

Ep #28: Giving Emotional Consent



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Emotional consent is when we check in with the folks we love before responding to their stories, concerns, fears, so we can show up in the most loving and respectful way possible. The flipside of asking for consent before we respond to others is asking for what we need before we share.

And that's our topic for today, my love, getting clear on what you're thinking, feeling, and needing so you can ask for it in conversation, which is a vital part of self-love and honoring your own sovereignty, as well as honoring the person you're speaking with. This episode is packed with useful tips and suggestions, so stay tuned, my beauty, here it comes.

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. This Leo season has been a really big one for me. It's brought lots of shifts, lots of changes, new ventures and adventures, lots of beautiful time with family and my chosen and so beloved friend family. I've been counting my blessings each and every day and it all feels so darn good right now.

I've also gotten a ton of DMs and emails from y'all about my recent work on the inner child and this new series on communication and emotional consent. And I'm so honored that you would take the time to write to share your thoughts and feelings with me. Thank you, my love.

When you comment on Insta' or Facebook, leave a comment on my website or leave a review for the show on iTunes, it is all in service of helping more people to find this free resource. So I want to encourage you to take a moment to do those things and I want to thank you in advance with all my heart.

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My deepest goal is to spread these lessons far and wide. I know just how lucky and privileged I am to have the training, education, and experience that I've been gifted in this lifetime and it's such a delight to be able to pay back the universe with this show. So, thanks for helping to get my work on all platforms to more folks.

And if you want to stay in touch and hear about all the special classes and offerings and things that are going on in my world, please head on over to my website victoriaalbina.com and sign up for my email newsletter. I promise I won't spam and send you 40,000 messages a week. I mean, who's got time to write that, frankly?

But yeah, it's really fun and I send out tidbits about the upcoming show and I'm doing a lot of in-person breathwork classes here in New York City and virtual classes worldwide, wherever the interwebs are. And you can be the first to hear about that and some *Feminist Wellness* retreats that are, like, houses are being rented. It's getting real, y'all and I know that those are going to fill up fast, so get on my mailing list. Be the first to hear about it.

Alright, my darlings, let's dive in, shall we? Last week, we talked about emotional consent; a loving aligned way we can show up when someone wants to share their emotions, thoughts, and feelings with us, and how to check in before sharing our wisdom with someone else to make sure it's something they want to hear, which is not unlike getting consent before touching someone or engaging physically with them, or even before using someone else's stuff.

As feminists and respectful responsible humans, we ask before we enter someone else's physical or emotional space and make sure that they're on board for whatever we have in mind. We talked about how simply saying, "I have some thoughts about what you shared, is it cool if I share those thoughts or do you just want to be heard right now," can open up so much

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space for the person we're talking with to set a healthy boundary and to tell us what they need in that moment.

This week, I want to talk about being the sharer – which is maybe not a word, the sharer. I like the way it sounds, so let's go with it – and how you can set a healthy boundary up for yourself before you even start the conversation.

So, when you're the one who wants or needs to share something that feels heavy or fraught or emotional or is just something you're super excited about and you'd like the listener to do something specific, such as hold space, give advice, share their feedback, or just receive what you're saying without adding their reaction, you get to request that, understanding that the other person is an adult with their own capacities and limitations and they get to show up however they choose and you get to choose to respect and honor their capacities and or limitations.

I do this by saying, “Hey, I'm so excited about this new offering in my practice. Can I share about it with you and can you just hear me for now?” Or, “I'm really sad that my wombat, Charlie, died. I don't want to hear about how there are more wombats in the sea or that I can get a new wombat. I just miss Charlie and I want to talk about how soft and sweet he was. Can you hold space for that, or can I share for a few minutes and can you hold off on giving advice?”

Doing this takes just a few seconds and can help you get what you want and need from a conversation and is, as with any boundary, a gift that we give ourselves and the person we're connecting with because it gives them clean and clear guidelines for what you want and need. And they can then decide how they want to show up for you, knowing your request.

This is a kindness, asking directly. For example, let's say it's your birthday and your mom's like, “What do you want for your birthday?” And you can

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say, “Whatever, mom, just get me whatever.” And if you don’t state clearly what you want or expect, it’s not the kindest or most loving of you to be upset with her when she doesn’t read your mind and get you that necklace you’ve been eying on Etsy.

Or, for example, there are specific foods you do or don’t eat and someone invites you over for dinner, it’s a kindness to yourself and the other person to say, “I don’t eat gluten,” or, “I don’t eat dairy,” or, “I don’t eat meat,” or, “I get wicket acid reflux, so skip the tomatoes,” so they can know your preference and can plan accordingly versus not asking for what you want and need and then being grumpy or resentful or irritated when you get to your friend’s house and they made you their grandma’s special lasagna, which for you may be a bowl of indigestion with a side of annoyance.

You, my love, are worth speaking up for. It’s worth the momentary discomfort of doing something new, like stating your needs or stating a boundary, to get what you want and need in conversation and otherwise.

What we’re talking about here is a kind of boundaries issue. You get to say what you want and need in a conversation, understanding, of course and as always, that the other person may not be able or willing to meet you in the way you’d like. And if you set a boundary that’s not respected, you don’t have to have any bad or negative feelings about the other person, your relationship, or yourself. It’s just more information about them and how they’re able or willing to show up. And having that information, that is a beautiful thing.

So maybe you choose to get vulnerable and share some really deep stuff with your friend Sarah and you set a healthy boundary beforehand. You share that you just want to be heard. And she launches into advice-giving mode. So, cool, that’s what she’s capable of. That’s how she shows up. And it’s so good to have more information.

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For example, you might say, “If I’m upset and just need to be heard, Sarah generally can’t show up for me the way I want and need, and that’s just a fact. I can give her more chances if I want to. That’s always up to me.” But you don’t need to talk shit about her in your own mind, or to anyone else.

You don’t need to make her into some villain or make her ability to honor your boundary mean anything at all about you, or even about her. You don’t have to have any thoughts about it other than, “She just showed me her capacity in this moment and I can accept that. And if I want to share with her, I can state what I want and need in a clean, clear way and stay all calm about it.” Because you always get to offer calm, peace, love, acceptance, and gentleness for others and yourself to your own beautiful heart.

One of the places that I see people struggle with asking for what they want or need in a conversation is around, well, not knowing what they want and need. And this is where my two favorite things come in; thought work and breathwork. What a beautiful combination.

I had no clue what I wanted or needed often. I think saying most of the time is maybe a little overwrought, but it was pretty frequent that someone would say, like, “Where do you want to go to dinner?” and my brain would just go blank. Or like, “This thing happened, how do you feel about it?” And if it wasn’t really angry or distraught, or excited – I’ve always had an easy time, I’m a very excitable little Leo.

If it wasn’t those big feelings, if it was any nuance or complexity to it, so often, my brain would go completely blank before I started doing my daily thought work.

I had no modeling in my family of origin for talking about feelings, much less this whole concept of boundaries. It just wasn’t a thing. We didn’t really do it and we certainly didn’t talk about having boundaries. And I’m not

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dissing my parents here. They did a great job with the training and the cultural frameworks and the communication skills that were taught to them by their parents and the society and culture they grew up with.

Fast forward, I'm 18, I've never had these things modeled, and I left home for the wilds of the world with little to no framework for asking for what I wanted and needed because, again, I didn't know what that was. And if I did have an inkling, I was so codependent, which is a topic I'll be talking about on future episodes because it's so juicy and life-changing, that I didn't want to voice my own thoughts, my feelings, my needs for fear of making someone mad or annoyed or risk someone having a negative reaction to me, which I would then take as being about me, which I so had no tolerance for back then.

And not knowing what I wanted or needed and not knowing how to express it was a huge barrier to my healing that I put up right around myself. The beauty of thought work and breath work is that these combined modalities have shown me that if I put the steel walls up around my own heart, then I have the power to bring them right on down and can swap them out on the daily for flexible, thoughtful, clean, clear stated boundaries based in knowing and believing in myself and owning my value and worth on this planet and giving voice to that.

Thought work gave me the tools to pull back and to recognize that no one can make me feel anything, the same way my stating my needs can't make anyone angry unless they have the thought, "I don't like what she said." And thought work also gave me the tools to ask myself, "What am I feeling right now?" And when I didn't know or don't know today, when nothing has come to me in mind or body, that's when I can count on my breathwork and I can go lie down on the floor and do just like, seven, 10, maybe 13 minutes of breathwork; a meditation that can help move my body out of all that panicky cortisolly fight or flight sympathetic state into a calmer, more grounded centered parasympathetic state by connecting with my breath.

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And I would come out of that short little breathwork experience with this intense felt bodily knowing that I could process through my body and could then take that knowing to my thought work. With this increased clarity around my own feels, I could then step back and ask, what thought am I writing in my mind that is leading to this feeling that I now recognize, through breathwork, in my body.

And from there, I can do what we do in thought work, examine the think-feel-act cycle to see what that feeling was creating in my life. I can write down the situation, my thought about it, the feeling that I have when I think that thought, the action I take when I feel that feeling in my body, and the outcome of that action or inaction.

And before thought work and breathwork, that action outcome was really often my going along with what someone else wanted and letting a whole boatload of resentment and irritation build up in me. Now, with these magical twin tools, I can much more easily get in touch with my own feelings, my wants and needs, and can express them more easily, can process them through my body with my own breath, as my own healer, and can choose new thoughts to create new feelings in my body, which leads me to take different and more aligned action. And that is frigging amazing.

Other barriers to voicing our needs can be found in conversation with our perfect and amazing inner children. If you haven't had a chance yet, do go back to episodes 22 through 26, the series I did on the inner child. And if you subscribe on iTunes – I don't know about other platforms – it will just start to download all of the episodes in your phone, which is very convenient if you're a creature like me, who travels under New York City to get where I'm going... on the subway, you guys, I'm not, like, crawling through caves under New York City, though that would actually be pretty fun.

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Alright, hello, inner child. So, right, listen to episodes 23 through 26, my series on the inner child. And our exploration today works just as well without having listened to those episodes, but especially if thinking about your inner child brings up strong emotions or sensations in your body, the podcast series provides more information and ways to think about and connect to your younger self in those formative years and that would be really supportive for you.

So, if we turn back the clock to childhood, we see that each of us had unique childhood experiences, even those of us raised in the same household. Psychologists have though identified some patterns that are common and knowing that our experience may be at least similar to those of other people can help us feel less alone as we process our younger years.

One common experience that can make it hard for us as adults to feel connected to our own wants, needs, and preferences is the experience of being a parentified child; a term that means quite simply, being asked to be parent-like when we were just a kiddo.

As children, some of us were asked to step into adult-like roles before we were developmentally ready. Maybe you had the burden of parenting younger siblings, had the weight of your parent's lives, health, wellness, finances and the like put on your tiny shoulders, or circumstances and realities meant that you had to grow up real fast if you were to survive your childhood home.

In a situation such as these, a young person has to stay focused on the management and survival of others, while parentified children can most certainly develop to be highly responsible and reliable adults, they can also suffer from feelings of disconnection from their selves because of so many years spent worrying about others, which can often come to look like codependence.

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For these kiddos and others, parentified as a child or not, but living with codependence, finding the words to say, “I’ve had a hard day and just want to share without any input,” may feel selfish or, gosh, just impossible. By using tools like thought work and breathwork to better understand and rewire our thinking around asking others for support, even the parentified child in adulthood can learn to listen to themselves and speak up to get what they need.

Another common and challenging childhood experience is that of being raised by parents or others in our families who triangulate their feelings, asking us to be the go-between between two family members. For example, “I’m so done with this. Tell your mother that I’m not taking you to swim class anymore,” or, “You know what, tell your grandpa that I am angry at him and I’m not talking to him anymore.”

This kind of behavior, particularly from an adult who we want to look up to who is our beacon of safety as someone too small to go out and do their own hunting and gathering can be really confusing for a child, or for an adult, and can take us out of our capacity to know what we want and need, when again, we’re being asked to attend to what others want and need first.

While this episode isn’t in and of itself about our inner children, what I aim to show you here is that the challenges we face as adults, trying to mammal along through life as best we can, often grow from seeds planted in childhood. In my work with my clients, really getting to the root cause of the thoughts that cause their feelings that then influence the actions they take has been such a helpful and enlightening framework. And I have found that exploring the inner child can bring to light so much useful information to put in our toolkits as we move forward.

Okay, this has been a lot of information. Let’s take a moment to pause and review what we’ve talked about so far. Last week, we did some deep

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thinking about the importance of asking for emotional consent when someone comes to us in their feelings, whether excited, sad, angry, or confused, those emotions are theirs. And we, with love and respect, can allow them to feel their feels before we jump in with our own ideas, solutions, and concerns.

This week, we flipped the script a little to talk about how we, when we're feeling emotions, big or small, get to ask our conversation partners for what we need. "Hey, I need a listening ear right now," or, "I want to share something super exciting; do you have the space to just hear my story?" Or, "Oh my god, I had the worst day and I just need to vent, would you be able to be a sounding board and I'll let you know if I want feedback?"

Remember, my love, there is power and kindness in asking for what we need. And sometimes, we can give our consent for feedback and then realize we don't actually want it once we've heard it, and that's okay. The beauty of boundaries is that they're malleable, flexible, and the beauty of consent is that it can be rescinded if it's no longer aligned for us.

For example, I was recently talking with a dear friend about a change in my business that I'm excited about. She asked for consent to give her opinion and I said, "Yes, absolutely." And she launched into talking about the financials and how this plan could fail. And while I had originally said yes and given my consent, once she started talking, I realized I didn't want to hear it. I just wanted to be excited about this nascent little idea that felt tender and dear.

And I realized that I didn't want to hear her cautionary tale because I started to feel grumpy, like kind of irritable bordering on short-tempered. And I felt this heavy vibrating yuck feeling in my gut, which was my beautiful intuition talking to me, raising the alarm saying, something here is just not working for us.

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So, I used my words and I said, “Elena, gracias for sharing your feedback querida, but I actually don’t want to hear it right now. I’ll let you know when I do though.” And that was that, no hard feelings, no resentment or anger, on my end at least. And luckily, what other people think of me and how they react to my requests is none of my business. And Elena and I moved onto another topic, friendship intact, grump released, massive knot of, like, bleurgh in my stomach dissipated as soon as I spoke my need.

Now, one question I got in a DM from a listener after last week’s show was, “What do I do if I ask for emotional consent and the conversation gets all weird?” And those are this person’s exact words, and I love them. I totally hear that one.

When we change our behaviors, it can be challenging for others to adjust. It can throw our conversation partners off balance, like you’re in the break room with a coworker and she starts talking about the ills of sugar and how she’s cutting down on it because sugar is killing us all, which I totally agree with. Like, right as you chomp into a donut, you know, that feeling of, like, uh-oh I just got called out. Well that same thing can happen to your cousin or whomever you’re in conversation with and starting to set boundaries for the first time.

You shine some light on needing emotional consent and that, on some level, may make your cousin realize that she was never asking for herself, which could bring out some defensiveness. In that moment, I want to invite you to slow down, pause, take a few deep breaths with a longer exhale, like we do when we’re trying to reset the oxygen to carbon dioxide levels in our bodies in order to calm ourselves on a cellular level and get back into your body.

Asking for consent is a fair, thoughtful, self-loving, kind thing to do. And if your conversation partner doesn’t know how to handle it, that’s okay. You

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can do your best to meet them with loving acceptance, without judging or blaming or criticizing, not even in that pretty little head of yours.

Each of us is on our own journey, and if you're in a place to live a life built on emotional consent but your relationship partners aren't, that's okay. What someone else is thinking is never about you. It's about themselves, their cultural context, the society in which they grew up, the time when they grew up, everything they've learned up until this moment and maybe never challenged, which leads to their own habitual thoughts and reactive feelings.

I want to remind you and encourage you to state what you need thoughtfully, clearly, and with love and to stay focused on yourself, your journey, your values, your sovereignty, your needs.

Alright, my darlings. I know you love your homework. So for this week, we're going to practice this new technique and I want to hear all about it from you. Hop on over to my website and get yourself on my email list and drop me a little line, a comment on the page for this episode, which is victoriaalbina.com/28 – can you believe this is episode 28? My, how time flies – so I can give you a massive shout out for working on supporting yourself and the people you love through an active emotional consent process.

So, here's the assignment; I want to invite you to pause in conversation before you start to share something that feels tender, that feels charged, if your emotions are bubbling to the surface, or if you simply know that you want something specific from the conversation. Feel your feels about it, honor your inner child, honor your history, honor your habitual thoughts and get right with yourself about how you want to show up today as an adult in a way that loves, honors, and respects you and the people you're in conversation with.

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Ask consent before giving advice and ask for what you need and want before you start talking. Remember that other people's reactions to you is none of your business, and if someone isn't able to honor your boundary, that has nothing to do with you and it doesn't mean that there's some terrible horrible person, it simply means that they have limitations in their capacities and you get to choose, for your own best mental wellness, to honor that about them, not make it about you, and treat it as more information. And, y'all, I'm such a nerd, you know I always love more information.

Alright, my beauties, that is all from me for this week. Thank you so much for tuning in. It is such a delight and an immense pleasure, as always, to share all that I've been so privileged to learn with you, from my heart to yours. Be well, take good care of yourself, my darling. And remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved, and when one of heals, we help heal the world. Take care, my love, 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.