

## Ep #33: Direct and Indirect Communication



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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

## Ep #33: Direct and Indirect Communication

When we have clarity on what we want and need, we open up space to communicate directly. Saying what we mean and meaning what we say. This can be super challenging if we were raised as I was, with a lot of indirect or sideways communication.

Today we'll be talking, you and I, about what it means to communicate directly versus indirectly, and how we can begin to shift our ways of communicating with others and ourselves to speak our needs plainly and directly, which is a way of honoring ourselves and the people we communicate with in the world.

If this is resonating for you, if you find yourself biting back your words or kind of saying it sideways, you're going to want to keep listening, my love, it's going to be a good one.

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've been really loving thinking about, writing about, talking about communication for the last couple weeks. It's such an important issue, and today we're going to talk about an issue that's been really challenging in my own life, and it's one I see my life coaching client struggle with, often in really significant ways, and that issue is direct and indirect communication.

One of the things I was talking with my friend Becca about this, we both this our medical training in San Francisco at the University of California, San Francisco, but we're both from the greatest state in the union, which do I even need to say that's Rhode Island? It's kind of obvious, right? You say greatest state in the union, everyone goes Rhode Island.

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So culturally, modes of communication can be really different. Like as an Argentine, one of the things that we often do, I mean, we swear like sailors constantly, but we also kind of just trail off. Like we'll imply something and then just sort of leave it in the air, and everyone picks it up or doesn't and it's really fascinating.

In Rhode Island and on the east coast, generally speaking, people tend to communicate rather directly. Like in New York, if you're standing on the sidewalk and you're blocking someone, they'll say excuse me, get the F out of my way. Like, just yesterday morning, getting on to the subway, someone was blocking the door and like, four people were like, excuse me, move into the car. Like excuse me, get out of the way.

And what was really funny, this is what I was reminiscing about with Becca was when we first moved to San Francisco, we were both really struck by how indirectly people would often communicate, particularly with strangers or on the street. I feel like patients would do this too.

Anyway, there was this one moment that I remember clear as day where I was lost. I had no idea where I was. I think I was probably on Market somewhere, and I was blocking the sidewalk. And there was a woman behind me who was like, huffing. If people would just get out of the way, then other people could cross the street and then we could all get to work.

And I remember hearing her and turning around and being like, I'm sorry, are you talking to me? I was so confused because I wasn't used to folks in public communicating that indirectly or in that kind of a passive aggressive way. And it just really struck me, and she just kind of looked at me and like, went all deer in the headlights.

Like yeah, I just mean like, you know, if people got out of the way then other people could cross the street. I think I just kind of was like oh okay, cool, cool. Because whatever, it's a stranger on the sidewalk. I don't need

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to get into it with her. But in my head, I was like, alright, take note. This is how people tend to do around here versus where I'm from, where people are like, get out of the way.

But what's really interesting is that I didn't grow up with that. I didn't grow up with direct communication. I grew up with a lot of indirects, a lot of hinting, which is in part whatever, the complexity of the amazing human beings who raised me who are just human beings after all, and I think it's in part cultural. That's how Argentines of that generation talk.

But it's been a real thing in my life to learn how to talk, communicate, speak my mind more directly. So let me pause and let's define terms. So my beautiful nerds, direct communication means stating what you want and need in a simple, straightforward way without excessive explanation, excuses, disclaimers, emotional pleas, and from an emotionally clean space. Just meaning that you're not trying to manipulate anyone, to attempt to make them feel something.

I mean, if you've listened to this show or pretty much ever, you know that that's not possible because each of our thoughts creates our feelings. But sometimes we communicate indirectly, in a way to attempt to make someone feel something.

This is often unconscious and it often looks pretty darn manipulative. So indirect communication is when you hide or don't acknowledge your true intentions or motivations and you certainly don't say them plainly, simply, and directly.

All of this said, communicating indirectly is often all we know. What we're taught as kids, by society, our culture, the geography of where we grew up, et cetera. So if direct communication is your norm and what you know, then someone communicating indirectly may be experienced as evasive,

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manipulative, sneaky. You might think that person untrustworthy or even dishonest.

And if you're accustomed to communicating indirectly, if that's your norm, if that's what goes on around you, then someone stating their needs directly, simply, and without couching it in anything may feel harsh, rude, or mean. And of course, all these reactions are caused by your thoughts about the situation, the person you're talking to, how you perceive them, it's all a choice totally.

And as we're talking about this, I want to remind you to pause and to bring compassion and self-love in, particularly as these concepts may resonate for you. We generally communicate in the ways that were modeled for us growing up. The ways we were taught to, or indirect reaction to those familial ways of communicating, and which we may do the opposite, that is if a parent was never direct and clear, you may copy that form of communication.

Or you may have developed a very direct way of communicating if what was modeled didn't work for you. So let's do some examples because my brain learns really well through examples. Hope yours does too. So an example of direct communication may be hey Luca, I'd love to hang out. I'm free Friday night at seven.

An example of indirect communication may be hey, so Luca, it would be cool to hang out if you're not too busy or like, if you don't have other plans. I'm sure you're busy, right? Like, you're probably really busy.

In this first example, you're stating your wants clearly. I'm free Friday night at seven. In the second, you're giving your power away. Couching your want in a lot of BS, likely with the goals of one, not making the other person feel pressure, which isn't something you can control no matter how you say it, and two, not getting vulnerable.

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Hey Luca, I'd love to hang out. That is often we don't state exactly what we want because we're afraid of putting ourselves out there too much. The way you talk to yourself is often the way you talk to others. So if you fear feeling your feelings or being vulnerable with yourself, you may project that onto others.

It makes total sense that you would do that until you bring your attention to it, recognize it, own it, give it love, and can thus begin to shift it. Not to be all like, you're super normal if you do this, if you attempt to protect yourself from being vulnerable, if you speak indirectly, if you have been told and taught and believe the story that you can make other people feel things, all super normal. A lot of us feel and think those ways.

And you know, I'm here to help you learn and live some different ways. Let's do some more examples because I love them. An example of direct communication in response to a request to borrow something of yours may be, I prefer not to lend my things out. An example of indirect communication may be, oh, this sweater? I just got it and I actually haven't worn it myself. You can borrow it if you really want to, but I'd actually really rather maybe not. But if you're cold, I mean, I guess it's okay.

Indirect may be, gosh, it's so cold in here. I can barely feel my toes. And direct would be, hey babe, can we turn the heat on? Indirect, oh gosh, so thanks for the invite. I'd love to come to your all-night rager party but I have to do this thing for my cousin so yeah, I can't but you know I'd love to so yeah, definitely keep inviting me to ragers. Yeah, please.

Where direct may be, thanks for the invite but it's not my style. Have a blast. In these indirect statements, you demure. You don't own your own preferences and give them importance. You put what you imagine the other person wants or needs ahead of your own wants and needs. You imagine the other person's response and attempt to protect against it when you don't need to.

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Other people can think anything they want about you. It's none of your business, and it has nothing to do with you. Because you see, the person who loses out in the end when you don't communicate your needs in a direct and clear way, man, baby it's you. You lose out each and every time.

And sometimes our indirect communications look more like actively working to try to get someone else to feel something without actually saying what we want to. This is that often unconscious manipulation that's part and parcel of indirect communication that I spoke about earlier.

For example, this happened with a client of mine recently. She's a school teacher and they got let out early. Wasn't expected, and she called her partner and was like, hey, we got let out of school early. And he didn't pick up what she was indirectly putting down, which was a veiled request to be picked up so she wouldn't have to walk the like, whatever, four or five miles home in work shoes.

So instead of saying dude, we got let out early, will you please come pick me up? She just said man, so we get let out of school early and it's so hot out and it's such a long walk. And he was like oh yeah, it sure it hot out there. He didn't pick it up because she wasn't saying it directly. He was at work. Whatever the situation is, the point is that she didn't ask for what she wanted and needed clearly.

And then this was the issue that she brought to me. That night they were sitting on the couch and she took her shoes off and was rubbing her feet and was like, my feet are killing me from that walk home. And in that moment, she was being indirect. She was being passive aggressive, and she was attempting to make her partner feel something.

Feel bad about not picking her up, feel bad about not picking up the indirect message she was sending, she was trying to manipulate him emotionally

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because she didn't get what she wanted because she didn't ask for it. This is so super common.

So that was a moment that we worked through in coaching and got some clarity around, so now she's going to be more aware of those moments where she relies on the habit of communicating indirectly.

Another one that I've heard in some form or another from many clients over the years is you've been working all day and you walk in and your husband and kids are on the couch watching TV, looking at their phones, and you say hi everybody, gosh, I've had such a long day. Now I have to cook dinner for you all and put the laundry away and, and, and.

And you start listing out this whole long list of the reasons why you're so long suffering and all the thousands of things you have to do, which is not to say that you don't have a long list of things to do. But listing them out in such a way versus simply saying hey everybody, I'd like if you could help me with dinner and if you could each put your laundry away. Thanks.

Making a direct statement like that, saying what you want, what you need, without the expectation that folks are going to hop to and do it immediately, especially when you're talking to other adults, but stating that desire for help is the way to not inadvertently, without realizing it, attempt to manipulate the people in your life to do what you want or to feel a certain way.

And I think it's worth pausing to say this lovingly and clearly. Being direct isn't about being unkind. Quite the contrary or when you say hi, I'd like it if you could help me with dinner and if you could each put your laundry away. Thanks.

It's about stating your thoughts, wants, and needs clearly to avoid confusion, miscommunication, and resentment. Now, any of those things



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can happen because we can't ever control how other people hear us, but what we can do is show up in the world for our relationships and most importantly, for ourselves by standing firm in our truth and stating it plainly and clearly.

And I get it. It's hard to have direct communication with others if you don't have clarity on your thoughts, wants, and needs and feel confident in speaking those thoughts, wants, and needs in a clear and direct way. Doing so is way better for you because it allows you to say what's on your mind, which is you doing your part to help prevent miscommunication and keeps you aligned with yourself.

Versus playing that old game that most of us, particularly those of us socialized as women have learned to play, where we don't say what we want, need, feel in a clear and direct manner often because we don't want to upset someone else or evoke a feeling in them, and that, my love, is a recipe for building resentment with ourselves and others.

When you are thoughtful and communicating directly, you create space for yourself to get clear on what you actually want to say. If you just lean on the old habit of indirectly communicating or not speaking up, you never push yourself to get clear with you or with others.

But you know I'm most interested in you getting clear with you first and foremost. That's the thing I see so many people struggle with. And I think our modern interwebs, social media world plays a part in that for sure. There are so many shiny objects and people to compare ourselves with, so many people out there telling us what to want and thus of course, capitalism, patriarchy, we got to always call those out.

Those forces are always in our heads telling us what we want, what we need, what we should desire, and all of that can cloud our ability to hear

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our own voice and to name our needs clearly. So start with you, my darling, in getting clear with yourself for yourself.

And of course, direct clear communication is also good for the person you're communicating with. It opens up real and honest conversation and gives you the chance to mutually get your needs met. Simultaneously, if our direct communication is attached to a request, then you can talk it out and can figure out a solution that works for everyone versus putting yourself in the martyr chair of not getting your needs met or putting the other people in the place of having to somehow into it or guess or read between the lines to know what your needs and your meaning are.

Direct communication also allows us to rightsize the situation. So here's an example from my own life, which I hope will show you just how layered this can all be. It can be a little long so hold tight, stay with my, my darling.

So the other day, I was listening to music as I often do and I was bopping around the house doing stuff and I said to my partner, listen to this song with me. And what I meant but didn't say was this is my favorite song from my depressed goth teenager years and it just came up on shuffle and it's provoking really deep feelings and memories for me and I would love to share it with you, and I would really like it if you could honor the fact that I'm sharing this with you by giving it your full and undivided attention.

So some bigger feelings got attached there for me and my partner Ash, poor sweet bear, listened in the way most of us would when the gravitas of the moment isn't made clear. When there isn't direct clear communication. And that was while finishing the tasks I interrupted with my indirect request.

They kept working on their stuff because I didn't ask them to do anything differently. So I didn't get what I wanted because I didn't fully realize it for myself, and I definitely didn't speak it. Ash's lack of response, lack of focus,

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lack of emotional reaction to the request I didn't actually make got all rolled up in my old stories of not feeling heard or seen or respected as a kid.

My inner child came right out. Made her presence known. And I hurt my own feelings there big time. And had I just said dude, this song is so vital for me right now, it's bringing up a ton of old memories and it feels really important, I'd like you to stop and listen. Are you available for that?

Then Ash could have made a more informed decision. Could have assessed their capacity and desire to put what they were doing down to pay attention, or they could have simply said I'm in the middle of something, can you circle back in like, 20 please?

But I didn't give them that opportunity because sometimes as humans, we don't communicate perfectly and that's okay. So after six-year-old me and 14-year-old me stomped her little foot within me and had her feelings hurt, adult me got to swoop in, to take back the reins and say hey Ash, I just got hit with some big old feels because I wanted something very specific from you that I did not ask for, and that wasn't fair or kind to either of us. I'm sorry about it. Could we try that again please?

And I was able to do that because I practice it daily. And because I know that my thoughts aren't facts. They're just a sentence in my mind. Here, that sentence was Ash is not paying attention correctly. Like that's a real thing, like you could even pay attention correctly.

Brains love to take subjective terms like correctly and make them feel mighty objective in our minds. What my brain meant was pay attention to me the way I want you to. I'm being vulnerable and that's scary. So I got to sit with that, to give that part of me some big, big love, and to come back to the convo as an emotional adult.

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Ash didn't hurt my feelings. I did by not communicating directly. So my darling, let's breathe into this. If you are not behind the wheel, if you are not driving and it's safe to close your beautiful eyes, please do so. Breathe into your body, take a moment to ground yourself. Get centered.

Think about a time when you have communicated indirectly. A time when you didn't speak up. A time when you didn't speak your mind. Feel into it. Where do you feel it in your body? Does that feeling have a color? A vibration? Is it heavy or light? Does it have a temperature?

Maybe you just feel tension. Maybe you feel nothing. That's all okay. This is a practice. Breathe into it. Hold space for your body to show you what not speaking your needs clearly or directly does inside you. What it produces for you. There is no wrong way to feel here. It's just an exercise. And you're not failing if you don't feel anything. You're just learning and that's so beautiful.

Now, I want you to imagine yourself simply asking for what you want in a simple, direct, loving fashion. Feel into that. How does that feel? Where do you feel it? Is there a protector part of you coming up to warn you about the dangers of speaking up? I know that feeling. That protector part comes up for me in my chest and in my throat and it's like, both my physical throat and my through chakra gets all woolly and tight and heavy and my throat hurts.

Whatever is happening for you, or if nothing is happening for you, keep breathing. Keep getting present for yourself. Let your body know that it's safe to ask for what you want and need directly. Without hemming or hedging or trying to get anyone else to feel anything. Let your inner child know too. You are safe to communicate directly. Breathe into that.

It is safe to know what you want and need. Breathe into that. Let's take a final slow deep breath together and out. Thank your body, your mind, your

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spirit. And when you're ready, flutter open your beautiful eyes. Hello my love, welcome back.

So we've got some homework. You know I'm obsessed with awareness so your homework is this. I want you to start by literally just asking yourself what you want in any given situation. Do it out loud when you're alone, or on the subway because who cares there, or in your mind. Acknowledge it.

I want it to be warmer in here, or I don't want her to bring her kids over tonight when we have dinner. I want it to just be us. Get comfortable with trying to hear that voice in your mind that says what you truly want and need. Remind that sweet voice in your brain that it will always be heard by you, and that others may not want or need the same thing and that's okay.

You don't need anyone's approval of your wants. You don't need anyone else to do what you want them to do. You just get to voice it and thus, to show yourself that you can speak your truth and the world won't crumble down around you.

I know that feeling of fear or worry about getting vulnerable and speaking my truth. I know it so well. And as always, remember, you can do hard things, my darling, including learning to hear your own desires and to voice them plainly, directly, without any extra BS, any emotional manipulation. You can state your truth.

So step one is to learn to figure out what you want. That was, as I've said, really challenging for me at first. I didn't have a lot of clarity around my own wants and needs and therefore, well, it was hard to speak them.

So the next step, my love, is you guessed it, to be your own watcher. And if you don't know what that means, finish this episode and hop on back to episode two, which feels like 147 years ago, which is titled Watcher, or Be Your Own Watcher. Something like that.

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The next step is to be your own watcher. To start noticing and getting present to when you speak indirectly or directly. If you're choosing or that inner child within you, some part of you is choosing to communicate indirectly, ask yourself why you're doing it and try to dig into the motivation and intention behind your word choices.

Start with being gentle and loving with yourself. Again, you're not bad or wrong for speaking indirectly. It's just a habit. A habit you can undo if you want to and it's always your choice. And it's going to take practice and that's great. How lovely to get to practice something new? Especially something so foundationally self-loving, and so kind to others, which is an added bonus of course.

When that feels comfortable, when you feel awareness in your heart, mind, body, before, during, or after an indirect communication, pause, bring love to yourself, and then pull back and try again. One of the things my partner Ash and I have done is we've decided to give each other the grace and to allow each other to say, "I'm working on speaking more directly and I just heard myself throw you an indirect. Can I try that one again?"

It's been really helpful to have that understanding between us. Let me be real and own this. Ash is a lawyer and has absolutely no problem speaking directly. It's me practicing and that's great because I'm doing my best, I'm practicing. Every day my best gets a little more better. So yeah, gosh, moons ago at the beginning of our relationship, I feel like I said this like, really frequently.

"Hey, can I try that one again? That sounds indirect in my ears." And Ash wonderfully agreed to that, so that's something you could try to set up with the people you love in your world and even if the other person doesn't agree to it in advance, it's something you can definitely do. At work, at home, with your friends, with your partners, give it a try.

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It'll likely feel super uncomfortable. I mean, it felt terrible at first because I was still in the habit of beating myself up for like, not doing it right. And that's okay. The more I practiced, the more I was able to bring compassion to myself to be my own watcher, to do so with peace and love in my heart.

And part of it was about reminding myself I can do hard things. You can do hard things, including to learn how to communicate in a new and potentially really awkward at first way. Because it's awkward to be like, I said that like, real sideways, let me try it again.

And the more you do it, it's like anything else. Like riding a bike is super awkward. It's like, all wobbly and weird, and then you just do it and it's not something you ever think about again. So that.

And also remind us that pausing is as always, vital for making change. And this is no exception. What has helped me the most is learning to bring a wee pause into my mind before speaking. And in that pause, I ask myself what I want and need to say and mentally strip all the indirect language from it and say it plainly in my mind.

Please, turn down the volume on the music. Please do your dishes. Please return my pen. No complications, no BS, no padding. Please, lower your volume if you're going to be speaking to me. Please don't swear at me. And this is not cruel or harsh or mean. In fact, it's the first part of setting a healthy boundary.

These things are part and parcel. They go hand in hand. The person you're speaking to may think that your direct communication is cruel or harsh or mean, the same way a lot of people don't like it when we set boundaries, and that's okay.

See, you may have a speaking habit, a thought habit and other people — well, you have them too, right? But have hearing habits. We're used to

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hearing things in a specific way. And each of us has our own triggers, our own childhood stories, our own experiences. And each of our stories, our habits, our experiences, that's theirs.

Just like you have thinking and speaking habits, other people have theirs. And how lovely to recognize that? And you can be direct while still having kind, loving energy while still saying please and thank you, which I highly recommend in fact, because why not be polite. But also speak your mind, my darling.

Get to know yourself ever more. Be your own watcher. Learn to listen to that voice inside you that says I want, I need. Here is my limit. Here is my boundary. I get to speak this.

Alright my loves. I feel like I could wax on about this one for like, hours and hours but I shan't. You have things to do. I want to thank you as always for listening. If you're enjoying the show, please do subscribe, rate, and review on the iTunes. It really helps people to find the show and I want to stay in touch.

So I'm planning all of these exciting things. I have breathwork classes starting weekly here in New York City for those of us in the city. I'm going to be launching more online breathwork courses that you can do virtually from anywhere in the world.

My last course had folks in Australia, Scotland, Argentina, obviously, because you know, cousins. And here in the US, oh, and Canada. Very exciting. I'm also planning a bunch of retreats for the coming year so there's a lot of exciting stuff going on.

So if you go to the podcast section of my website, there's actually opportunities to sign up for my emails all over my website. But if you go to



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the show notes, that's [victoriaalbina.com/33](http://victoriaalbina.com/33), that's the page for this show and you can sign up for my emails there. I don't want you to miss a thing.

There's so much coming up, including a big massive online coaching program where you can take the lessons from the podcast. Take them deeper, learn them, apply them to your life, which is so exciting.

Okay my darlings, I said I'd let you get back to doing the dishes, walking to work, whatever. So this has been such a pleasure. My life is so much better since I learned to communicate directly with myself and with other people. So I will leave you with that. I know it feels challenging at first. I know it can sound kind of scary, and that's okay.

Those are just thoughts creating feelings. You can take this work on, you can make it your own, and you can learn how to get your point across in a way that honors you and the person you're speaking to. Alright my love, remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us 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](http://VictoriaAlbina.com) to learn more.