she posted right after she got off the phone with her friend that her friend said, I feel like I'm invisible and my feelings don't matter. And Sarah said, oh.

And then her friend started crying and said, I feel like my feelings matter right now with you. Isn't that so beautiful? And Sarah shared that for the first time she felt like she was truly connecting with her friend instead of just being a sounding board or just giving advice. She was actually connecting and I think that's so beautiful.

Step two, create emotional agreements. In relationships, it can be helpful to set agreements around emotional expression. For example, when one of us is upset, let's check in before offering advice. It's okay to say, I need a minute if we feel overwhelmed. And then for Billey and I, the agreement is if

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you ask to table something, it's on you to bring it back up. And we always do because we honor our agreements, which feels so rad.

So these agreements create structure and safety, helping both people feel supported without taking on more than they can handle. They are not rigid rules, but rather flexible frameworks that honor each person's capacity and state. Importantly, these agreements can serve as counterpoints to the oppressive narratives that tell us our feelings should be minimized or managed silently.

So I'll share another client example. I'm so proud of my clients every single day. So in an Anchored session recently, Maya shared that her partner would often try to solve her problems when she vented about work, leaving her feeling totally unheard. Together they created an emotional agreement. Before offering advice, check in to see what kind of support the other person needs.

The next time Maya vented, her partner asked, do you want me to listen or help brainstorm ideas? And that simple check-in transformed their conversations. And I'll also make the note, Maya, not to brag on her behalf, but she also has ADHD, bragging. I recommended that she put this language, do you want me to help? Brainstorm, do you want me to listen, to write out the options and put it on like a post-it note or like a piece of paper on the fridge.

Because sometimes brains can get overwhelmed and then go back into default habits and it's so nice to be able to actually look at a physical thing and be like, okay, that's all I have to do is remember to have the check-in, radical consent, let's go. I love it.

My other client, Janelle and her sister, both had super big emotions, which often led to very heated arguments. If I remember correctly, they were also Irish twins. My sister and I are Irish twins, which we're a little outside Irish twins. Anyway, close enough, but you can go at it when you're very close in age.

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And they created an agreement. So when I'm talking about relationships, I'm never just talking about romantic relationships. All of our relationships matter. So their agreement was if either of us feels overwhelmed during a discussion, if it gets heated, if someone starts throwing unkind words, like insult words, the language we can say is potato minute. And that means we're taking a break.

And we went with something, it's funny, we workshopped this in Anchored, and Janelle was like, if I just say, I need a minute, she's not going to listen. Because it's going to feel too much like regular speak or work speak or something. It needs to be something that's going to break the reverie. And so potato minute is just ridiculous enough without being like too cacao, like being too silly. And it's really been working.

So Janelle shared that the first time she used it, she worried her sister might get angry, but instead she said, thank you for letting me know and for using our silly word, I will wait. And it was the calmest argument they'd ever had. I think she said something like it was bordering on a conversation. And I feel like that's amazing.

Step three, practice the two-minute pause. When emotions feel overwhelming, whether yours or someone else's, practice a two-minute pause. This is not about avoidance. It's about giving your nervous system time to settle before responding. Sometimes this means we go to the bathroom, sometimes we need to walk away, get some fresh air, get some sunshine. Sometimes we need to ask to table things.

Practice stating those needs when things are chill, so you'll be ready to do it when life offers you the chance to. So here's how it works. Orient your nervous system, always. Take a deep breath, focusing on the exhale. Place your hands on your thighs or over your heart. Feel the warmth of your touch and ask yourself, what's needed right now? What can I offer from a grounded place? Would it serve me the moment the other person to step away, or can I show up intentionally the way I want to now?

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By pausing, you're more likely to respond with care instead of reacting from a place of overwhelm. This practice leverages the principles of polyvagal regulation, supporting a shift from defensive states into a more balanced, socially engaged mode, especially in moments of tension.

Step four, use somatic boundaries. Sometimes reclaiming emotional space means creating physical or energetic boundaries. This doesn't ever mean shutting people out, it means protecting your capacity. And I'll remind you, thoughtful, loving, well-stated boundaries are the best resentment prevention available. So I take boundaries very serious.

So I want to share a somatic boundary practice with you. If you're in a place where you can close your eyes and get into it, join me. If you're, obviously, if you're driving, you know, or flying a spaceship, don't do it. Okay. I wanna invite you to orient your nervous system. We're always gonna orient, always, always. Take a moment to either close your beautiful eyes or simply lower your gaze and imagine a gentle, flexible bubble around you.

Let it be whatever color it is, whatever density. This bubble lets love and connection in, and it keeps out any energy that isn't yours. Visualize this boundary as a safe, protective layer around you. And remind yourself that it's not only okay to say no, not yet, I don't know, maybe, instead of defaulting to yes. Doing so, sharing that no, is a vital part of taking care of your relationships.

Taking a moment to thank yourself and your bubble, either lifting your eyes, fluttering them open. Welcome back. I set this bubble around myself any time I leave the house. Why not? And I just remember when requests are being made of me, I don't have to say no and I can let that bubble help me to remember.

So I just tell those physical reminders, even if they are just like visual. So this practice of somatic boundaries, it's not just about defense, but about affirming the integrity of your body space. It's a way of saying that your

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nervous system, your very core, deserves to feel safe as it remains open to authentic connection.

When we begin to see our own boundaries as a form of self-respect and resistance to oppressive social pressures, we embody empowering ourselves to create relationships that honor both our needs and the needs of others.

Step five, embrace the repair process. So if you realize you've shut down someone's feelings, because we all do it, my love, you can't like expect yourself to be constantly 100% present. You'd go bonkers, right? Like it's not a sustainable thing to expect of a human mammal.

So if you're like, oh, I think I just silver lining to that and shut her down and meep. It's never too late to repair. Repair builds trust and shows that you value the relationship, especially if someone is courageous and brave enough to tell you directly, you hurt my feelings when you weren't listening, when you negated my pain that created this distance between us, whatever it may be, right? And if you're like, oh, I don't really know about apologizing. It's not a thing I'm good at, it's not a thing I have skills at. I got you. I got you back in 2019, actually. I think. 2020. Whatever. Long time ago. Go back to episode 72, 73, 74, 75.

I know. Way back in the day. So far back. It's amazing. But anyway, those episodes, it's a whole series all about apologizing. So listen to them, take them in, take a moment to really be with it and practice apologizing. Herein, you could say, I realized I might've minimized what you were feeling earlier. I truly apologize. I want to understand more. Can we talk about it?

And you can really just own it. A couple episodes ago, Billey was on the show and we talked about the do-over. This is a great time for a do-over to say like, do-over, I think I just minimized what you were saying. I'm so sorry. I apologize. And naming what you were going through, naming what you did. And of course, in repair, we always talk about how we're gonna do better and then we do better, right? And this kind of repair isn't just healing

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for the other person or just for the relationship. It's also a really powerful way to build your own capacity for emotional intimacy.

In our somatic work, we know that repair is not a sign of weakness, but of deep relational strength, a willingness to re-engage even when our defenses have been triggered. My client Marla gave me a great example of this the other day. She was exhausted after a super long day, and she snapped at her daughter when she came home from school, upset and wanting to talk without checking in. Her daughter is also 13, so didn't get consent, but she's 13, right?

So later, Marla sat down with her and said, "I realize I wasn't kind earlier when you were trying to tell me about your day, and I'd like to apologize. I'm quite sorry. I was tired, and that is no excuse. I just want you to know where I'm coming from, and I want to hear about it now if you're ready to share." She was so happy to tell all of us in Anchored that her daughter's face lit up and the end of the day feeling way closer than before.

Finally, my client Aliyah realized she had minimized her friend's feelings when she said, "It's not that bad. At least you have options" during a conversation about a failed job interview. The next day, Aliyah texted, and we coached about this for quite a while at Anchored. We did some really deep, powerful work because she was feeling a lot of shame for shutting her friend down. And we talked about how that shame doesn't support anyone. It doesn't make anything better. We did some beautiful somatic work around that deep core shame.

And so she was able to text, "I realized I wasn't supportive when you were sharing yesterday, and I'm sorry. I want to be better at just listening, and I hope you'll accept my apology. How are you feeling today?" Her friend replied, thank you for saying that, it means a lot. I'm still feeling disappointed, but I'm better now, and it's great to know I can count on you to be a responsible friend. And that's the part that feels amazing, right?

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And finally, we need to talk about the political act of reclaiming emotional space. It's essential to recognize that the act of reclaiming emotional space is never apolitical. When we dare to honor our feelings and the feelings of those we love, we resist the dehumanizing forces that seek to silence us. Whether it's the pressure to conform to rigid gender roles, the expectations imposed by capitalist productivity metrics, or the legacies of colonial structures that diminish the emotional lives of marginalized communities. This work is revolutionary.

By insisting on authentic connection, we challenge the status quo in ways that are both subtle and profound. We disrupt the narrative that vulnerability is weakness and instead affirm that it is through vulnerability that we create resilience, empathy, and justice.

In doing so, we help create relational spaces where power is shared more equitably and where the full range of human experience is validated. This is how we forge new models of care that are as much about healing social wounds as they are about personal wellbeing.

All right, my love, that brings us to the end of this series on why we struggle to let others have their feelings and how to reclaim emotional space for yourself and those you love. Today, we talked about the cost of emotional suppression, how it erodes connection, and what we can do to create more space for emotions in all of our relationships. Remember, this work isn't about perfection.

It's about showing up one moment at a time with curiosity, compassion, and care for yourself and others. And it's about repair and offering an honest, oopsie, I'm so sorry, I'd like to apologize, and try again when we stick our foot in it.

As we integrate these practices into our daily lives, from relearning the language of emotions to embracing our somatic boundaries and acknowledging the political dimensions of our emotional worlds, we build more than just healthier relationships.

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We create a collective shift that challenges the oppressive structures around us and reaffirms our commitment to a kinder, more connected way of being in the world. If this resonates with you and you're ready to go deeper, check out my programs. Anchored is my six-month deep dive coaching, somatics, nervous system, breathwork program.

And then within The Somatic Studio, I offer the embodied learning lab, which is my somatics and nervous system 101 program, where we dive into these practices, learn so much nerdery, and of course, so much more. And of course, dancing. There's dancing in all of my programs, always and forever. Amen. Because more dancing, more better, right? Right.

Together, we are forging paths towards a more authentic, compassionate, and resilient future. And I would be beyond honored to continue to be your guide to dig even deeper. Until next time, take gentle care of yourself. You're doing brave and beautiful work. Keep honoring your feelings, your body, your connections, and remember, reclaiming emotional space is both a personal and political act of love for yourself and everyone in your world.

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.