

Ep #326: Doing the Opposite: How Childhood Pain Shapes the Patterns We Can't See



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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  a 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. Let's set the scene, my darling. Maybe you recognize yourself in one of these everyday moments. You're scrolling Instagram, coffee cooling beside you, and suddenly there she is again, posting another messy, joyful selfie, dishes piled high behind her, grinning ear to ear. You roll your eyes, muttering, "Must be nice to not care what anyone thinks."

Or perhaps it's your friend casually texting, "Actually, I'm wiped out, gonna skip dinner tonight. Have fun!" Your chest tightens. You think, "How selfish! Who just cancels like that?" But deeper inside, you feel a longing, wishing you could honor your own exhaustion without endless guilt. Maybe it hits you at a family gathering. Your sister's kid spills juice on the pristine couch, her pristine couch, and she just shrugs, laughs, hugs them close, and keeps chatting as if nothing happened. You sit there, tense, silently furious, thinking, "Does no one else care about keeping things nice?" And yet, beneath your frustration, there's an ache, a quiet envy at her ease, her casual imperfection.

Or you're at work, exhausted from another late-night project, watching a coworker cheerfully leave at exactly five o'clock, laptop shut, boundaries and limits clear. You bristle at their audacity. But what you're really feeling is deep resentment towards yourself for not daring to protect your own precious time. Here's the sneaky truth, angels: the things we resent most fiercely in others, those things that rankle us, those moments that trigger our quiet inner rage (and sometimes outer rage, maybe more especially if you're a New Yorker, but anyway), those moments often reveal exactly what parts of ourselves we've spent a lifetime burying.

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The loud, expressive, boundary-setting, body-loving, unapologetically messy ways other people live, they don't just irritate you. They ignite an ache inside, pointing directly towards freedoms you deny yourself every single day. And here's the thing, my sweet buttercups: our brains and bodies are absolute masters at keeping us safe, even when "safe" means small, resentful, toeing the company line, quietly miserable.

Think of your psyche and nervous systems as having one essential job: to protect you from repeating childhood pain at all costs, especially if that pain could have led to really existentially frightening things for children, like abandonment.

If your caregivers wounded you emotionally by being critical, chaotic, emotionally immature, neglectful, or even invasive, your subconscious brilliantly crafts strategies to avoid repeating that pain. It's as if your nervous system whispers to you, "Listen, kiddo, whatever Mom did, do the opposite. Whatever Dad embodied, reject completely." Sounds solid, right?

Well, it would be, except humans rarely do subtle. Instead, we tend to pendulum swing wildly, careening dramatically to the opposite extreme of the behaviors we grew up witnessing. It's like our inner children stomp their tiny feet, yelling, "I'll never be like them!" And that fierce declaration sends us sprinting straight into an entirely new kind of trouble.

Maybe your mom was emotionally immature, unpredictable, and chaotic, leaving your childhood nervous system perpetually braced for disaster, not knowing what she was going to say or do next, when she'd take something personally, or find a way to be offended again. So you vowed, "I will never have big emotions." And you shove them all down. You vowed, "I'll never let my life feel out of control." And today, your calendar is color-coded down to the very minute. Your inbox never passes zero unread emails, and the thought of a spontaneous change in plans makes your chest tighten and palms sweat.

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Or maybe your father was entitled, emotionally immature in his own way, always making himself the center of the emotional universe. It was his way or the proverbial highway. So, your little self promised fiercely, "I'll never, ever be selfish like him." And now here you are, bending over backwards for absolutely everyone, buried under silent resentment every time you pick up another extra shift, bake another birthday cake, or say, "Yeah, of course," when your heart and your tired feet desperately long for you to say, "No."

Psychology has a fancy term for this: reaction formation, a powerful defense mechanism where we adopt behaviors directly opposite to those that wounded us. It feels rational, justified, even virtuous, until we start living its exhausting consequences.

Let's talk specific, my love, because you know I adore the concrete and the actionable. Your gal is a nurse at the end of the day. So, recognizing these invisible rebellions in your life can feel like catching your reflection in an unexpected mirror: startling, but ultimately relieving. Maybe your dad never showed up for you emotionally, leaving you perpetually lonely as a child.

Today, you pride yourself on never needing anything from anyone, fiercely independent to a fault. You are a rock, you are an island, and you roll your eyes at friends who openly lean on partners or parents or anyone, or folks who admit vulnerability. "Bunch of fools." But inside, you feel isolated, longing for the kind of connection that vulnerability fosters.

Or perhaps your mom obsessed over appearances, criticizing your body, your clothes, your messy hair. Now, you judge women who freely inhabit their bodies, especially their fat bodies, their messy hair, those who wear whatever pleases them, who don't follow the trends, who simply show up joyful, messy, authentic. "Doesn't she care how she looks?" you scoff, while silently grieving the freedom you deny yourself every day, every bite, every outfit.

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Maybe you grew up in a house where anger was explosive, frightening, unsafe. You promised yourself you'd never be like that, never lose control, becoming the perpetual peacekeeper, holding back even justified, sacred anger until resentment fills your belly, quietly seething at people who dare express anger or set firm limits and boundaries openly.

Or perhaps unpredictability ruled your childhood home. Sometimes things were great, but sometimes not so great, leaving you always alert, unsure, anxious. Maybe you felt like you had to tap dance for your lovability, proving yourself with grades, roles in the play, varsity jackets. Today, your entire life is micromanaged. No spontaneity, no surprises. Your friend says, "Let's ditch the plans and just see what happens," and your nervous system screams quietly inside your skin, "No, no, no."

Are you starting to see yourself, my love? Maybe not the extreme of it or all of it, but a whisper. These invisible rebellions look like virtue on the surface: responsibility, generosity, discipline. And listen, I'm not dissing them wholesale. I'm just saying that beneath the surface, they're quiet cages, holding you back from genuine connection, joy, and the rich, full life you deserve.

My brilliant hummingbird, these patterns aren't hidden because you're weak, broken, or haven't done enough therapy, though I see you out there with your perfectly journaled revelations. No, no. They stay hidden because your sweet, protective subconscious designed them to masquerade as "just who I am." Your subconscious truly believes it's protecting you from harm. Let's take a moment and thank it. What a gold star nervous system you have! A-plus, top of the class.

Listen, as children, these coping strategies genuinely saved your emotional bacon. Perfectionism kept chaos at bay. People-pleasing prevented rejection. Emotional silence protected you from ridicule. But as grown-ups, we're running outdated software. Your subconscious wrapped these old survival strategies in shiny new packaging labeled responsibility, maturity,

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virtue. Perfectionism disguises itself as excellence. People-pleasing masquerades as kindness. Hyper-independence wears the cloak of strength. No wonder these patterns feel noble, justified, necessary. Your subconscious genuinely believes breaking them is dangerous and selfish.

Late-stage capitalism, patriarchy, and white settler colonialism don't just support these patterns; they actively reward them. Capitalism loves your relentless productivity and self-denial. Patriarchy praises women's quiet adaptability and endless emotional labor. Colonialism venerates stoicism, conformity, silent suffering. On a neurological level, your nervous system becomes hypervigilant. Even considering a tiny boundary or resting without guilt triggers internal alarm bells. Stress hormones flood your body, screaming, "Danger ahead, retreat immediately!"

And that, sweet angels, is why insight alone rarely changes these patterns. Your nervous system needs gentle retraining, reassurance, and compassionate rewiring. These patterns aren't benign or harmless. They silently rob you of joy, intimacy, freedom, and health.

Think about my client, Claire, raised by unpredictable parents who exploded at any imperfection. Today, her house is immaculate, her schedule airtight. Yet, when her toddler spills cereal on the kitchen floor (they tend to have a Ph.D. in mess-making), her body freezes, a wave of anxiety flooding her chest. Her rigidity costs her deep intimacy, flexibility, spontaneity—qualities that connection demands.

Or Anchored client, Elena, whose critical mother made her feel permanently inadequate. Now, Elena overfunctions, always saying yes, working late, rescuing everyone but herself. She sees coworkers leaving at five, judges them harshly as lazy, while quietly resenting her own perpetual exhaustion, putting herself out time and again for her partners who could be taking care of themselves but find it just as easy to lean on her, right? It's not like she's going to say no.

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And Jasmine, whose father rarely offered emotional comfort or support. Today, she insists, "I don't need anyone," while rolling her eyes at friends openly expressing needs or vulnerability. Her independence is lonely. Her body quietly holding grief for connections denied. When friends share their feelings, Jasmine is the first to give advice instead of holding space.

These aren't just theoretical, my love. They're daily realities, quietly draining your health and your happiness. Chronic stress hormone release from constant stress wreaks havoc on your body. The studies are clear; spend four seconds on PubMed. Sleep deteriorates, immunity weakens, anxiety and burnout settle into your bones.

So, let's do what we do around here. Let's lovingly interrupt these patterns with a gentle remedy. So, your nervous system learned these habits to protect you, and shifting them requires compassionate retraining, not force. And here is your simple, potent practice: the permission slip.

Grab a small piece of paper. Write clearly and simply: "Today, I have permission to..." Choose one small freedom you habitually deny yourself. Perhaps it's permission to say no kindly, to rest without guilt, to speak your truth quietly, or to show up messy and imperfect. To maybe begin to consider thinking that your body is okay-ish.

Notice, mama didn't say, "It's okay to love my body," because your brain's not going to believe you. So create some space in there. We call them bridge thoughts in my world, in Anchored. And they're the way we bridge what we want to believe, what we want to give ourselves permission for, and what we actually can give ourselves permission for today in a real way that our bodies and our minds and our nervous systems and our inner children will believe. Write out the permission slip. Carry the slip somewhere visible or tucked into your pocket, or maybe it's a Post-it you put on the bathroom mirror or tape to your laptop.

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Every time you touch or notice it, pause briefly. Take a moment to orient by looking around, and take a slow breath. In for four counts, out for six to calm your nervous system. Then let yourself consciously feel the subtle relief and freedom in your body as you begin to practice granting yourself permission. And again, listen to what I said. I'm careful with my words. As you begin to allow yourself to grant yourself permission, right? Because it's a process, not a destination, and it's going to take a minute.

And what we know is that neuroplasticity. Each repetition lovingly rewrites your neurological wiring. Your subconscious begins learning that choosing yourself, your boundaries, your rest, your honesty is safe, beautiful, deeply human, permissible. This tiny slip of paper, it isn't trivial. At its core, it's revolutionary self-love, gently beginning to dismantle the invisible cage built from childhood wounds, one small permission at a time.

So my love, that is the work. I know it sounds really simple, and these things often are simple. It's really the repeating, the growing into it, the allowing your nervous system to rewire around it that is the real, beautiful work. Set a reminder on your phone. Do this practice several times a day. It'll add up, I promise.

And also know that the permission slip practice is just the beginning, my love, because compassionate awareness and daily self-permission, almost like you're the boss of you, help us to see even more clearly into our own patterns, gently illuminating the subtle ways we've been limiting ourselves without even realizing it.

This permission slip practice gently begins to open your eyes and your heart, my love, making it easier to notice all the subtle patterns that have been quietly shaping your days. To support your growing awareness, here are a few more sneaky patterns to gently watch out for. You're not alone if any of these resonate. I promise there have been dozens of people in Anchored groups who have experienced exactly this.

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If you had a martyr caregiver, then you might have difficulty asking for or receiving help, believing it's weakness. An appearance-obsessed home can lead to a rejection of beauty, pleasure, or comfort as frivolous, or exactly the opposite.

A boundary-less parent can lead to deep discomfort setting boundaries, silently resenting others who do. A parent who suppresses emotions can lead you to harshly judge people who freely express anger, joy, grief. Having a highly anxious caregiver can lead to a relentless need for control and a lot of challenges trusting others to actually handle things. It's that like, "I have to do it all myself" kind of vibe.

A parent obsessed with productivity, "If you start it, you got to finish it," can lead to guilt and anxiety whenever you rest, prioritize play, or just don't want to do something anymore. A shaming parent can lead to secret envy and resentment towards people who openly love and accept themselves.

A parent who avoided conflict can lead to intense discomfort with disagreement, swallowing your truth to keep the peace. And a caregiver who dismissed your feelings or sensations can lead to deep distrust of your body's signals, numbing sensations instead of listening to them. That living from the neck up we're always talking about, that is such a huge part of our work to overcome emotional outsourcing.

So my beauty, gently noticing is the revolutionary first step towards choosing yourself, stepping into your authenticity, stepping into intentionality, and out of these old, painful patterns. We've traveled deep today, my sweetheart. If something stirred within you, that's beautiful. It means you're ready to reclaim yourself gently and powerfully. Listen, you don't have to live your life running from becoming someone else. True freedom means softly, courageously choosing yourself, your joy, your boundaries, your rest, one compassionate permission slip at a time.

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So take a deep breath, my beautiful turtle dove, my gorgeous, tender ravioli. You deserve a life built around who you truly are, not who you're afraid of becoming or are living in reaction to. So until next time, go write your permission slips, put them where you can see them, and be so gentle with your beautiful self.

Thank you for joining me, my love. I hope this has been supportive. 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.

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