

## Ep #20: Expectations and the "How-To" Guide to Other Humans



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With Your Host

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[Feminist Wellness](#) with Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

## Ep #20: Expectations and the "How-To" Guide to Other Humans

Most of us run around this world all day with a thousand thoughts about how other people should be behaving. It's so common to have a long list of things we expect from others, and it's just as common to not tell them about the expectations we secretly have for them in our minds.

We carry these stories. These expectations, these how-to guides for the people in our lives. Our own understanding of what it means to be a good friend, a good patient, a good partner, a good parent, and we hold onto these stories in an erstwhile attempt to make ourselves feel better in the world by trying to control the people around us.

Truth is we can't control anyone but ourselves, and trying to do so only brings us stress and heartache. Keep listening, my love, to keep hearing about this common thought habit and how to start shaking your perfect self free from it.

You're listening to Feminist Wellness, the only podcast that combines functional medicine, life coaching, and feminism to teach smart women how to reclaim their power and restore their health! Here's your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, Herbalist and Life Coach, Victoria Albina.

Hello, hello my love. I hope this episode finds you doing so well. I am gearing up to go to Maine with my partner Ash, where we will be hanging out with both of my parents, my mom and my dad, my sister, her amazing husband Derek and their two fabulous kiddos, Mateo and Santiago, who are both five-ish and under.

So I'm really excited. I think we're going to have a lot of fun. We're possibly going to freeze our butts off even though it's broiling in New York because you know, Maine. It's never really that hot there, right, my Mainers? And I'm

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really excited about it and I also know that it's challenging to be an adult child.

In the last 20-something years since I left home for college, I've changed. I've grown. I've become the person I am. And my parents have continued to grow and change and become the people they are. And in preparation for what I know will be a fabulous time together, full of amazing stories, fun times on the beach, and probably some fights because come on, six adults and two kids in one house.

I know I get to do a lot of thought work and breath work to show up as my centered, grounded self for my family of origin. One of the tools that helps me to stay grounded in my own understanding of reality and to find peace in my own heart is to bring my awareness to when I am creating or holding tight to a mental how-to guide for the people in my life.

So I think about a how-to guide as a simple enough seeming thing that can be rather complex to unravel. So I think of it as a little booklet or for some of us, like tomes and tomes of books that we carry around in our minds, in which we've written out often quite clearly exactly how another noun, a person, place, or thing, should behave.

And we get awfully upset if that other thing doesn't comply with the how-to guide we have for them that they likely don't even know about, in that way that we can often want the people we love or rely on to read our minds. When we're holding tight to a how-to story, any deviation from it can feel like a disappointment, a betrayal, a failure.

And that's why I think it's so important to pause and to take a look at these stories and the thoughts behind them if we don't want to feel constantly let down or upset with the people, places, and things in our lives. So if these how-to guides, these lists of expectations that we have for other people,

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these things that we want them to do or be in order for us to be happy are so challenging for us and lead to heartache, why do we cling to them?

Well, if we haven't learned to manage our minds, it's common to believe that other people's actions, including the things they do or don't say determine how we feel. We may find ourselves saying, if he doesn't like my choice, I'll be so sad. If he doesn't bring home flowers, I'll feel disappointed. Wow, he really made me feel like crap with that comment.

But the truth is it's your own thoughts that determine how you feel. Never someone else's behavior, actions, or what they do or don't say. What other people think or do has no impact on us until we give it meaning in our minds and attach a feeling to it in our bodies. If you're getting on an early morning rush hour subway and someone pushes you on your way into the car and you think nothing of it and just keep moving, you are unlikely to feel upset by that push.

Meanwhile, if you think, what a jerk, didn't that guy see me here? I have this big old backpack on, he just pushed right past me, he didn't even apologize, then you're likely to feel angry or hurt. In that moment, your expectation about how someone else should behave is creating your lived experience.

You're literally putting the story of how you feel, that anger, that hurt into the hands of a stranger who is rushing off a platform in a hurry and maybe didn't even notice that their body made contact with yours. It's so common to tell these stories. Stories about how other people should behave. And we might not even recognize that we're carrying these thoughts, these how-to guides.

How to be a person on the subway, how to be a husband, partner, friend, parent, child, boss. Most of us certainly don't realize that these thoughts are keeping us trapped in pain and suffering. Holding onto these stories

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and expectations for others not only sets you up for heartache when your expectations aren't met, again, it's also putting your emotional wellness in someone else's hands.

If only she would support me the way I want her to, if only he would show affection in this specific way, if only they would call me and check in on me, they know I'm having a rough time right now, then I would feel happy. Then I would feel seen, cared for, loved. But the truth is only you can give yourself these things. Your thoughts create your feelings, and when you're listing out what someone else should do to make you feel something, you're making your emotions dependent on something external to you.

You're crediting something outside of yourself for how you feel, especially when the belief you carry is that you would be happier or would feel better if someone in your life would just change their behavior and would live their own life according to your design for them. And the fact is that's just not true. No one else's behavior can make you feel anything. Not good or bad, not happy or sad.

And when we try to change someone else's behavior to fit our how-to guide for them, we're being manipulative and trying to control another person's thoughts, feelings, and behavior. And remember that most of us don't voice the fact that we're carrying these expectations for others, often because we don't even realize that we're doing it. And yet, we expect other people to read our minds and to behave how we secretly expect them to based on our own values, norms, and stories about folks in different roles in our lives.

So let's pause here for a nerd moment. I've talked endlessly about how our thoughts and feelings can change our physiology, and it's worth noting here too that when we're full up with expectations and how-to guides for others, we get an adrenaline and then a cortisol rush when we go into a situation wanting someone to change, and we get another rush when that person doesn't behave the way we think they should.

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The feeling of not having the control we so desperately desire over other people can lead to a flood of emotions, and thus, a neurochemical flood of its own. Blood sugar goes up, so too does blood pressure, our thinking gets clouded, cognition is fuzzy at best, our heart might beat faster in our chest. We go into panic mode.

When we feel like our survival is tied to others and their everyday choices, a shift in those expectations can send us into many or mega bouts of flight, fright, freeze, and can be exhausting for our brains, pancreas, heart and lungs, and our sweet adrenal glands and thyroid, who are charged with keeping up with this emotional rollercoaster of thinking someone else's behavior dictates how we feel.

I recommend that we raise our awareness of our expectations and how-to guides for so many reasons that I shall soon get to. Chief amongst them that they lead to more pain and unhealthy relationships, but also from a medical standpoint, these stories keep our sympathetic nervous systems on high alert, chugging out the chemicals that keep us anxious and panicky, and keep our digestion and our thyroids, our reproductive systems from healing and working optimally while our bodies are on the lookout for the danger that we're actually creating with our own thoughts.

So let's look at some examples and talk about how to start to release these how-to guides that are keeping us feeling all sorts of not great. So I coach a woman, let's call her Sarah, who wants her husband to show her love in a very specific way. And when he shows her love in his own way, she makes it mean that he doesn't love her, that he doesn't respect her or care about her needs because he isn't meeting them.

Meanwhile, her eyes are clouded to the dozens of things that he is doing around the house, the ways he's showing up for her, for their kids, the groceries he's buying, the dinners he's fixing. She's fixated on this story about how her needs should be met. Meanwhile, the truth is that it's her job

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to meet her own needs, and she gets to either accept her husband for who he is and how he shows up in their life together, or she can choose to stay in the story that he isn't doing the role of husband right.

That he's failing her, and he needs to change for her to be happy. I'll say it very clearly, my love. Only you can make you happy. The call is coming from inside the house. No one else can do that for you. And no amount of cajoling will make anyone else's behavior change in a way that will actually bring you joy. You get to do that for you. What a beautiful gift.

And in this example, Sarah got her husband to start complimenting her, something that she said she really wanted and would make her happy. Something that she expected her husband to do. Something clearly outlined in her how-to guide for being married to her. And after much pleading and begging, he started giving her compliments.

But because his energy wasn't right and "I could tell he was just doing it because I asked him to," she got no satisfaction from his words. In fact, she told me she felt even more sad and less loved. See, his behavior was incapable of making her feel what she wanted to feel, and as long as she was holding onto this how-to guide for loving her and was holding expectations for his energy, his behavior, et cetera, he was bound to fail in her eyes because her thoughts continued to be he doesn't want to show me love the way I want it to be shown to me, which kept her feeling less than loved.

That prophecy fulfilled itself the way these stories do because your thoughts create your feelings. Together in our coaching, we came up with an alternate plan, that is an alternative to just brow-beating her husband and trying to push and shove him into doing exactly what she wanted with the hopes that she could feel a specific way was for Sarah to focus on building her own sense of self-love, confidence, and self-esteem, to give



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that task fully over to herself. The only person who can actually accomplish this for her.

Simultaneously, we worked on releasing her emotional attachment to her husband's behavior and realizing where her how-to guide for him was leaving her feeling disappointed. The more she was able to show up for herself and not hold as many expectations for her husband and thus put fewer demands on him, the more she made and held space for him to be himself, to show her love in his own way and for her to accept that love and receive it fully just as it's given.

She came to see that tying her emotional wellness to her husband and his behavior was setting herself up for a lousy life and a lousy marriage, full of recriminations and the pain of unmet expectations. When she stopped blaming her husband for how she felt and was able to return that power to her own self, she was able to find joy in her own life for herself on her own terms.

And what, my love, could be more feminist and self-loving than that? Another client of mine was having a really hard time with the fact that their partner, recently diagnosed with an autoimmune condition wasn't following her clinician's recommendations around nutrition, meditation, stress management. She wasn't taking her supplements or doing what she'd been asked to do.

My client had such a massive guide in their head for how to be a sick person and was so frustrated that their partner wasn't meeting these expectations. They would remind their partner constantly of what they thought she should do, and exactly how she was failing in this role. They had tied their sense of safety, comfort, and control to their partner's choices for her own health.



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The fact of the matter here is that their partner is indeed a grown up, a full on adult human and gets to make her own choices. She doesn't have to follow the specified therapeutic diet or learn how to eat intuitively. She doesn't have to take her supplements, exercise, take an Epsom salt bath, meditate, do breath work. She doesn't have to do any of those things if she doesn't want to.

And my client doesn't have to ascribe any meaning to those decisions. They don't have to make it about them, make it mean anything about their partner, themselves, their relationship, their love, anything. My client just gets to accept that there is a how-to guide at play here, a set of expectations for another person's behavior that we take on as a way to attempt to control life and to attempt to make us feel better if only that person changes, or does what we want them to.

But these stories about what someone else should be doing with their life never bring us the joy and peace we desire. Generally, quite the opposite in fact. The key here is to take responsibility for your feelings and to leave people and your expectations of them out of it. You will never feel better because of someone else's choices, and the more you move to release control of others, the more peace you'll have in your heart.

Our third and final example for today is one I hear an awful lot. And this is the story of upset, anger, heartache, disappointment with previous medical care experiences before coming to functional medicine. And let me say, having been sick for, oh, you know, 20, 30 years and never getting the care I needed from the primary care providers and gastroenterologist and psychologists, I never really got what I was looking for from those people.

And I've come to a place where I recognize that so much of my frustration, my sadness, my hurt was the how-to guide that I was holding for those clinicians. So here's a story I hear all the time. I went to my primary care provider and I told him that I'm fatigued, but like, constantly tired. It's really

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hard to get out of bed. Sometimes I end up sleeping like, 10 hours and even then, I don't wake up feeling better, and I'm so constipated. My belly is always bloated and I just - I feel like garbage.

And you know what? He didn't tell me anything about nutrition. He didn't even talk about exercise other than telling me to do it, which is so not helpful. He didn't recommend any vitamins, any supplements. He didn't even do any real blood work. He did like, a quarter of what you just did, and I'm so mad at him. I'm so frustrated. He really failed me and kept me from healing. I lost all this time not healing because I took the Prozac he put me on when I told him I was tired. He said I must just be depressed but I don't even feel depressed.

And I hear some variations on this one a lot, like most days. And what I want to remind you is that your primary care provider is doing the best they can within a very broken system. The guy in the white coat at your local primary care office is a part of the medical industrial complex. He is trained in the framework of one pill for one ill, and he's not trained to look and see what's under the surface, to look for the root cause.

In my work, I focus on all the mental health, the psychology, the thought work, the breath work, the connection to soul, spirit, these things that I know make up so much of how we feel on any given day. And by expecting that guy in the white coat at your local primary care office to be any different, to have the training of a nutritionist, herbalist, functional medicine provider, therapist, life coach, me, and getting mad upset, disappointed that he is not matching up with that how to be a doctor story in your mind does you no good.

And remember, I know because I've been there. His lack of knowledge needn't make you feel anything at all. You can simply understand that his training is limited around the things that you and I may care about or need help with. And while that symptom management framework is likely not

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what you need when you're feeling constantly fatigued, that is what he offers.

And I bet you he's really good at doing it, like probably super good at it. And getting mad at him for being exactly who he is and for offering exactly what he says he will offer is burrowing trouble and getting mad at things you cannot change. You know what it's like? It's like getting mad that your local pizza joint doesn't serve sushi. They serve pizza.

I mean, you can get a calzone, maybe you can get some garlic knots, but if you walk in there with a how to be a restaurant story in which they should serve everything you want, including sushi, your thoughts about that situation will create your suffering. Not the fact that the pizza joint serves only pizza and pizza related items, when you want them to be different than who they are.

By accepting your previous doctor's training as exactly what it is and not expecting anything different, you can walk in with a thought that you know what you're getting from him, just like at the pizza place, which is probably the most Brooklyn analogy I can make, comparing everything in life to a pizza joint. I crack me up. Really, I do.

What I want to pause for here is to be very clear in saying make requests. I not saying not to make requests. You can always ask your partner, roommate, or whomever you live with to please take out the trash or do the laundry. You can always ask your partner to please bring home flowers on a Friday. Knock yourself out. Go for it.

But where I want to invite you to pause is if you find yourself attaching your emotional wellness to whether the other person accepts your request and does the thing. And if they don't, what you might make that mean about you, about them, or your relationship. This is the tricky place when we start to try to manipulate people and often is when we give voice to the often

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internal, unspoken how-to guide with statements like, if you loved me, you'd do this.

A good partner would know that I want flowers. A friend who's really there for you calls every week and I'm always the one calling you. And all this kind of language, all that this kind of thinking does is create an aura and energy of negativity and suffering for ourselves.

It doesn't bring us any more happiness when we push for people to be who we want them to be instead of accepting them for who they are and how they're able to show up. And you don't have to make their choices mean that they don't love you or respect you, just that they're making the choices they're making for their own lives. Basta. End of story. That's what it is.

Alright my loves, and now the part you've been waiting for. The what to do about it. Well, the first step and this will come as no surprise to people who have been listening to the podcast. The first step is awareness, which we talked about in episode two, Be Your Own Watcher. So recognizing that you have these manuals for the people in your life and that you're giving away your power by focusing on others and your attempts to control or fix them.

That is the first step. And I'll also add on this topic that managing my own mind is plenty for me to take on. One of the most important reasons why I have worked on releasing my how-to guides is because I'm busy taking care of me and I have no need to attempt to manage or change anyone else. That sounds exhausting.

So step one is awareness. Step two is accepting that you have this thought pattern. You have this habit. You have built a life in which you have expectations for other people and maybe this has its roots in your childhood or your teen years, your 20s, or maybe last week. But by moving

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into acceptance versus fighting tooth and nail against the fact that you do this, you are setting yourself up to begin to make change.

So once we have awareness - I'm doing the thing. Once we come into acceptance, yeah, I really am doing this, and I really want this to change, then we get to dive in and ask ourselves what we think we'll gain if this person in our life changes their behavior. And the answer is generally that we think we'll feel happy or peaceful or in control if they do x, y, and z.

The next step is to begin to take responsibility for your own feelings. You get to turn your focus on yourself and to ask yourself what you could do for you that would make you happy. If you want your partner to eat a certain way because you believe it's healthy, then give yourself that gift. If you want your friend to listen to you talk about your feelings in a specific way, start journaling. Learn to be your own watcher and to hold space for your feelings.

List this out, put pen to paper, my loves. It's really important to write these things out so we can get some cognitive distance, so we can make a real analysis and evaluation of the thoughts that we've been thinking. Thoughts that float around in our head are super slippery. They're like little fish in a pond and they're hard to grasp onto. When you write them down, you can get some space, you can see them clearly, and you can start to recognize where you get to shift.

Finally, after doing all of this beautiful writing, maybe you do some breath work about it, some meditation, maybe you take it to your yoga mat or out for a run or however else you complete the stress cycle for yourself, finally you get to begin to release your rules for other people and to start to love them for who they are.

This is the stuff that long-lasting, deep, emotionally intimate, vulnerable - in the best way - relationships are made of. Mutual acceptance, love and

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appreciation for each of ourselves exactly as we are, and once we're able to do this for others, we are so much more able to accept and love ourselves as exactly who and how we are.

Remember, the most important thing in making change is to do it from a place of deep self-love. You get to pause and realize that holding onto how-to guides for the people in your life is a thought, feeling, action, habit you have. You get to own it, get to give the part of you that is all about it some love and the choose to either stay stuck in these stories about what you expect from other people or you can learn to release these stories and to thereby show up for the people in your life with ease, grace, peace, and love.

Remember my darling, you can always choose suffering. You don't have to change your thoughts; you don't have to let go of the how-to guides or the expectations. The second arrow of suffering is always available for you. And if you don't know what at all I am referring to here, finish listening to this episode. There's a couple minutes left, and then go take a listen to episode 15, which is all about the Buddhist concept of the second arrow and the suffering we choose.

Alright my darlings, that is it from me this week. I hope this was helpful for you. It's always helpful for me, even though I talk about these topics all day long with everyone I coach, everyone in my practice, and it's really special for me to pause, really dig into it, really think it out. So take a moment to make sure you're subscribed to the show so you don't miss an episode.

And make sure to get on my email list. I'll be announcing the details of my upcoming online four-week guided breath work course quite shortly, and thanks to all of you who have written asking for more details, I'll be announcing those details first to my email list. So make sure that you head on over to [victoriaalbina.com](http://victoriaalbina.com) to get on my list.

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I'll also be doing a giveaway of one free seat in the class to a lucky social media follower, so make sure to follow me @victoriaalbinawellness. That's on both Instagram and the Facebook. I'm so excited to share this offering with you, my love, and the details are just a little minute away.

Thank you for listening. This episode is really an invitation for deeper self-reflection and that's something I want so much for you, my love. Be well and remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved, and when we heal ourselves, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling. Talk to you soon.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you like what you've heard, head to [VictoriaAlbina.com](http://VictoriaAlbina.com) to learn more.