

## Ep #41: Boundaries and the Holidays



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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As the winter holiday season begins, so many of us are gathering with family and friends, perhaps going back to our families of origin or the places we grew up, seeing folks from high school, folks we haven't connected with, maybe in years. While this season can bring so much peace and joy, it can also be quite challenging, particularly if you're on a path of healing, of finding self-love, of figuring out how to support your inner child and reparent yourself, if you're learning how to deeply attend to your own self-care as an adult in the world.

Being with family can be complex, for sure, particularly if you're not yet skilled in setting boundaries or knowing your own limits – our topics for today. 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 realized that this episode was set to go live on Thanksgiving morning here in the US, so I decided to shift my schedule a bit to share a short episode about boundaries and limits because holidays can feel really challenging if you're coming to them with an unmanaged mind, from a place of emotional childhood, without a sense of your own limits, not knowing how to set boundaries.

And I want to provide a bit of support to make today and the upcoming December holidays feel a little – or hopefully a lot – better for you. Back in episode five, which feels like about 473 years ago, I laid out the foundation for the concept of boundaries, which is something I knew nothing about growing up.

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Boundaries and internal limits weren't a part of my family life, my friendships, my relationships. I didn't know what they were, how to feel my limits in my body and to respect them, or how to know I wanted or needed to set a boundary. I didn't know how to set one without tons of guilt or shame or blame and I certainly didn't know what to do if the person I set a boundary with didn't like them.

So I would just cave. And then I would get super resentful, and then passive aggressive, so the opposite of all things cute, and whatever cute, but like, so not helpful and so antithetical to my own goal of having peace in my heart.

So, on this Thanksgiving morning, I want to pause and to give great thanks to all of the amazing teachers in my life who've taught me about boundaries and limits, who have modeled having them, honoring them, and have lovingly called me in when I have failed to set my own boundaries.

I know that I would still have so many self-harming habits of beating myself up for not sticking to a boundary I didn't even know how to set, of shaming and blaming and guiltting myself, of rolling around in codependent thinking, not listening to or honoring myself, if it weren't for all those teachers. And I bow to them in deep and great gratitude.

So, in episode five, we talked, you and I, about boundaries as the clear clean emotion-free statement of what you will do for yourself, not to change or control the other person, just to take care of you when someone else does something that's not working for you. If you do X, I will do Y.

If you raise your voice in a conversation, I will step out of the conversation. If you drink to the point of excess, I will call you a cab and will ask you to leave my house. If you talk about my weight or my body, I will let you know I'm going to change the subject now, or I'll let you know that I prefer not to talk about my weight. If you try to discipline my kids or insist that they give

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you a hug or a kiss without their consent, I will ask you not to do that. And if you continue, I will ask you to leave my house.

Boundaries are what you will do in response to someone else's action. If you do X, I will do Y. they come from a place of deep self-love and self-care and are stated without emotion, that is they're not statements laced with guilt, shame, blame, anger. And they can be flexible.

A boundary is not a brick wall. It's a statement that can open a conversation. If you stay out past midnight, I will likely be asleep when you get home. If you do X, I will do Y. So a conversation could happen there; a loving or just neutral discussion of timing of plans, for example.

A boundary can be flexible if the boundary setter wants it to be. Boundaries don't always end the conversation and they can shift and move and grow as needed, and your boundaries are yours. They're about what you are going to do to take care of yourself, not an attempt to control or manipulate another person. You're just laying out your own responses in a self-loving kind way, nice and simple.

And then that other person can make their own adult choices about their behavior and you will continue to take care of yourself in your way for you. Boundaries are made from a place of knowing the other person is capable of making their own decisions.

Setting boundaries doesn't mean that you're cold or mean or unloving. Boundaries are about you understanding your limits, honoring them, and clearly stating them. This is an empowering thing for all involved. I will make my choices, you will make yours. It's a gift to both parties, truly.

And when we don't set boundaries and instead do things that we don't want to do to attempt to be nice, we are living in a form of dishonesty. We

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are trying to convince another person to think something of us that we'll likely resent them for later.

A limit is what you will do in response to someone else, and the A-line, the action only involves you, not what you'll ask of someone else. If X happens, I will do Y for and by myself. And I think most of us have experienced feeling like we've hit our limit. Sometimes it's with a person and a conversation, sometimes it's studying. I remember so many long nights when I was doing my medical training just studying and studying, and it was like I hit a wall. I hit my internal limit.

And sometimes, I would try to push through it, but it never really worked. Anything I studied past that limit never really sunk in, and then I was just exhausted the next day. Maybe you've felt like you've hit your limit when you're eating or feeling tipsy when drinking, but you have that next drink anyway.

You always have the choice to keep on keeping on and push on through that limit, but know that there will be a consequence, such as getting over-activated in your nervous system, or getting a bellyache, or being drunk and then having a hangover the next day. There is always a consequence for pushing through a limit.

The work here is to learn to recognize your internal limits and to pay attention to them. Knowing your limits can often be an important first step in setting a boundary and taking care of yourself. This is deep embodied self-care, embodied meaning you feel it, you feel it in your body, not just think it in your head, but rather feel into your intuition, your knowing, your nervous system, your cells, your one perfect human body.

And living in radical self-love and living an intentional life in which you're paying attention to yourself and your internal signals, respecting them, honoring them, and acting on them is such a beautiful way to show up for

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yourself, and this is the bedrock on which lasting sustainable self-care is built.

To situate the concept of limits within the holiday setting, some examples of limits could be around gossips. So my coaching client, Sarah, was sharing with me that her in-laws love to gossip. They talk about pretty much everyone in the family, everyone in town, and they often try to bring her in, to get her to complain or to criticize others with them, which she doesn't want to do.

So for years, she used to just sit there and feel really uncomfortable, like seething internally, feeling her body get squirmy with discomfort, her body sending her vital signals about the situation through her vagus nerve. But Sarah didn't want to be impolite or to upset anyone or to have anyone get mad at her.

Meanwhile, she was getting upset, she was getting mad at her and she wasn't being nice to herself in this situation. She had hit an internal limit that, "I've had enough of this, thank you very much," moment and she didn't know what to do next.

So, we did what we do. We did some breathing to help her center and calm herself, reconnect with her body through a body scan meditation, and then we did our thought work, recognizing, as always, the societal context and her nervous system's activation.

Sarah decided that she wanted to practice the thought, "Gossiping isn't aligned with my values and I can excuse myself if I want to." She felt calm and in control when she had that thought. She felt in her body, not subject to her bodies cries for her to pay attention to the crossing of this limit.

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Along with some slow deep breathing and the practice of these new thoughts ahead of time, in the moment, Sarah was able to take the action of simply and directly saying, “I’m going to bed y’all, sweet dreams,” when the conversation turned to gossip. The result of that action was that Sarah would calmly leave the table, taking good care of herself, showing herself and her in-laws such deep love by not judging them, which she used to do.

And that’s the irony, right? She was judging them for being judgmental of others. And then she’d feel anxious and tense and would end up feeling like she betrayed herself, or she would leave the room in a huff, resulting in even more discomfort all around.

One of the things that helps me and my life coaching clients so much is to think about scenarios ahead of time and to plan for them, knowing what we know from past experience, like how Sarah knows that, towards the end of family gatherings, the conversation is likely to turn to gossip.

Another example would be if a parent or someone you love is an alcoholic or tends to drink to excess, you can know, going into that holiday situation or any other situation that when that person has the third drink, that’s your cue to leave the room. That’s your internal limit.

And sure, you can do the thought work to stay if you want to stay around someone who’s intoxicated. If it isn’t bothering you at all, right on. Or, if it is a concern in your life, if it’s something you’re not comfortable with, don’t want to be a party to, you can simply recognize your own internal limit and decide that it’s time for you to leave a situation.

And the thought work comes in for me to get to a place where I’m leaving in an emotionally clean, clear way, where I’m not leaving in anger, in a huff, pissed off, frustrated, which is what I always used to do. Instead, doing my thought work both in advance and in the moment helps me get to a place where I’m leaving as an emotional adult, not out of emotional childhood

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knowing that, in this example, the person who drank to excess and who was intoxicated, their drinking didn't make me feel anything, my thoughts about it did.

So I can choose to release judgment or frustration to put down my expectation stories for how other people should behave to release the story, "Parents shouldn't get drunk on holiday," and I get to do all of that for my own sake because I can't change anyone else's thinking, anyone else's drinking, anyone else's gossiping.

The only person I can affect in that moment is me. And so I can choose the thought, "He's intoxicated and I don't want to be around that right now," Without all the extra suffering, the recriminations, the judgment. I can recognize my own limits, can get clear on my motivation, intention, and story. | I can just take myself to bed.

This isn't to say you won't have feelings in that process of just taking yourself to bed. Of course, you'll have feelings. To have feelings is human and perfectly normal and a wonderful reminder that you're a complex mammal who's alive.

I just want to encourage you to act from a place of taking care of yourself versus a place of trying to manipulate anyone or to try to make someone feel or think something. I want you to end the conversation, to go to another room, to leave the party when you want to do so because you want to, and to do so peacefully.

Go wash the dishes. Take the dog for a walk. Take a break. Excuse yourself to the bathroom. Make a phone call. Listen to your body saying, "My darling, I've hit my limit with this. And that's okay. Do so before you react so that, instead, you can respond with self-love and you can make a choice that reflects that decision to take loving care of yourself honoring your internal limits.



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The key to this all is being your own watcher and having that internal awareness. The central organizing tenet of everything I teach is how to live an intentional life, one where you are not subject to your brain's habitual thinking, but rather are managing your own mind, not living at the whim of your lizard brain.

And that, that takes practice and work, and it takes mindfulness, self-reflection, and self-love. And the beauty of these practices is that by doing them, by checking in and attending to the think-feel-act cycle within you, you build more mindfulness and more self-love. That's pretty rad', I'd say. Self-love begets self-love. I feel like we should put that on a t-shirt. Shouldn't that be on a t-shirt somewhere? Maybe I'll make a t-shirt.

It also takes consciousness around cultural, familial, class, social conditioning and a recognition that many of us, particularly at the intersection of marginalized identities and those of us socialized as women are taught to prioritize or privilege politeness, not rocking the boat, making people feel comfortable versus speaking our truths or risking upsetting someone by saying what we really feel, changing the conversation, speaking up if something bothers us, or simply leaving the table.

I'll invite you to pay attention to your perfect human body. It will give you all the signals if something is working for you or not, regardless of what you've been socialized to believe.

Take a deep breath, feel into your chest and your shoulders, your jaw, your neck, your back. Do they get tense in these moments? Do you feel a little queasy or uncomfortable in your skin? Do your palms get a little sweaty and weird?

Our bodies, or nervous systems give us very subtle but distinguishable signs of nervous system dysregulation when something isn't working for

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you. And this happens sometimes long before you get overly activated and get into that full on freak out state.

Living a conscious checked in life starts with this kind of subtle somatic awareness. It starts with being in touch with your body and learning to listen, which may be wildly new for you, as it once was for me.

And babies, it is so worth getting in touch with your perfect body. And listen, I get it. If you're listening to this and you're like, "Okay, Vic, wow I am so not ready yet to set boundaries, like to tell my mother-in-law I'm not doing X, Y, Z, or if my father-in-law does this then I'm going to walk out of the room, wow, no I'm not there yet," that's totally cool. That's fine.

You can spend this holiday season doing the vital work of learning your limits, of getting in touch with your body. As things come up, pay attention. Learn to sit with yourself. Know that it's going to be mildly to ridiculously uncomfortable and that's okay. We can do hard things.

But this is your homework, my darling, this is the first step; awareness. And then, you know it, acceptance, and then action. So jumping to that A-line, the action of setting these boundaries, speaking to your limits, it may be well beyond where you are right now, and that's great.

Listen, if you've never run before, please, don't try to run a marathon. Start where you're at. Go for a little tiny walk and feel what it's like to feel your body walking down the street or walking through the park. It's totally beautiful to begin and end with raising your awareness about what your limits feel like in your body.

And know that that's your work right now. That's great. You're not, like, failing at setting boundaries. That's just where you're at. And this is what living a conscious aware checked in life means. You can't change what you

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can't see, my darling. Maybe that goes on the back of that t-shirt that I was proposing earlier, self-love begets self-love. Someone make that t-shirt please.

In conclusion, I want to encourage you to listen to your body and your limits, recognizing what you think and feel so you can move on from there; being curious and loving and open to feeling all your feels, even when they're challenging, and perhaps especially when they're challenging. Recognize the signs and signals in your body that tell you you've had enough of whatever the situation is, that you're done, that you don't want to spend time with someone who's gossiping, intoxicated, being hateful, whatever it may be so you can take steps to care for yourself rather than trying to change the other person.

Boundaries are when you let someone know, if they do X, you'll do why. It's all about taking care of you and recognizing that you get to do so and that doing so is a loving act for you, your community, your family, and everyone you come in contact with. Because if you're just reactive and not in awareness, you are not building an honest and intentional life. You're living in emotional childhood, which is episode 23 and is also a place I know so well, my darling.

I lived in emotional childhood for such a long time and particularly for people with childhood trauma, particularly unresolved or unattended to childhood trauma, it's a very tempting cozy place to stay. So no shade if you're there. I was there. It wasn't great. Like I didn't love being there. It actually felt pretty lousy most of the time, but also cozy in the way that two tight shoes feel weird when you take them off, right? Brains are so fascinating.

Anyway, I digress, but you know I always do that. My sweet love, you get to decide how you want to live your one human life. When I was living as a child in a grown-up's body, I was angry. I was resentful, irritable – oh was I

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irritable. And what I'm talking about here, my love, is recognizing what all of this feels like in your body and recognizing when you're reacting, when you're going to that anger, that irritability, that resentment from an old pattern, an old way of being in the world, when you're not listening to your body's signals that you are approaching or have superseded your internal limits.

Because if you're anything like me, that was the switch that would flip. I was fine, I was fine, I was fine, and I'd push through that limit, and then all of that ugliness came to bear, the anger, the meanness, being short with the people I loved, and that's just not a way I want to live anymore, so I do my thought work, I do my breathwork, I check in with my human body. I value the somatic understanding of my lived experience and I check in with myself. I check in around my limits all day long.

And I want to encourage you to do the same. The more in touch you are with your own limits, the sooner you'll know when it's time for thought work, for breathwork, for meditation, to excuse yourself from a situation or to set a firm but loving boundary, and the less of a chance that it will be you throwing mashed potatoes at someone this holiday season.

Alright, my loves, I hope this was helpful. It's been a real game-changer in my life to get in touch with my limits, to know them, to honor them, to speak them, to really take care of myself in this way, and it really is such a vital part of understanding that you need to set a boundary, feeling your own limit. Yeah, it's key.

So, I hope this was helpful. I also want to share that I have so many goodies coming up for you in 2020. I'm getting set to launch my six-month course. It's going to be called The Self-Love RX and it's a six-month coaching and breathwork program that helps women to reconnect with their radical self-love, to do exactly what we're talking about today, to live a wildly conscious checked in intentional life with less anxiety, less self-

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doubt, more confidence, more deep loving self-care. I'm so excited. My life is its absolute best when it is deeply rooted in radical unapologetic self-love; me first, you second, with love.

I'm so excited to share this with y'all, so there will be an application on my website. It's all coming. And I want to make sure you're on my email list because I'm only taking 15 people into the first group. I might even take a couple fewer. I want it to be intimate and cozy, so make sure you head on over to my website [victoriaalbina.com](http://victoriaalbina.com) and get on my email list. I really want to make sure that you are the first to know about it.

Okay, that's it. You know I get excited. I'm so excited. Alright, my angels, remember, my love, you are safe, you are held, you are loved, and when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling. Happy Thanksgiving, if it's Thanksgiving when you're listening, and I will talk to you next week in an episode all about doing the next right thing. Be well.

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.