

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Victoria Albina, NP, MPH**

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

Do you find yourself apologizing for having needs and wants? For setting a boundary? For taking care of yourself? Do you over-justify those needs and wants along the way? Do you apologize for things that just don't need an apology like being a human with a human body or a woman with an opinion?

I know I sure did, and my life coaching clients sure do on the regular. Today, we'll be talking about where this habit comes from, why we do it, and how it hurts us. And next week, we'll be doing what we do in this family and we'll dive into the remedies, the antidotes to this painful habit.

Does all of this resonate? Sound like you? 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 have been really enjoying this mini-series on apologizing. It's like, gosh, it's such a big issue and I can see that all of this talk about apologizing, the when, how, the why, has really struck a chord with a lot of you, and I'm grateful to all of you who've been blowing up my DMs over at @victoriaalbinawellness on the Instagram, emailing me at [podcast@victoriaalbina.com](mailto:podcast@victoriaalbina.com), and just letting me know that this series is hitting home for you, that it's been helpful.

And I'm so glad. I mean, first of all, the point of doing this podcast is to be of service, so to hear that it is actually helpful and supportive for you, I wish you could see my silly grin. Go follow me @victoriaalbinawellness on the gram and you can see my silly grin like, most days.

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

It just makes me so happy to think of you gardening and biking and walking into work and just listening to this and getting some support from it. So it brings me a lot of joy, my tender ones. And you know, I talk a lot about how collective healing is so important and it's so important for us to all be connected and to sort of rebuild the commons, rebuild our connection with each other.

Before corona, it was so common to feel so disconnected. Here in New York City, so many people don't know their neighbors. I am lucky to live in a very small building so I know all 10 of mine. Well no, there's 10 units. Not 10 people.

But anyway, my point is that it's so common not to know your neighbors, to feel disconnected, to feel really alone, and I mean geez, we've been in quarantine for how many months now? So it's really important to take any chance we can to connect.

So thank you for reaching out, DMing, emailing. Oh I almost forgot, babies, I did something so hip and modern and I'm going to keep using those words about it because they make me laugh because I am neither hip nor modern. But I got this really cool service where we can text. How fun is that?

So send a text message to 917-540-8447 and drop your email in there and I will send you an extra special present surprise to say thank you for taking the time to connect. And if you've already put your name on the list, drop your email in there too and we'll send you pressies. God, I love presents.

Okay, so you are here for installment number three of our mini-series on apologizing. So let's dive into it. So this whole concept of apologizing is a complex issue for many of us, especially for those of us raised and socialized as girls and women. We have been taught over and over and

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

over again, well, to be sorry for just about anything that involves us asserting our right to be.

That is, we apologize for simply being, for existing. And I hear it all the time. I'm sorry for crying during a session, for having a bellyache or other indication of having a human body, like needing to pee, needing water, being hungry, feeling unwell, needing a rest, for needing specific foods like a gluten-free or dairy-free option, which often comes out as, "I'm so sorry but gluten just makes all my joints hurt and dairy, it just really destroys my belly. I'm so sorry."

That comes out with a lot of justifying and explaining. I hear a lot of sorry for speaking or having an opinion, such as, "I'm sorry, I just wanted to add something to the conversation." Lots of sorries for not wanting to go out or go to a party, for wanting to out or go to a party, for having boundaries, for not having boundaries, for being a professional with training and experience and knowledge to share.

"I'm sorry, I'm just a nurse but..." and while these examples all use the language stem I'm sorry, I want to reframe this specific kind of expression as a pre-apology or false apology, rather than a true apology. Remember that we apologize when something we have said or done harms someone we love and care about, even if it's loving and caring about them as being another human animal on this planet.

And then we go about owning our part of things, cleaning up our side of the proverbial street, offering a repair for the harm and doing our best to do better going forward, remembering that apologetic words are vital and important and changed behavior is what rebuilds trust.

So when you're out to eat and a server comes to your table and you say, "I'm sorry, I don't mean to bother you but I eat gluten-free and I'd like to

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

know what the gluten-free items are,” you haven’t done anything wrong. I mean, yet. Who knows what you’re up to.

And so you have nothing to apologize for. You’re at a business, one I worked in for many years, that specializes in feeding people, and you’re asking the food service professional, who I expect you to tip hardily, especially these days, for detailed information about the food they serve.

Nothing rude or out of line there, but I bet if we took a poll, so many of us could remember a time when we said if not those exact words, something along those lines. For our time together today then, we’ll talk about what it means to pre-apologize or offer a false pre-apology and how this false pre-apologizing may show up and what problems come with pre-apologizing.

Next week, we’ll talk about language shifts that can help us to own what’s ours and leave the rest. Are you ready? Let’s go. So my beauty, what is false pre-apologizing and why do we do it? Actually, as I’m talking, I’m like, maybe it’s pre-false apologizing? You get the point.

So this false pre-apology or this pre-false apology is a way to attempt to protect ourselves from the disapproval we fear another person may have of us if they don’t like what we’re saying, what we’re asking for, or what we need. It’s a way to people please in advance.

I love the old saying that fear stands for false evidence appearing real. As always, we have no clue what the other person is actually thinking or feeling about us, or what they might think or feel about us. Yet, we guard ourselves against someone else’s possible thoughts, so often, to our own detriment.

And its core, this false pre-apologizing is so often about attempting to please others or protecting our tenderest parts from possible judgment or

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

attack. All of which will take quite the deep dive into, my perfectly imperfect love.

So let's talk about social conditioning. Many, but certainly not all humans who are socialized as women and humans from groups marginalized by our F-ed up dominant systems are taught not to take up space, so as to appear less threatening. To be easygoing, to demure, to not call attention lest someone think ill of us, princess awaiting rescue from the castle on the hilltop by the knight in shining armor.

And I want to empower you, my darling, not to wait for the knight. But rather, to rescue yourself as it were on the daily. To stand firm in your own wants, needs, beliefs and decisions and not to shift or change those needs, to not upset the proverbial apple cart. To be real.

Strong women who say, "I have something to add," versus, "I'm sorry, I don't mean to complicate things but I have something to add to the conversation as an engineer with a PhD and 20 years' experience in the field. I'm sorry."

The bold women, the woman who says, "I have something to add here," are often treated differently. This isn't a new concept. I mean, this shit's real, but like, very real. A woman who says what she feels is labeled shrill, bitchy, demanding, and a man who says the same thing is labeled as strong, decisive, powerful. There are so many studies showing this. I'm not making this up, my darling.

And this isn't fair or okay. But it's what is today. And it's a system we get to dismantle, starting internally and rippling that outward. If you are a human of color, especially a woman of color, oh mittens, it is doubled and tripled and quadrupled. All this labeling, all this pre-judging that is so well documented in the scientific literature, the social science literature that is, the psychological studies.

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

Humans of color are judged so much more harshly in our racist society. The dominant racist society. So that's not okay. None of it is fair, none of it is okay, and while we work to overthrow the patriarchy, rewrite the last 400 plus plus plus years of racism, you may get called named and feel hurt by it, which is totally normal.

Or you may not speak your mind and suffer in silence. My sweet darling, this is some second arrow business and if you don't know what the heck that is, do go back to episode 15 please to recognize that you suffer either way. So why not state your needs, get what you want or attempt to, feel all the feels about how yucky and scary that feels, how unfair and F-ed up?

Give your inner children so much love. Reparent yourself. Connect in with community, with others who have felt the same experience, who have lived through this, to get mutual aid and support, to not ever go it alone so you can process all those feels through your perfect body.

So you can then do the thought work to begin to feel a little less terrible because someone called you a lousy judgmental name. I know it's a challenging concept, but what other people think of you is truly none of your darn business. It's all about them and their thoughts about us. But not actually about us.

It's just their thoughts pointed towards you. And you can, with practice and self-love, collective care, learn to feel and process those emotions to give them and your inner childrens so much love. So you can rewrite how you choose to interpret the things that people say to and about you.

We do this to bolster ourselves within, to empower ourselves, and ripple it out as collective action for change. And my beauty, if you're new to the show, welcome. You are loved. And if you're wondering what the heck thought work protocol means, after this episode, go back and listen to

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

episodes 35, 36, and 37 where I explain the thought work protocol in so much detail.

So to loop this back to women and other humans disenfranchised by all these systems of oppression, with pre-apologizing, there may be a perceived cost to speaking plainly, directly, and without demurring. And to be very clear and I think I have been, but that cost is real. That cost is real. And it is often strategic to take a different stance in life.

But the cost of not owning our power is in the long run, for our bodies, minds, hearts, spirits, collective healing, so much greater than being called shrill or bossy or overbearing. Let's take a big deep breath in and out.

So now we have a sense for what I mean by this false pre-apologizing, what it's all about. So let's talk about how it may show up. One place I see this false pre-apologizing show up is when we take responsibility for something we didn't do wrong or simply didn't actually do at all.

When we pre-apologize in this way, we are in fact apologizing for other people's thoughts or mistakes, which may appear to relieve them of the burden of that misstep of their own, but it really disempowers the other person, who then doesn't get the opportunity to step up and own what's theirs.

And also, disempowers us as we take on someone else's issues as if it were our own. Perhaps you've said or heard people say things like, "I'm sorry to trouble you but can you help me carry this? It's really heavy." I'm sorry to be a bother but you missed your due date. Could you send me that report that you said you've have done three days ago?"

"I'm sorry, I'm super allergic to nuts and I asked to not have any nuts on my salad and I think this is a pistachio and I'm sorry but I will go into anaphylactic shock and I literally could die. Could I trouble you for a new



## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

salad?” “I’m sorry but your son has been taunting my dog and throwing things at him and I’m sorry but could you ask him to stop please?”

Or maybe you find yourself in a situation where you felt uncomfortable with someone’s behavior and you sit down, you get out your pen and your paper, you write out circumstance, thought, feeling, action, result. You do your thought work protocol around it, and you recognize the behavior as something that crosses a boundary for you.

But instead of setting a limit, you pre-apologize and/or make up an excuse, explain your position rather than claim it. Let’s say you’ve set boundaries for yourself around the wearing of masks. A timely topic these days, especially here in the massive humanity that is New York City.

And a friend or whomever comes close to you unmasked. From your habitual thought patterns, you say, “I’m sorry, but could you please put your mask on? It’s not that I don’t trust you or that I think you’re sick. I mean, I could be an asymptomatic carrier. I could be sick and just not even know it. Who even knows? What even is this virus? It’s all so confusing. I’m sorry, but if you could please put your mask on.”

And on and on it goes. You, my love, have nothing to apologize for. And no reason to justify your decision and your needs. An alternative request could have been, “I’ll need you to put on a mask if you want to hang out with me in person. If you’re not into wearing a mask, we could do a phone date. We could do FaceTime.”

Sometimes this habit even extends to us apologizing for things that are really failures of systems and structures such as apologizing for bringing your child to an event that doesn’t provide childcare, apologizing for needing a translator at an event that doesn’t provide one.

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

Or we could find ourselves apologizing for calling someone in or out for racist, sexist, ableist, or other comments you find problematic. Not only are these things not your fault, but by apologizing for them, remember that you're taking responsibility off the parties who may in fact actually need to fix the problem.

"I'm sorry, but could you just not call the civil rights movement that's happening right now riots and looting? I'm sorry, but I'd really like it if you didn't do that around me." Another super common form of pre-apologizing is when we pre-apologize by over-justifying our wants and needs.

Over-justification is so common in codependency, perfectionism, and people-pleasing thought habits. Because there's this part within us that doesn't believe that we're worthy of having wants and needs. And so that part speaks when we create some fantastical story to prove, to attempt to prove to another person why our needs, thoughts, or feelings are valid.

And often, this comes up when our small requests, our small needs weren't validated as children. When we didn't get that attention we wanted and needed, when we needed a snuggle, when we needed quiet, when we needed to play, when we needed to be heard.

And it's interesting, so as children, we just sort of whisper our needs. "Excuse me, can I have a hug?" And if we're not heard, we get louder and louder and louder. And because the average adult doesn't yell their needs most of the time, instead, we concoct these huge stories, these justifications.

These stories that are meant at their core to protect us from someone saying your needs are not valid. And my sweet ones, I used to do this all the time. It was just what I did. And I still find myself doing it sometimes and I get to pause, put a little hand on my chest and put a little gentle pressure

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

in there to bring me a little bit out of that sympathetic towards ventral vagal, slow deep breath.

What I meant to say was please pass the salt. No story needed. So whether we're justifying ourselves to ourselves or to someone else, this behavior is a denial of our needs and our power to manage our own lives as we see fit.

For example, maybe your mom calls and you don't feel like talking. Instead of just saying, "Mom, I don't feel like talking right now, can we connect later?" Or my absolute favorite, and I will invite you to write this one down because it's so useful, "Mom, I'm not available right now. Can we connect later?" How good is that one? I'm not available right now.

I also love to use it when someone wants to have a heated political conversation or get into it and I'm not in the space and I don't want to be in the space for that, I'm not available for that conversation. Try that one on. It feels really good. And it's just so like, clear. I'm not available.

So instead of saying something like that, instead, you say something like, "Oh gosh, I'm so sorry mom, the cat just knocked over a vase of water and then barfed in it and someone is ringing the doorbell and I think I have bubonic plague and actually acute onset leprosy. Yeah, acute onset leprosy because that's a thing and I'm so, so sorry but my nose just fell off and I have to go, I can't talk right now."

Okay, I don't actually think you're saying something like that, but come on, acute onset leprosy? Side note, you know I'm not going to make it through an episode without going way off topic. This is me, my angel. Here we go. My grandma, Marta Beatríz on my dad's side was a school teacher in our hometown of Mar del Plata and she started in the 40s and 50s, she started a summer program for the children of lepers.

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

So they were like, born immune and they weren't contagious because they had antibodies to leprosy, but their parents were lepers. And so people wouldn't let them play with their kids and their parents were lepers, people with leprosy, I apologize. Were people with leprosy before there was - now there's a simple drug treatment. It's less of a thing.

I mean, it's still a thing, but oh Maria Victoria, rein it in, kitten. Anyway, my abuela Marta had this summer program where kids would get these scholarships. She would fundraise all year and she would take them to the beach and she would teach them lessons and they'd play in the sand and she was a teacher, so there was a school component too to help them get ahead or catch up. That's really cool.

I never met her. She was killed by a drunk driver long before I was born, but I love her and I talk to her a lot. Anyway, any time I mention leprosy I think of my abuela Marta. Alright, let's take a nice big deep breath and out. Re-centering, re-grounding.

Okay, your mom calls. You concoct this whole huge story because in your brain, it's like, I don't want to upset her, I don't want to hurt her feelings, I don't want her to be upset. But instead of being direct and just speaking your truth, recognizing you don't need to apologize, you just get to say what you want, and you get to let your mom manage her own thoughts. You make up this story.

In that moment, and I know you're not trying to do this, but it's like, taking some agency and power away from her to have her own feelings when you try to pre-manage them for her. She is a grownup after all, or at least a human in an adult body. The emotional adulthood childhood thing, I don't know about your mom, but she's an adult.

And she can have any thoughts and feeling she wants to have about your life and your choices, her life, her choices. That's cool. Her mind is creating

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

those thoughts. They are hers to choose to hold onto or not. And they're not really about you. They're about her ideas about you. They are welcome to have their thoughts as you are welcome to yours.

Often, when we're pre-apologizing, we are trying to preemptively take care of the people we interact with, to try to spare their feelings by softening our statements or false pre-apologizing for having thoughts, feels, or needs, or a human body, or emotions.

I want to say this clearly for y'all in the cheap seats because this is an important point. People, and I mean grownups with all their faculties can take care of themselves. You do not need to caretaker other grownups. And if this is resonating for you and you're like, hey V, tell me more, go back and listen to the fixer episode was right before this apology mini-series.

So it is paternalistic, patronizing, and just actually not nice to attempt to manage another adult or another human's thoughts and feelings. It's not nice, baby. I know it feels like being nice but it's not nice. And it doesn't serve you, it doesn't serve them.

And listen, if another human, another adult doesn't like your needs, again, that's cool. Like, right on. Good for them. No one else has to like your needs or choices for them to be valid and really, you don't have to baby grownup humans because they may not like your request or statements.

Doing so is not living in your power. It's making your desire secondary to someone else's presumed discomfort or their feels about you having a voice and using it. Is this a C change for many of us? You bet. But by increasing our awareness, we can grow more and more into our own truth and live more honestly for ourselves and those we care about. We can live with more intention.

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

So why and how is pre-apologizing disempowering? What's at stake here? Also known as what is the problem with all of this BS? By pre-apologizing when you haven't in fact done anything wrong, you are asking permission instead of owning your wants and needs. It reinforces the false notion that you are F-ing up, which is so easy for your perfect body to interpret as I am an F up, I am a person who is always doing things wrong.

And a worthlessness spiral so easy to fall into when that's your story about yourself. And remember my perfect, beautiful, little sweet potato pancake, these kinds of thought habits are part and parcel of the survival skills your magnificent inner children learned in order to attempt to protect you if you grew up with a codependency, perfectionist, people pleasing, demanding, or neglecting family or had early childhood stress or trauma.

And there is nothing to be ashamed of ever here. This is just a place to give yourself more love and to raise your awareness around these habits. And of course, for some of us, it's not that deep. Maybe you think well of yourself. Like you're not actively hating on yourself or speaking poorly to yourself.

But you feel like you could have some more confidence, sort of like, yeah, you could live into being more confident in your day-to-day life. And so I'd like to invite you to bring your attention to how and when you might be giving your power away by pre-apologizing for things that aren't yours, or where you are over-explaining or justifying taking care of yourself or having a boundary or limit.

Finally, apologizing when you don't really mean it can lead to resentment, which we talked all about in episode 64. When we state what we want or need, we are owning our truth and allowing others to react as they do. Not taking it personally. When we pre-apologize, we not only give our power away, but put others in a position to soothe and comfort us because we're coming from a place of weakness, or simply not standing in our strength.

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

When the other person can't or won't meet this artificial need for comfort that we've created by pre-apologizing, then we feel hurt again. Unseen again. It's like picking the scab off a childhood wound. And suddenly a simple, "Baby, could you do the dishes tonight?" Turns into a seven-layered dip of false pre-apologizing, confusion, hurt feelings, disorientation, frustration, disregulation, resentment, and probably leads to a sink full of dirty dishes after a lengthy fight.

This demand on others to help us feel okay can be exhausting and can do a lot more damage to a relationship than just saying what we want plain and simple. And baby, I know this is challenging. It's such a new skill set for so many of us and you know it was for me. And that's okay.

You can do hard things, and by doing them and loving yourself and your inner village of sweet children so hard, by reparenting yourself daily with tenderness around these things, then you begin to shift the story from I can do hard things, which is a great place to start, to I can do things that once felt hard and they don't feel so hard anymore because I have re-patterned my beautiful adult mind.

Alright my sweet one, you got this my beauty. And remember, I love hearing from you. I just - it's such a delight. Head on over, follow me on the Instagram, @victoriaalbinawellness, drop me a text. Once again, how hip and modern are we? 917-540-8447. Drop your email address in there and we will send you a present.

God, I love presents. And yeah, let's be friends. I love you all. I don't even know you and I just feel this well spring of love within me for you. Alright, let's take another big deep breath in. So we're going to remember, when we take big breaths into our chest, that's actually activation energy. That's a little sympathetic energy, and sometimes we want that if we're feeling really tired or low.

## Ep #74: The Dangers of False Pre-Apologies

Where I want to invite you to go is to get a little ventral vagal with me. So we're going to take a big deep breath into your belly, so picture your belly button going out, out, out, out, out. Big breath in and now a long slow out. A long slow out, you breathe out a lot of CO<sub>2</sub>, carbon dioxide. And in doing so, you literally calm your autonomic nervous system. You calm your body. Science, right babes? The science of self-care. I'm a nerd for it.

Alright, thank you for joining us. This series is really, really fun. Make sure you subscribe to the show so you don't miss a thing. And we'll see you next week to talk about the remedies and antidotes to this wee pre-apologizing situation. My sweet 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, take good care. 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.