

Ep #22: Inner Child



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With Your Host

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In childhood, we learned to survive, to please our parents, our teachers, to label our behavior internally as either all good or all bad and to make it mean something about us as beings. We learned to think in black and white ways because that's what children do, and to judge ourselves where we fell on that success-failure-meter that ruled our home and our inner lives.

We learned to think like our caretakers, the way that was modeled for our developing brains, which makes so much sense. As adults, we may find some of our own thoughts, reactions, and behaviors perplexing or confusing, or even frustrating or enraging. We may not understand why we can't take action to make our lives better or to reach that next huge life goal.

I believe that our thoughts create our feelings, and today, we'll be talking about how our inner child, that kiddo part of us that lives on within us into adulthood, may be steering the ship more than we recognize and how important it is to bring awareness, love, and understanding to our inner child if we're ever to become our most embodied, enlightened, and free versions of our adult selves.

If you're ready to start releasing what holds you back, keep listening, my love. Your inner child needs you, and you need them.

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 recently spent some time with my family of origin, and it brought up a lot for me, which is not unexpected. And I'm so glad that I have the dual tools of

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thought work and breath work, which I used to help me prep for and move through this overall quite lovely family vacation time feeling, overall, pretty darn good.

One of the things that was really powerful for me was my ability to see and accept my parents for who they are and how they operate in the world. This is something I've been working on for a very long time. I wasn't always very accepting of them, like so many of us aren't.

I wanted them to be different, to be better. And that's just not what's real. They are amazing humans who've been doing the best they can for all these years I've been in their charge on this planet and they are complicated and have their own issues, their own hang-ups, their own things that drive me crazy. And they are, above all, humans, and they're the ones I got.

I can celebrate what is great about them and I can accept the parts of them, the behaviors and points of view, that just don't work for me as the offering that they are able to make. I cannot change them. I cannot change my childhood. But I can change my relationship to the child within me; the one that emigrated as a child, that took weird food to school and had a funny accent that was so frequently made fun of, the chubby little kiddo who sometimes had a hard time in this world and who I used to have a really hard time with too.

When your brain is used to judging others, it always judges you first. And I had a lot of judgmental thoughts about the choices I made, the people I dated, the jobs I languished in. I used to be really hard on myself, and can be now too if I'm not being thoughtful about my mental self-care and thought work.

And after some time of working pretty intensely with my inner child, I can honestly say that I am wildly in love with little me, with that loud little

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rambunctious beast of a me that was constantly singing songs and making up dances and who ran around the world talking to strangers and dogs and trees, the little me who got in trouble for talking in class pretty much every single day. And there was this one time I got put in the corner for talking too much, which is, like, a draconian punishment that's not good for anyone.

But the point is, I loved talking so much, I talked to the corner. Yeah, Leos... That little me was a ball of pure energy and sunshine and joy and light, and that was a beautiful thing. And, it was way too much for most of the grownups in my family of origin; the grownups at school, at camp and theatre group, and on and on.

All that light and beauty was so often met with shame, with recrimination. I was told I was too loud, too much, to be quieter, to laugh less, to control my emotions – and I had access to so many emotions then – and to stop being demanding, which is something my father still says when I ask him if he'd like to have a cup of coffee with me.

So, I learned what any smart kid learns; to shove it all down and to hide it away and hide it in me, to not let my light shine at its full brightness, to guard myself, to protect my tenderness, to run away, to always cling to the black and white thinking I grew up with, which kid brains love. One is good, one is bad. One is a winner, one is a failure. And as an adult, these lessons morphed into a fear of being abandoned, which kept me in really shitty relationships and lousy jobs, far past their expiration date, often accompanied with the feeling of being stuck or trapped.

These lessons led me to keep my vulnerability either hidden away, alternating with wearing my heart on my sleeve in an attempt to connect from my authenticity, well actually usually overdoing it and leaning into over-sharing with the hopes that I'd finally feel heard and seen.

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And mostly, what all these childhood wounds led to was a chasm between myself and myself; that is all this desperate grasping for safety, this scrambling to be seen, or for the persona I was attempting to project for others to be seen, to be seen, while simultaneously fearing being seen in a deep and real way, worrying what others would think of me while desperately wanting to prove myself to anyone and everyone kept me so detached from my true real self.

And all of this brings me around to this week's topic, which is the magnificence of our inner child. Today, my love, we'll spend some time together exploring this concept; what is the inner child? We'll talk about why your adult relationship with little you matters and what you can do to begin to re-parent yourself in small but important ways.

Please know that today's episode won't be an all-inclusive exhaustive guide to inner child work. We're just dipping our toes in here, darlings. I'll be coming back to this both on the podcast and in a future breath work online course focused on inner child healing and support.

Okay, so what is this concept of the inner child? Your inner child is the part of you that you've locked away and have placed protective mechanisms around, that you've learned to hide in order to survive. If you grew up with dysfunction, your inner child learned to thrive in that environment, however they did, by seeking intense order and control or by moving with the dysfunction and seeking out dysfunctional relationships throughout your life, in love, work, friendship.

Chaos can feel really cozy when it's what you're used to and I see folks repeating this pattern so often, of unconsciously recreating their childhood as grownups, seeking out chaos, dysfunction, situations that are constantly dramatic or upsetting, always having something to complain about or cling onto, someone to blame, or seeking out folks, situations, stories, where they can be in control, can feel like the boss of it all, and can feel like they're managing life tightly.

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Even if you weren't abused or didn't grow up in dysfunction, even if your story is like, "My childhood was fine, thank you," your inner child can still get the message that it's safer to hide a part of yourself away. Our parents are not perfect animals. They too probably didn't get what they needed in childhood and they didn't get some guidebook to being a parent; they just got you. And they did the best they could with the skills they had, much like you did the best you could with the skills you had.

As children, many of us are taught that we have to give, give, give to these less than perfect but trying their hardest parents in order to get their attention, their approval, their notice, that we had to be A-plus students, the best athlete, the most gorgeous debutant – if that's your thing. Not mine, but no shade there – the most diligent worker, the quietest, the loudest, the smartest, and the best, or that we were safest always staying in that, like, B to B-plus range of life. You know what I mean, like, passing for sure, but never excelling or calling too much attention to our success.

If you look back on your childhood and think, "Yeah, you know what, it was actually pretty alright, thanks," then inner child work is still of benefit. You can choose to use these techniques for growth, even if your childhood was great, even if you don't feel like you have wounds to heal. That is a beautiful place to be in; as is recognizing that a chaotic childhood is still affecting you now. It's all perfect, my love. It's all beautiful. It all got you to where you are today and, from today, you can grow into a better tomorrow.

So this framework of the inner child is not new. Some would point back to the archetype work of Carl Jung or to the post World War Two writing of Alice Miller, Eric Berne, John Bradshaw when talking about the origins of this framework of the inner child. Others would look to the ancient framework of the chakras, the seven – or 114 depending on who you ask – energy centers in our body that run up our spine and are formed and develop at different points in our growth and development and at different ages.

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Where the outside world didn't match up with what we needed developmentally, energy can get stuck in that chakra and can cause imbalances further up in our energetic fields and in our lives as we continue to grow. Whichever framework works for you, the idea that we all carry around the wounds and joys of our childhoods with us until we learn to release and transform those stories is something that I find to be just about universally accepted and universally applicable.

Childhood stress, trauma, disappointment, hurt stay with us until we actively work to heal and release it. Your inner child is a powerful little creature and can rule your unconscious mind. Most adults are walking around totally unaware of the child we carry within us and just how much that little kiddo can be calling the shots; shaping the way we act in relationships, be they romantic, work, with our family of origin, or with ourselves, how that kiddo may be pushing us on to be successful at work, to get that next promotion at whatever cost.

Or again, your inner child can keep you in the shadows fearing being truly seen. So it's important to step back, to understand how these stories get stuck inside us as an entryway to talk about why our inner child matters and how to support ourselves.

So it's not hard to literally age in the global north in 2019. If you're lucky enough to not get, like, smushed somehow or to receive some kind of nutrition most days, to not die of a communicable disease, you will literally grow older. But there's a reason the, "Adulting is so hard," memes are so popular. It's because most of us are walking around with gaping childhood wounds that we have no idea we're even carrying. And all of that can sure get in the way of learning how to adult the way we want to.

Developmentally, there's a lot more to being adult than simply surviving to whatever age we're calling a grownup these days. Truly being an actualized adult in the world means recognizing, accepting, and taking ownership for your own mind, for the thoughts you think on the daily that

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create your feelings, understanding that we take action in the world based on how we're feeling and get the outcomes we do because of those actions.

If you want to change what you're doing and getting in the world, if you want to change a habit like being reactive, easily annoyed, blaming others for how you feel. The loving, caring for, and re-parenting your own inner child, seeing how that kiddo is alive and well and running parts of your life is so key because we aren't taught this concept in school – and I do think this should be a mandated part of our education system, along with the basics of managing your mind for mental health and true healing – most of us don't realize that it's our job as our own adult caretaker, because no one is your caretaker but you, that you get to care for the child parts of you that didn't get what you needed.

And as always, there's no guilt or shame or negativity here that, like, "Oh, you haven't done this work yet..." not at all. There's just an understanding that this happens. You may have inadvertently denied, neglected, abandoned, or even rejected your inner two, three, five, 10, 14-year-old. Maybe you bought what society and capitalism have taught us time and time again, and especially for those of who are socialized as women, that when you hit puberty, when you get your period, when you have your bat or bar mitzvah when you hit some, like, proverbial line in the sand, it's time to be a grown up, to put all the silliness and fun and weirdness and expressiveness of being a kid aside.

It's time to stop staring at tall buildings with your mouth open because we are not a codfish. It's time to stop crying at the beauty of a sunset, to stop being so sensitive, so loud, so silly. Innocence is over. It's gone. And wonder is gone with it. And while we may be able to stifle those wild-eyed child parts of us to meet deadlines, get that raise, buy that house, consume, and compromise ourselves and stop playing and get things done, those parts are still within us just waiting, yearning to be acknowledged and celebrated.

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Along with our childhood disappointments – because they stand side by side, or side by each as we say in the great state of Rhode Island – with our hurts, our traumas, our secure or insecure attachments, our jealousies, our fears, and frustrations and angers, it all lives on within us, all of it. The joy and the sorry, the happy and the sad, we carry it all in our psyches, in our life choices, in our mitochondria, in our cells, in our muscles, in our energies and the thoughts that we think are automatic or habitual thoughts.

The thoughts we were taught to think as children drive us today for our benefit or our heartbreak. When you ignore a child who wants something, what do they do? They pull on your pant leg a little harder, right? They call out for you louder and louder. They work to get your attention. So too with your inner child.

Without even knowing it, so many of us are being driven by the wants, needs, and fears of this kiddo because there's a four-year-old trapped in your body; that body that pays taxes and takes out the trash. And when ignored, that kiddo screaming for your attention may be part of why you feel so anxious, why your tummy just can't heal, why your thyroid keeps going bananas, why your body keeps trying to slow your metabolism down as well as why you constantly compare yourself to others, why you worry what others think of you.

So what's an adult to do about all this? How do we stop ourselves from having these internal and external temper tantrums, from yelling at our kids, our coworkers, strangers in traffic, the dog? How do we come back to center?

Well, the first thing is to realize that you're not, like, stuck with some jerk of an inner child who's holding you down or holding you back. Quite the opposite. Your inner child is just trying to help you survive, which I talked about at length in episode 19. And recognizing that that kiddo is a genius and is doing what they're doing, that might feel like holding you down or holding you back, because they love you.

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See, the key to becoming a psychological adult, not just a human being who survived into adulthood, is to recognize and acknowledge that you do, in fact, have these child parts within you and that they need you very much and you can change your relationship with your inner child. This isn't some, like, static locked-in thing. And I hope that that brings you as much hope as it brings me.

Change is possible, my darling. And as always, we use the framework acceptance, awareness, action. Oh, and if you want to learn more about that, I have a free ebook and it's really good. I worked really hard on it. I made these really cool day by day worksheets that you get in your email. I'll put the link in the show notes, but also, hop on over to my website, victoriaalbina.com and right there at the very top, you can click and put your little email in and get this workbook that talks about this framework of how we make change; awareness, acceptance, action. Okay, digression ended.

So, first thing, realize you're not stuck with some jerk. Your inner child loves you. Step two is to bring in your inner watcher, which we talked about so much in episode two, which feels like about 400,000 years ago that I recorded episode two.

Your inner watcher is that part of you that recognizes that you are not your thinking, that allows you to get clarity on the habitual thoughts within you, that allows you to bring your awareness to that child who may be feeding thoughts into your adult head that you may then have feelings about and act on. When you are unconscious of your inner child, that's when the boss baby rules the show.

So, I ask her questions and listen for her answers with full heart. That doesn't mean I'm always going to do what a four-year-old tells me to do because, like, trust and believe that she wants me to eat a whole jar of peanut butter with my hands before, like, painting the walls in peanut

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butter. Because she's four, that's an emotionally and developmentally correct thing for her to be thinking.

So, while I might not always do what she implores me to do, I listen with love. And that part of it, in this example, that four-year-old little me fresh to the United States trying to manage, like, is my life in Spanish, is my life in English, where are my aunts, what is this strange Rhode Island? That part of it, she feels it. She feels me listening. And so all of me feels it.

I listen in for her guidance when I feel stuck or don't know what to do, and I listen and connect with little me so deeply through my breath work meditation practice. It has been such an amazing portal for me to see little Maria Victoria and to listen deeply to her experience of life, which she wants and what she needs to be at peace.

The more I listen to her, the more I let her know that she is seen and that she matters, the more I can connect with my own inner power and grace. It's a remarkable gift, for sure. And nothing, nothing will sadden and hurt your inner child more than ignoring her, not taking her seriously, or telling her to hush. No child takes kindly to that, regardless of chronological age.

So I often listen more than I talk, and sometimes she really needs me to step in to soothe and support her. So I do talk to my inner child, to little me, and I do it a lot. It's been surprisingly helpful for me in so many aspects of my life, from relationships to dealing with my family of origin, to running my business, to being a damn good life coach. She's sage, that little inner bunny of me, and sometimes she's having a really hard time swirling or spinning in really old hurts. And that's when I get to show up and give her such massive love and I get to remind her that the past is the past; it's over and done with.

She doesn't have to be upset or sad or angry now to protect me from something that happened years ago. I am an adult and I'm doing the work

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of making peace with the past because I know that I can't change it and no amount of shaking my tiny fist at what others have done will change what already is.

As an adult, I get to recognize that my truest healing, the key to long-lasting health and wellness is to learn to manage my mind, to feel my feelings in a deep and real way, and to then step back, to see the thoughts that are keeping me stuck in feelings that don't serve me or move me forward, like stories that keep me anxious or sad about a loss from, I don't know, 20 years ago or two days ago or a loss that I'm projecting and future-tripping about maybe happening next week.

And while my adult self could understand these concepts, can see where my thoughts may be keeping me in suffering, where I'm choosing the second arrow of additional suffering or borrowing trouble, which I discuss in episode 15, my inner child may just need a hug, to be told that she's enough, to feel seen, to feel heard, to feel cared for, to be allowed to play and be silly and wild and loud.

Generally, children have rather simple needs; the biggest of which is to be met with an open and accepting loving heart. And so, that's what I bring to little me, and it feels truly amazing to get to show up for her and for me in this way.

Your homework, my love, is to practice this. When you feel upset or stirred up, angry at something you have no control over, ask yourself how old the reactive part of you is and what that part is saying, wanting, needing, really listen in. Show that part of you that you're there for it. You can just let it know, I hear you, my love, what do you need to say to me? What do you need me to know?

If that point of entry doesn't work, feel into it. Our emotions are an amazing gift, a portal into our psyches and our bodies, so feel into it in your body.

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Does the anger you're feeling live somewhere? Mine usually lives in my chest, my jaw, my neck, my fists, for sure. Does it have a color? Mine is usually bright red, which also lines up with the root chakra where so many childhood hurts originate.

Is this anger still? Is it moving? Mine is usually like a very hard clenching feeling. Is this anger hot or cold? Mine is generally red hot. Feel the entirety of this feeling. So for me, a red-hot clenching almost painful feeling in my neck, jaw, chest, fists. Okay, I've got it.

Now, ask that feeling what it needs you to know. "Oh, so you're angry that your boss doesn't listen when you talk? Okay, got it. You're angry that you're not being heard and seen. That's beautiful, my love, so beautiful. You made and held space to hear what your inner child, what your body wanted and needed you to know about how you're feeling and what that's bringing up for you.

Once you've let yourself sort of soak in that feeling, really experience it. really get aware of everything it's doing to your physiology, to your energy, to your spirit. That's when we can back up, give your inner child a big hug, some love, or simply ask what your inner child needs and give that to it. It may just be listening in. Maybe your inner child wants to color about it or write about it.

And having done that work, having shown up for yourself in these beautiful ways, you can then back up and you can ask your adult self what the thought is that you're thinking in your head that's leading you to feel all of this red hot painful clenching in your body.

You can do some journaling about it, get a little cognitive distance, download it onto some paper, and then, and only then, I'll invite you to start thinking about a new thought that you could bring in to help yourself, your inner child, feel a little better in this situation.

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One of my favorite ways to practice this process is to show up for myself and my inner child during my future self planning, which is the journaling work that I do; this writing out of I-am statements that we talked about in episode nine. I love doing that writing and I also like to invite my inner child to show up for me during that writing. I really get some amazing guidance. That kiddo is a smarty-pants.

So, however you choose to connect in, however you're able to connect with your inner child, remember that awareness is, in and of itself, healing. Simply holding space to accept and recognize that you have so many parts to you, that you aren't just one, like, monolith adult psyche, just like you have lots of organs. You aren't just one human body; you're a complex and beautiful system, and that each part of you, your adult self, your child selves, all these parts matter and they all deserve to be heard.

And if you're going to do the thought work to begin to change your thinking to change the way you feel in the world, so you can take actions, so you can be proud of and get the results you most desire, I recommend that you start by giving your perfect, beautiful, amazing inner child some love and letting her know just how loved, seen, accepted, and heard she is.

I'm going to be talking a lot more about this topic and expanding on it in future episodes, so please, make sure that you're subscribed to the podcast on the iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts, and that you're following me on the Insta' @victoriaalbinawellness, and that you're on my mailing list so you don't miss a darn thing.

I have a lot of goodness and offerings coming up for you, my love. I have an online breath work class that I'll be offering you all and I'll be doing a webinar with a lot more details about that soon. So keep your eyes on my interwebs and on your email box and I'll be teaching breath work classes locally in New York City along with a colleague who does sound therapy healing, which is, like, if you've ever been to a sound bath, sound bath plus breath work is, like, mind-blowing.

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And I'm plotting out those *Feminist Wellness* retreats that I've hinted at, and so I'm looking to later this year and early 2020, so, my loves, there's so much coming your way, so many opportunities for us to hang out and heal together. How fun is that?

Well, thank you. Thank you for listening, mi amor. I'm so honored to get to share this work with you. Thank you for receiving it. Thank you for sharing it with the people you love. Thank you for sharing these lessons with your beautiful inner child.

When we make space for all of us, all of our parts, and honor them all equally, we can heal on such a deep level. There is so much beauty in this work. It's so beautiful. I'm just in love with it.

Alright, my darlings, please remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved, and when one of heals, we help heal the world. Take care, mi amor, and I'll 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 to learn more.