

Ep #53: The Secret Sauce to Healthy Relationships



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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What does it mean to have a healthy relationship with other humans? Does it mean putting up with all their foibles? Does it mean putting your own needs last? Taking care of them first and making sure they're happy?

While all of that may be what you learned or what was modeled for you growing up, I have come to see just how beautiful and fulfilling my relationships can be when I do quite the opposite. When I focus on my own wants and needs, and my own personal growth first, including giving big love to my shadow side. To those things about me that are so challenging and important to see and embrace.

So this week, we're diving in to talk all about healthy relationships. Stay tuned 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. Things are really moving and shaking over here. I have so many exciting offerings coming up for you in 2020. A master class in May, day-long breathwork workshop on February 22nd in New York, I'll be doing another one in the early summer, lots of evening breathwork classes, and yes, planning that *Feminist Wellness* retreat for you all.

It's so exciting. I'm also really curious like, where is winter? This winter has been the most unwinter of my life. It has yet to consistently snow in New

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York City, which like, if it's going to be all grey and yucky out, I would at least appreciate some beautiful snow. But can't control the weather, can I?

It's been rather confusingly warm. But I have to tell you, as a hair-obsessed Leo, I am loving this humidity. My girls look great when it's humid out. Unweather-related, I am loving hearing from you all. I love getting your emails and your DMs and it makes me so happy, which of course is my thoughts about it, but there it is. I love hearing from you.

And I'm so excited about all the questions I've been getting for the upcoming Ask Victoria Anything episode that I'm planning to do soon. So if you have a coaching question you'd like me to answer, email it to podcast@victoriaalbina.com and I'll add it to the list. I'm so excited that I get to answer your questions.

So today, as we continue self-love month here on the *Feminist Wellness* podcast, I want to talk about healthy relationships. And I'm going to take a slight spin on what you might be anticipating. So for a second, I started musing on making a sort of how-to for healthy relationships. It would include things like be true to yourself, communicate directly, focus on your own healing, don't try to control others. That sort of thing.

And all of that's like, incredibly important. But I actually want to go deeper today, I do promise to circle back with my top tips because who doesn't love a how-to guide? I love one. That said, do you want to know the secret how-to tip for having a healthy relationship?

If you're a regular listener, you guessed it already, right? The key is learning to manage your mind and regulate your nervous system. That is to actively practice awareness, being your own best friend, and to align your think-feel-act cycle and bodily responses with that goal of being your own best friend. That's the secret sauce.

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Okay great, so thanks for listening. Podcast over. No, JK, there is much to come. So really, let's jump in. Alright, so you know me, nerd town USA. Let's start with defining terms. So I thought a lot about this, about how to define healthy relationships. And for me, it came down to this. It's impossible for anyone other than you to define it for you because it's such an ever-moving, ever-shifting thing in this life.

At some point in life, a healthy relationship can look like spending tons of time with someone, where you're feeling this really deep connection. And other times, having a healthy relationship with that same person can mean not seeing them, taking a break from hanging out, keeping a healthy distance.

And maybe at some point, that's the way for that relationship to be its healthiest. That is, for it to feel best in your body and to serve you, and potentially the other person in the best possible way. Relationships ebb and flow over time, and what might be healthy at one point is not at another. And different relationships feed us in different ways.

So for example, when I'm with my dearest friends, with Becca, Eliah, Asha, April, our healthy relationships look like immediately baring our souls and going super deep and talking about our soul's purpose and the complexities of living under late stage capitalism and how we're working on healing our trauma and codependency right now, what phase the moon is in, how we're feeling it, how we're living out our attachment styles.

I mean, we go deep. And we hold that safe space for each other always. And then there are folks in my life with whom I have a more surface relationship. Conversations tend to be about the weather, surface things about work, that kind of thing. We don't go deep in the same way but there is love and caring between us, and it's okay for our relationship to be what it is.

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It can still be an exchange of real sweetness, or it can really just be that surface thing where you see a certain coworker at the fax machine. Oh my god, does anyone actually have a fax machine? I mean, I do. But like, you see a certain coworker at the printer and you chit-chat, and that's your relationship, right?

So whatever kind of relationships you're thinking about, relationships that are in your life, it's okay and natural and normal and fine for them to be things that fill a different role in your life, and the roles of different people can change and shift over life. And what I find really important in all of my relationships is having thoughtful, healthy, self-loving boundaries, which I talked so much about in episode five.

And that is really so key for me in having a healthy relationship with any other person. So what I aim to do here today is to talk about what having healthy relationships means for me, and how I see this theme playing out for my life coaching clients. It's pretty easy for me to say what an unhealthy relationship is for many or even most of us, and I want to pause to be very clear about this from jump.

Things like non-consensual hitting, non-consensual name-calling, attempts to control someone's money, movement, time, contact with loved ones, these things are abuse and abusive. And they are never okay in my world. So that is not what we're talking about here. I'm not ever talking about managing your mind around those things. Not at all, ever. In those situations, I urge you to connect with resources to support yourself, which I'll link to in the show notes and to get out of those situations.

So, having said that clearly, putting those kinds of actions and behaviors aside, I feel like I need a deep breath. Let's take a deep breath in and out. Okay, I can feel myself. I got a little sympathetic there, which was totally fine. It's okay to have a nervous system that moves into different states and

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creates different stories in your body. Totally normal. I wouldn't want to not have those reactions when talking about abuse.

It's okay to feel sympathetic. It's actually in its way a great thing, and I want to get into that ventral vagal, that parasympathetic place to keep talking about beautiful things, so I'm going to take another big deep breath and I'm going to focus on expanding my belly. Okay, I feel my physiology calling, which creates space in my mind for smart cognition and to talk to you with love about smart things.

Okay, so, so much of what makes a relationship feel healthy and fulfilling is about how you choose to see it. An important starting framework and one I talk about an awful lot here because it really matters is that of adaptive and maladaptive behaviors. So as we're growing up, we learn certain survival skills and ways of thinking about ourselves and the world.

And I should mention, if you're like, what's that? Episode 19, all about it. So, in this process of becoming ourselves, growing up, we come to have beliefs and in this family, we define a belief as a thought that you've thought over and over and over again, until it becomes solidified as truth in your brain.

So we come to have beliefs about life, ourselves, love, other people, communication, relationships, and connection. And we believe those stories to be real and because they're the stories we've got. We learned survival strategies. Thoughts and beliefs from our family of origin, society, the culture we were raised in, in our childhood, our teen years, our early adulthood.

And our experience of these stories, these beliefs, they change as we grow. What felt like a healthy relationship in high school might not have felt healthy in your 20s. And what you learn to do to adapt to your environment

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in your youth may later feel maladaptive. That is, it's no longer the thing that helps you thrive, while it was certainly the super important, amazing, incredible thing that helped you survive.

And one of the things you may have learned was to have a certain relationship with your feelings, to feel them in really big ways, to stuff them down, to deny them, to not express them, or to express them at the drop of a hat. And I want to encourage you to get into a flow state with your own feelings. That is the energetics of the thing when we're talking about relationships, the energy is so important for me.

And as always, being in touch with your feelings, those movements of energy through your body is so vital. And finally, the way to not feel overwhelmed by them, to not tell the story that they are too much, or that it's a problem that you are not in touch with them, but rather to find that homeostasis, that place of equilibrium in the middle where you recognize that your feelings are your most important teachers.

And every relationship, romantic, friend, work, parent, child, is a potential teacher. And you, my love, you get to choose how much and what you want to learn. What truths about yourself and how you learn to be in relationship you're willing to see. That is, just because life gives you an opportunity to see a pattern doesn't mean that you're going to see it.

That's the work part of growing as a human. The part of actively becoming and being your own watcher and raising your awareness around your own motivation, choices, patterns, thoughts, which is the first step in making change. Awareness is so healing in and of itself. And awareness paired with thoughtful and courageous action, now that's how you start to live a deeply and powerfully intentional life, which is what I want most for you, my darling one.

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And listen, seeing these patterns in our lives, in our relationships, it's a lot of work, and it's challenging for sure. But is it not more work and more challenging to continue to be in relationships that do not serve? To continue to live out the same painful patterns? I know it was for me, and I repeated the same patterns in friendships, with roommates, at work, in dating and romance about 473 times before I started to see those patterns so I could change them.

And the thing to know is that if you run from something in one relationship, it will find you in the next. It always has for me. The things that come up in relationships, the challenging things, that is your own shadow side. A concept from energetic and shamanic and other healing traditions, and found in Jung in psychology, that refers to the unconscious parts of our personality that our conscious self, our egos do not identify with or do not want to identify with.

These are the parts we don't want to see. And what lurks in your shadows is not always a negative thing. Not at all. But it's the hidden thing. Like how I didn't realize that my thought habits were to be codependent, to people-please, to focus on external approval seeking. Until I started doing thought work and energy work and started to see those habits in myself and my relationships so clearly.

And this, all this shadow, this is what comes up in relationships. Relationships are amazing mirrors that way, which can make them powerful vehicles for personal growth and potentially amazingly challenging and painful. And those patterns you're seeing playing out, that's your stuff. That's your ancestral stuff, your corner of the collective unconscious that you get to choose to heal if you want to.

And I want to let you know that you are resourced. You are capable and ready to face those patterns if you want to. These patterns are the things

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that you are here to process if you want to grow and to decide how you actually want to show up in your life, for your own sake.

So we all get to choose every step of the way. Do I want to look at this shadow and work on it and process it and live in a different and more intentional way on the other side of it? Having integrated it? And as always, consent and choice first. Baby, you don't have to. It's a choice to take the more challenging road and it's your choice to make, my darling one.

When you see your shadow come up, you may be tempted to cut and run, to bolt, to quit the job, ditch the friend, end the romance, and again, I'm never saying to stay in abusive relationships. What I am saying is that when we are offered the opportunity to work on our patterns, to see them lived out before us, to see our shadow in its fullest glory, you get to get as much out of any and every relationship as you want to.

You get to choose to stay and learn about healthy boundaries, to stay and discover new edges of your own growth and learning. You get to choose to stay and learn as much as you're willing to. And when you bail, when you leave with that running away from energy, know, my love, that you'll take that shadow that is within you to the next relationship.

As Jon Kabat-Zinn, the Buddhist meditation teacher says in his book of the same name, "Wherever you go, there you are." So, let's say you're dating someone and they say that they need a lot of alone time, or they're just not into looking at their phone, and so they're not texting back as often as you'd like. And it's bringing up some abandonment issues for you.

Then that's what you get to work on, to get clean and clear and good on that for you. I get the temptation to cut and run, but I don't think it always serves us, especially when that choice to flee is instead of turning inward,

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to ask, what can I learn from this? And when you understand the think-feel-act cycle, you know that your thoughts create your feelings.

Always within an understanding of your history and habitual thought patterns, your automatic and autonomic experiences of the world, and you understand that the situation or circumstance cannot, does not ever create your feelings. Your thoughts about it do.

So leaving any kind of relationship, work, romance, friendship, et cetera, expecting that the leaving will change how you feel is a fool's errand. For example, if you don't feel loved or honored in a relationship, you'll take that underlying belief that you are unlovable to your next relationship. Whatever your relationship habits are, you'll stay in those patterns until you pause to work on them, to get them love, to understand them, to pause and break the cycle.

I'm not saying you need to stay in every relationship forever, not at all. I'm just saying that sometimes staying until you can figure out what's going on on your side of the street is an amazing gift you can give yourself. That is, learning to profoundly love yourself and to see the realities of your patterns without blaming yourself, beating yourself up, being mean to you about them, but using them as a catapult, an emotional catapult to really grow, that is the name of the game here. That's the gift of all relationships.

One common pattern I see in my clients is codependency, which is because I love working with codependency, having done so much work over the last 20 years or so to heal that habit of thinking in myself. So codependency often shows up as people-pleasing, seeking validation from others, and a hallmark of this trait is when your emotional wellbeing feels controlled by someone else's emotional wellbeing.

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It can sound like, I can't be happy until they are. Or, simply putting someone else's needs ahead of your own. In codependency, other people's approval forms your identity, and this can be subtle and insidious. And it can also be super obvious to everyone other than the person acting out the codependent habits.

This was the case for me for sure until my amazing BFF Becca pointed it out for me. I don't even know, it feels like at least 20 million years ago. So for defining codependent thinking, sort of writ large, as basing your own joy, happiness, and other feelings on whether other people approve of you and your choices, your thoughts, your emotions, if we recognize the profound pattern of looking for approval outside of ourselves, of wanting and trying to please others above pleasing ourselves, then one of the hallmarks of this thought habit is wanting and expecting other people to make you happy in return.

After all, you did put their happiness above your own. Is it not their job to do the same? Such a slippery slope, that one, right? Gosh, I'm just sitting here thinking about how often I did that. It's such a beautiful pattern to be free from. And I got free of it by seeing how I was acting it out in relationship, by not cutting and running, but looking at that really painful mirror and choosing growth.

And of course, I want to speak not just to the codependent folks or those raised by codependents, but to most humans socialized as women, in that many of us were taught the opposite of this. No one can make you happy but you, my darling one. And it is not your job to make anyone else happy because you can't. You just can't do it. It's that other person's thoughts creating their feeling.

And I bring that up because the best relationships happen, in my humble opinion, when two or more people come together, agree to each meet their

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own needs first, and to then meet in the middle to enjoy their time together. If one person is having a challenging time managing their own emotional life, it's unreasonable to expect the other person or people to be able to do it for them.

Of course, you can ask for support and I love it when you do, but the expectation of getting that support in the exact way you want and expect it is where trouble come and points to a pattern you might want to investigate. No one can make you happy but you.

Emotional results are responsible for their own happiness, and their own unhappiness. They're responsible for their thoughts, feelings, actions, including taking something personally, having hurt feelings. Clients often tell me that they worry that if they're the only one responsible for how they feel, they might relinquish responsibility for the way they treat other people, that they might become a selfish meanie pants.

In my experience, the opposite is usually true. When you act from a place of emotional adulthood, versus emotional childhood, which I talked so much about in episodes 23 and 24, when you're in emotional adulthood, you don't act in mean, unkind, or cruel ways because you're not trying to control others or get them to behave in a certain way.

You're no longer attempting to control the uncontrollable, other people, places, or things. It's that attempt to control other people's thoughts, feelings, or actions that lead us to raise our voices, to say cruel things, to pout or whine or act out of alignment with how we most want to show up for our human lives.

Trying to control others doesn't work. Trust me, I tried it for years. And it causes pain and tension in relationships. Instead, we can learn to stay on our own side of the proverbial street, letting other adults live their own lives

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on their own terms, allowing and holding space for them to behave however they want to, releasing our judgments, taking responsibility for everything that is yours, and nothing that isn't.

And staying in a relationship when you have something to learn. And lovingly bowing out as an adult, taking full ownership and responsibility for your thoughts and feelings when things truly no longer serve you. My love, I want to pause to say that pleasure, joy, companionship, camaraderie, these things matter. It's not all about shadows and suffering. Not at all.

I want to encourage you to find the people with whom you easily connect, with whom you laugh and have fun, have the deep conversations, or the easy light conversations, or the great sex or the fun meals or the awesome workout. Whatever it is that brings joy into your world. Knowing and understanding that it's your thoughts about those people and interactions that bring you joy, and it's okay to want to spend your time preferentially with folks you don't need to do work to be around.

Go where it's warm, my love. You get to decide when you want to do the thought work to make a challenging situation work, to make it tenable, to make it okay, to learn from it, grow in it, and there are some situations, like employment, where we get to - how to say this elegantly? Practice that more.

For example, not everyone has the privilege to just easily leave their job if their coworkers or boss are annoying to them. And so if that's your situation, that's a space in which you can choose to do some thought work. Looking at your own think-feel-act cycle around those coworkers, to find some peace for yourself, and to see that annoyance, our example feeling in this case, is a choice.

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Because it's a thought, right? "Megan in accounting is so annoying." And that sure, someone or something at work might be triggering your nervous system and your habitual thoughts, and that's okay. Because you can do the thought work for yourself to make it tenable while you make an exit strategy, versus complaining about them, trying to control them, or otherwise acting from a place of emotional childhood.

And you get to choose to stay in that relationship, to learn all you can, while choosing in your spare time and your time outside of work to go where the joy is, where the pleasure is, where the peace is. And I'll share that once you really like yourself, like, truly like yourself and act from that place, from that feeling, then making these choices to decide how you spend your time and with whom, when you want to do thought work and grow in a situation, and when it is just time to go becomes much more intuitive.

See, it's not all based in struggle and strife and shadows. It comes from knowing what will truly feed your soul and bring you joy. It's not about trying to force yourself to feel okay in a situation. It's definitely not about pleasing other people. Choosing to spend time with someone is about liking them, wanting to hang out because you enjoy being with them.

And when you can touch into your spirit, to your most loving inner parent, to your highest and most intentional self, you know who you want to spend your precious present moment with without BS, pretenses, obligations, expectations, resentment. It just feels right in your gut and your spirit, so you do it.

To put a finer point on it, the answer to our original question of what makes a healthy relationship with others is truly at its core, having a healthy and loving relationship with yourself. When you start from there, everything else in life is just so much easier, my darling.

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So, how do you do it? How do you have this healthy relationship with yourself in which you're seeing your patterns, you're getting real with them, you're coming into awareness, acceptance, action? I mean, frankly, you work with me. I mean, no, but really. This is challenging stuff to see.

Awareness is super-duper vital and it's absolutely the first and most important step. And this is a challenging one to do on your own, as is the next vital step, which is taking action. Awareness changes your perspective; action changes your life.

I highly encourage you to find someone with whom to do this work. It doesn't have to be me, but I love it when it's me because I love my work and I love what I do all day. And I am taking a few more clients before I launch my signature master class in May, so if you do want to work with me, make sure to hop on my schedule soon if you're interested in getting one-on-one support.

And you can also email podcast@victoriaalbina.com to get on the waitlist to learn more about my upcoming six-month master class, which will have a very limited enrollment. I'm keeping it really small and sweet and intimate. It's going to be a real healing community. So if you want to learn more about that, get on it, email my team, we'll put you on the list.

Okay, so in closing, I'd like to repeat some really key lessons from today. One, there is no one but you that knows what a healthy relationship looks like for you. And this very thing, a healthy relationship, its definition, its experience will shift and change and grow over time, and that's great.

Two, our individual concepts of what a healthy relationship looks like come from our earliest teachings on the subject. What was modeled for us and taught to us in our families of origin, our early relationships, and the things that lurk in our unconscious shadow side.

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Three, challenging relationships are our greatest teachers, and you always have the choice and the opportunity to ask yourself what you can learn from any situation for your own self, your own evolution, your own growth.

Four, what you don't heal in one relationship, be it work, romance, roommate, friend, family, will follow you to the next until you do the work to heal it. Wherever you go, there you are.

And five, hand on my heart for this one, my darlings. You are worth healing, my love. You are so worthy and deserving of the healing you desire. And we heal through the process of coming into awareness, of our patterns and thought habits, by stepping into acceptance that these things are real. They're what you've always done and that you're acting them out repeatedly.

This acceptance is devoid of self-judgment, blame, and being mean to yourself. Gentleness first and foremost, my love. And then after awareness and acceptance, we move on to taking smart and courageous action, to change your thoughts, to change how you feel, to heal your nervous system and to actively reparent yourself. These are the steps to living an intentional life.

A life in which you are not subject to your old stories, your own patterns, your unmanaged mind. A life of empowerment, in which you, my precious one, are the boss of you. This is the work I do for myself and with my clients on the daily. And it is truly mind-blowing.

Alright, that's it from me, my loves. Thank you for joining me on this journey today. I love talking about this stuff. Remember to subscribe, rate, and review on iTunes, follow me on the social medias, @victoriaalbinawellness. I just love being connected with you, so be in touch. It's a delight.

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Alright, let's take a collective big deep breath in and out. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well. I'll see you next time.

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.