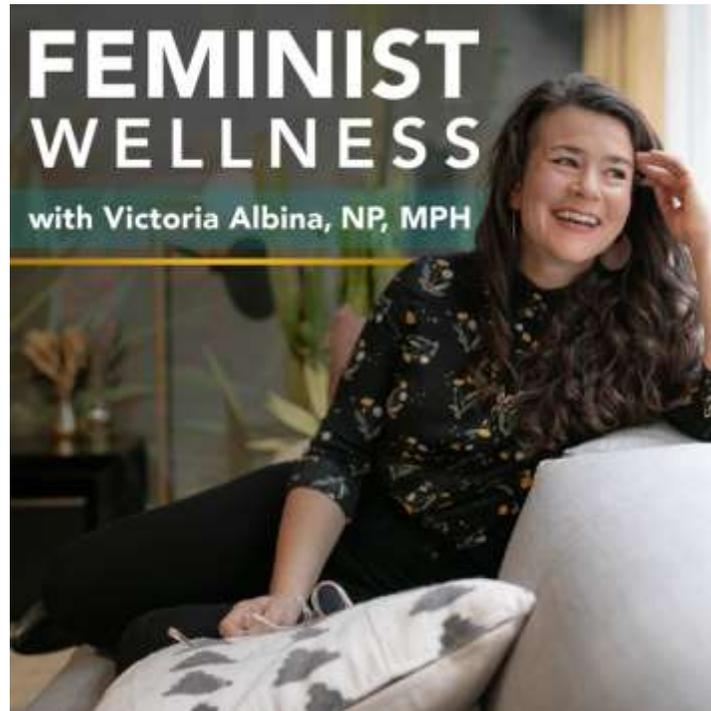


Ep #30: Healing Codependent Habits



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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As adults, we tend to emulate the relationships we saw growing up in our families of origin. For some of us, that means speaking our needs clearly and without guilt or shame. And for some of us, those thought habits can be quite the opposite.

Codependent thinking is so common for so many of us, and this is when we put someone else's needs ahead of our own and then resent them for it. If this topic resonates for you at all my love, then keep listening. I'm going to take us through some of the key shifts I recommend for beginning to shift out of the codependent thinking pattern and into a mutually interdependent way of thinking, feeling, and showing up in the world.

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 finds you doing so well. I love this topic and I'm excited to continue to discuss codependency, codependent thinking, the ways it affects us and the ways we can shift out of it.

If you haven't listened to episode 29, I recommend you pause this episode, go download and listen to episode 29, which is more of an introduction to codependent thinking, my thoughts about it, how I identify it, how it's shown up in my own life. And then come on back here to hear my thoughts on how to begin to shift yourself out of codependent thinking and into an autonomous and interdependent framework in relationships.

Also, I want to start by saying codependence is a huge and complex topic. When codependency is part of your thought patterns, it can touch pretty much every aspect of your life, and two podcast episodes will barely scratch the surface. So I'll continue to touch on this topic and

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codependence adjacent topics, which let's be real, I've been doing since episode one. So make sure to subscribe to the show so you don't miss a single episode.

Subscribing is really nice because it means the episodes pop into your iTunes or Stitcher, whatever app you use. So when you open your phone to listen, they're right there for you, which is really nice, particularly if you ride the subway because then you don't have to try what I sometimes do which is download them between stations, which never seems to work.

So around codependence, again to be clear, books, courses, whole programs are built around healing and recovering from codependence and what I seek to share here is my own lived experience and the experiences of my clients from the last 15 years as we've talked about this.

I want to say clearly, I am not the world's be all end all expert on codependence and I've done a lot of work on the issue. I feel that it's something – it's a topic I know a lot about and you listening may know a lot about it too, so I'd love to hear from you. Email me, DM me, leave comments on the show notes page on my website when I share this podcast on my Instagram page, @victoriaalbinawellness.

Comment. Let me know what you think about it. Let me know what resonated for you and what other techniques have been helpful for you as you shift your own thinking out of codependence and into interdependence and an embodied sensation of autonomy.

Finally, I'll say take what you like and leave the rest. If part of this resonates but you don't like the third thing I say or one, two, and three are great, but the fourth one just doesn't resonate for you, cool. One can't be everything to everyone, which is the tenant and theme of the whole concept of recovering from codependence. So there you go. I love that. Take what you like and leave the rest.

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Alright my darlings, let's dive in by defining codependency once more. It's been a whole week since the last show came out so let's refresh our memories, and I will touch on some common roots and expressions of codependent thinking to guide our conversation about healing codependent thinking patterns.

So Melody Beattie, the author of *Codependent No More*, defines a codependent person as one who has let another person's behavior affect them and who is obsessed with controlling that person's behavior. I see that. I get that. I think there's a lot of subtlety in there and for more on this topic, do read that book. It's a quick read. It's an old book so some of the language is like, I don't know, it's amusing, but it's a great, great book. Do check it out.

I will say that one of the things that can happen when we have codependent thought habits is that we can lose touch with our authenticity. And we can stop claiming our autonomy in relationships, which is what we talked all about on the last episode, this autonomy, interdependence, independent, codependent framework.

When we look at ourselves as babies and children, we are inherently dependent on our caregivers in every way. We form attachments as we once formed our thought habits as we age until we learn to become aware of and start to shift our thought pattern as growing creatures.

For many of us, codependent thinking habits start in our early lives and our behavior model as children by codependent parents or other caregivers. And because we're inherently dependent on these caregivers, it's so common to learn to do what they do and to think that it's completely normal because well, if you literally don't know anyone else in the world because you're like, two years old or six years old or like, when you're 10, you know teachers and people at school and other families, but your family of origin really does a lot to shape and frame you.

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And not just your family of origin but the early caregivers you have. Not everyone grows up with their family of origin. But in households with addiction, alcoholism, narcissism, parents who are self-absorbed, unreliable, unavailable, parents who haven't done their work or haven't healed their family legacy, their ancestral heritage of codependent habits and thinking, or when there's violence or other abuse, codependence is common there.

Codependency also commonly exists in households without these concerns where maybe you were taught that your value lies in keeping your family happy, getting good grades, or winning a competition so that you will be more lovable. Or if you felt like your worth or value in the world was or is dependent on something other than your inherent value as a human and note my darling, you are inherently worthy and valuable just by being you.

You don't have to say or do or achieve or accomplish anything to be lovable and of value in this world. Codependency is also common among parentified children. Those kiddos asked to act as grownups before it was developmentally appropriate because they can be asked to take care of adults and others in their lives and can learn to repeat this caretaking pattern as adults for other adults.

If you grew up in these type of home environments, which many of us do, or we're asked to fill a parent role as a kiddo, then you may have learned to think and behave with some degree of codependence. Just say yes even when you don't mean yes out of fear of upsetting someone else. You may have never learned how to set healthy boundaries or even know what those feel like, and more unhealthy boundaries in episode five.

Or you may have put your self-care aside, or not even know what it feels like to prioritize your self-care, your opinions, your wants, your needs. Often because what's going on in the home isn't discussed or acknowledged. So as a super smart kiddo, which is a topic that I talk about in episode 19, Adaptive and Maladaptive Behaviors. Finish this one and then go give that

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one a listen. It really talks a lot about how brilliant we are as children to do things that are just not great as adults. I won't spoil that one for you. Go listen to it.

So where was I, my angel? Okay, so I was talking about boundaries. Okay, so what often happens is that things are ostensibly bananas in a home, there's things going on that just aren't objectively healthy. There may be abuse, there may be substance use, there may be a lot of narcissism, there may be a self-absorbed parent, one that's not showing up.

And as a kiddo, often because what's going on isn't discussed or acknowledged, your super smart kid brain learns to hide your thoughts and feelings around these things, to stuff them down until your needs become foreign, first and foremost to yourself. And this is when we get resentful. This is when resentment builds.

When you lose touch with your own wants and needs, focusing on others, and you can come to feel like you don't deserve good things in life, to be treated well or lovingly, to be able to set boundaries at all, much less to have them met, honored, cared about, prioritized by others, it's also super common in codependents to look externally for validation and to overreact when you don't get that validation you desire.

Meanwhile, if you grew up feeling like you couldn't trust others or needed to control the world in order to literally survive as a child, as an adult, you can feel the need to control or attempt to control the people in your life. To make demands that are less than reasonable and thereby setting others up to disappoint you. A pattern that may feel all too familiar and comfortable in that way that super uncomfortable things can feel totally comfortable when they're what you've always known.

With all of this said, I want to start by saying that this stuff is challenging. Because codependent thinking can feel like or can actually be all we've

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ever known. So many of us have been taught to think, feel, and act in some of these ways by our culture and by our society. And so many of us have those lessons, those societal lessons compounded by our family of origin or our caretakers by what was modeled for us as children.

So many of us are trained to think that being codependent is how we show love. By putting others before ourselves, by denying our own truth, our own needs, and by acting in a way that we believe will make others feel something. Be it joy or happiness, sadness or anger, and that we can thus feel safe or okay if we're controlling someone else's thoughts and feelings.

And even though beginning to change these codependent thought habits may be hard, but let's be real, will be hard, it's challenging, it's hard, I want to remind you and pause, take a deep breath, consider opening up some space in your heart, your heart center, your heart chakra if you're so inclined.

My love, I want to remind you, you can do hard things. You can do challenging things. You can change your entire life and way of thinking one little day at a time if you want to. I have this faith in you. And if you don't have faith in you yet, that's okay. I'll hold that space and that faith for you. Borrow mine until you've got your own.

I also want to say that having codependent thoughts and actions doesn't mean that you suck or that you're doing life wrong. It's nothing to beat yourself up about. It's literally just a thought habit. One that may leave you attending to everyone but you, obsessing about other people and their thoughts, feelings, wants and needs, their actions, and that's okay.

You get to pause now to raise your awareness around the ways you may be pinning your happiness on other people's reactions to you or how you hope they'll react, or how other people respond to your choices and how you express them.

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To put it bluntly, because some of us have spent a lifetime chasing approval from others to validate our self-worth, we may not even know what we truly like or don't like, what we want or don't want. We may not have given the topic of our own minds, our own desires, our own needs enough or any time and thought.

And you know what, that is okay. This is a process of self-discovery and maturation. Learning to shift from emotional childhood to emotional adulthood, which I talk about in detail in episodes 23 and 24. The insidiousness of codependence is that this pattern can set up parts of ourselves to think that we can't trust other people or other parts of ourselves.

We can't trust that we know what we want and need, much less to speak our truth, and if we can't trust ourselves to have our own backs, how could we ever trust those we've chosen to love or to be in a relationship with to honor our truth?

We may worry that if we say no or state our needs or wants or take a break to take care of ourselves, we won't be loved, we won't be abandoned, which is a primal mammalian fear that can send your body into fight, flight, freeze. Sympathetic nervous system activation, keeping us from taking action on our own behalf.

This is normal. If you've grown up with codependence in a family with alcoholism or narcissism or folks whose parents were alcoholic or narcissistic or whatever the setting was that led you to be surrounded by codependency, it is normal to have these stories in your mind, your heart, your body, your spirit.

If you're wondering if this is you, if you're saying, do I do this? I've created a free guide for you, a set of questions that will help you to suss whether you're engaging in codependent thinking, feeling, or acting in relationships.

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And I hope this guide will be helpful. It's a PDF so you can download it and go through those questions on your own and there's some journaling prompts.

So head on over to victoriaalbina.com/30 because this is episode 30 to download your free guide, my love. And this brings the conversation to what you're likely here for. Some actionable steps you can take to begin to release your codependent thought habits and to begin to reclaim your power in relationships. Relationships with yourself and others.

Remember please to be gentle, loving, kind, and patient with your adult self and your inner children as you begin these processes, or deep in the processes of releasing codependence. You may have already started. This is challenging work.

I'm going to keep saying it because gosh, one of the homeworks of codependent thinking is to beat yourself up relentlessly. So I'm going to keep doing my best to be a balm against that practice, or maybe I'm not against that practice but rather in favor, support of you being as loving, generous, and kind with yourself as humanly possible.

So here are some steps that have worked for me and my clients to begin to move out of codependent thinking and behavior, and back into deep centered self-love. There are so many more things that one can do on the daily to help shift out of codependence into healthy autonomy and interdependence.

And the following list, my love, is just the beginning. Please, I really would love to hear from you to hear about the things that you've been doing to support your own shift out of codependent thinking. So don't hesitate. Holler at me.

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Alright my love, here we go. To build trust and safety within yourself, engaging in a process of reparenting can be transformational. For a more in-depth description of inner child work and reparenting, check out episodes 22 through 26. A recent series on the topic to learn more about this idea if the concept is new to you.

Perhaps you learned in childhood that the people who love you and who are meant to care for you will hurt you, abandon you, or not support you in feeling loved. Or you intuited as a child that something was off or wrong and that intuition or deep knowing was denied. You're either blamed for the problems or told a problem doesn't exist, your father doesn't have a drinking problem, which is very confusing because you know that something is wrong.

As a kiddo, you don't have a lot of options and you're pretty new to this planet, so you may blame yourself because it's less scary than believing that your caretakers, the big grown up people who are there to protect you in case of a lion attack are simply fallible humans who may not be doing it the way you wish they were.

Reparenting means learning to show up for yourself as your own most loving parent and to care for and attend to your inner child the way your little one needed back when you were actually young. This step is really vital, especially if you learned to have codependent thinking in your childhood.

Codependent thinking can make us feel like a child no matter our physical age, and can activate our little bambino and can let that little one run the emotional show. Bringing your awareness to when your inner child or inner children, because a whole bus load of them can show up at once, and when they may be activated for you, opens up a world of healing as you can step in and give your inner child and children the deep love and attention you may not have had as a child.

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Second, in order to shift negative self-talk and self-doubt, it's important to cultivate a daily practice of self-care by showing up for yourself in the ways that you deserve, you practice shifting your thinking, the root cause of feeling negative or doubtful of yourself.

In a way, it doesn't matter what self-care you do, just that you do it. Whatever self-care means to you, commit to it. Take small steps my darling, and bring one teeny tiny thing in each day or consider looking at the things that you're already doing for yourself every day and calling them self-care.

I'll be talking more about how we can bring new self-care rituals in and make them stick in a coming episode, so again my beauty, make sure you're subscribed to the show so you don't miss that episode. Meanwhile, self-care is reparenting in action. It is about you learning to put you first.

Self-care can be simply holding space for you to drink your morning coffee sitting down for like, two minutes instead of running around taking care of everyone else. Or taking a walk at lunch rather than sitting with your coworkers if you don't feel like doing that, or sitting with your coworkers if you've gotten to the habit of eating your lunch all alone and would like some company.

By self-care, I don't mean spa days or expensive trips though yeah, those things can be a delight and if anyone's handing out spa days or expensive trips, my email is – just kidding, but not kidding at all. Send me things. No, just kidding. Not kidding.

By self-care, I mean taking five minutes a day to do the future self planning that we talked about in episode nine, which is a journaling exercise, learning to be your own watcher to hear your own voice, saying yes and no when you want to, despite the fear. Not without the fear, which I'll come back to in a moment, my darling.

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It's hard to ask others for what you need until you've cleaned up your side of the street. You get to practice giving yourself what you need first and can then turn to those you love. Your beloved community from a place of deep authenticity, sovereignty, and interdependence in your own mind and body.

It's about knowing that this will be uncomfortably but doing it anyway because this work is uncomfortable. Oh my god, it's so uncomfortable. It feels so – to start speaking up for yourself. Gosh, I can think back to like, a decade ago, 15 years ago, something like that when I was first learning these practices. Wow. It's so uncomfortable, and that's okay. Uncomfortable is totally okay.

And as folks who may have the habit of trying to control others in order to feel more okay, I want to invite you to start to bring your awareness to times when you may feel compelled to tell others what to think or do and consider what it would feel like to just pause, breathe, and not say anything, to just let others live their own lives and thus, to begin to live your own more fully.

This is where emotional consent, what we talked about in episodes 27 and 28, here's where that comes in. Ask if someone wants your opinion before foisting it on them. And ask for the emotional space you need in conversation. It's a beautiful practice. An uncomfortable one, noted, but really beautiful and it feels really good once it gets really like – once it feels more comfortable.

To begin to hold space for what can feel like scary changes, begin to cultivate curiosity around what life can look like when you're not rolling around in codependent thinking, not obsessing about or trying to control other people, even beginning slowly to get in touch with your own wants and needs, and to practice speaking them in your own mind and then aloud.

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Maybe it'll be lonely or boring to not spend your time thinking about other people the way you used to, and that's okay. It's totally okay. Maybe you'll have more space for doing the things you want to do like reading, exercising, making ceramics, making mosaic tile pieces, I'm just making things up here.

But also breath work, you'll have more space for that. More space and time for thought work, for doing a daily download where you write down everything that's been rolling around in your head. And you get more space and time for these things when you're not so wrapped up in other people's drama.

And part of living a life where you're focused on other people is that you may be out of touch with what you actually like when you're not basing your life story on other people's likes, like maybe you like country music or baking or something else that surprises you. Shifting your focus on to what you like and what you want is a shift towards autonomy and interdependence.

As you set healthy boundaries and practice saying things like darling, I won't be home Monday night. I'll be at my Senegalese drumming practice or whatever it may be. You are saying I love you and I'm doing what I want and need for me because I love me first, which is so fabulous.

And I want to say that at first, again, there can be so much emptiness in your life when you stop focusing on others. And that makes sense. Perhaps you used to fill your brain space and your thoughts and your time with worrying about what others were doing, needing, thinking, feeling, and shifting all that time and attention on to yourself can feel weird and empty and it's totally normal to feel that.

And I want to encourage you to be curious about your thoughts, your reactions to other people, your judgments of others. Your likes, your

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dislikes as you get to know yourself through the lens of autonomy, the lens of putting yourself first.

Especially as women, we're taught that our main interests as evidenced in every woman's magazine are beauty, relationships, family, exercise, as a way to stay slim and thus lovably beautiful, and for some of us now, career. These are the things that we can be interested in. And I'm curious how many women, especially mothers are making time for hobbies, for creativity.

Are you making time for what really engages, invigorates, and excites you? It takes a lot of effort to learn what you might actually enjoy, especially if that's different from what your partner is into, or as a deviation from the patriarchy and learning what you like and making a commitment to doing it is profoundly healing.

So you get to try new things and to see by checking in with your beautiful body and intuition what makes you feel energized, passionate, and alive. By getting out of your head and your thought habits and by getting into your body, you can get all the information you need by following the seed of your curiosity and asking questions like what do I love to do with my time just for me?

And finally, in order to stay present, you get to learn how to tolerate discomfort, fear, anxiety, and discontent. Often, codependent behaviors are a coping mechanism to deal with and avoid stress, fear, and other uncomfortable feelings. The more we learn to sit with those feelings instead of immediately acting to avoid them, the more we'll be able to build healthier coping mechanisms to address those feelings in affirming, sustainable ways.

Having needs can feel terrifying at first. You may judge it, you may not like the way it feels to recognize like, oh, I want and need something just for me

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right now, and that's okay. Commit to feeling that discomfort. It's so worth it, my love. And one of the goals of self-care is learning to tolerate discomfort. I have a whole episode on this topic coming so soon, my darling. And make sure to tune in. That will be helpful for you as you learn to begin to make these mental shifts.

Part of what this process does is to help you take a grounded seat in knowing that you're enough, that you're worthy of claiming your autonomy, that you don't have to continue to engage in codependent thoughts, feelings, or actions just because it was modeled for you, because you've always done it, or because frankly, it may feel super cozy right now to put others ahead of yourself and super uncomfortable to put yourself first.

I get that. It's not going to feel cute, but it's a massive step forward in growing free of codependent habits. And one of the things to get comfortable with, to learn to tolerate is the feeling of losing your relationships because it's possible. A relationship that is built on the web of lies that can be codependency may crumble once you shift the way you show up.

I have an episode coming out soon all about people-pleasing, so please do be sure to listen to that one if this is a worry for you, if you might call yourself a people-pleaser. Because when you stop people-pleasing, people are no longer pleased. It makes sense to say it, and holding space for the truth of it can be super challenging.

The people who benefit from your lack of healthy boundaries will not be happy when you establish boundaries. And that too is okay. For now, don't worry about that, don't let your brain start spinning in those fears. Focus on how you can build yourself up first and foremost. So it doesn't matter if someone else tries to tear you down.

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Your mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health is what matters the most, my love. And beginning to attend to yourself in these new ways is so freeing, so liberating, so healing. And yeah, so scary, but being scared is just a thought. You're just feeling scared because you're having the thought, I'm doing something scary.

So you get to acknowledge that that thought is coming from a beautiful self-loving, self-protective place within you. You wouldn't be having the thought this is scary if you didn't love yourself. So you get to acknowledge that and thank your perfect body, your mind, your psyche, your spirit for loving you so much that it wants you to be scared, and then you get to pull back and ask, does feeling scared here, does that serve me? Or do I get to shift into the thought, well, how about I can feel scared but I can do this anyway?

So that doesn't deny what you're thinking and feeling, and it speaks to the power that you have to take care of yourself to move yourself forward. I love that thought. This can feel scary but I can do it anyway because we can do hard things.

And my love, I also want to say that I have been there. I had so much codependent thinking, feeling, acting for my whole life until I figured it out, until a beloved friend held a mirror up for me and helped me to see the ways that I had these habits and the way these thoughts just were no longer serving me. So if I can do it, you can. We can do hard things and we do it together in community.

Alright my darling, if this topic is really resonating for you, check out the links in the show notes. I'll link to several books on the subject that have been helpful for me in my journey. I'm linking to Amazon because that's like, the easiest thing to do but please, I want to encourage you to support your local independent family-owned bookstore, please. It's really important that we have them in the community and how nice is it that your money stays locally?

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So I won't go on about that, but please, shop locally. It's really important. It's actually a feminist issue in so many ways, but my darling, I digress. Okay babe, thank you for listening in. As always, this has been such a delight and such a pleasure. These topics are so near and dear to my heart because I've gone through them. Healing these patterns in myself has been so life-changing for me and I'm so excited, honored, privileged that I get to share all of this with you.

To celebrate the launch of the show, I'm going to be giving away five sets of my hand-crafted organic essential oil rollers. An energizing blend called Rise and Shine, and a gorgeous blend I use when I feel tension, stress, or anxiety called Easy Now that I also use when I need a little help falling asleep.

So I'm going to be giving away one set of each to five lucky listeners who subscribe, rate, and review the show on iTunes. It doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I sure hope you love this show. I want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome program that provides tons of value. Visit victoriaalbina.com/itunes to learn more about the contest and how to enter. I'll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode.

Alright my beauty, please, remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling.

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.