

Ep #110: Codependent Friendships



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With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, and Life Coach, Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. It has been such a joy in the last few weeks to do all of these extra special events for you all. My main goal in doing this podcast is to pay it forward, to be of service. As a white Latina who came to this country legally on papers, it is my duty to give back and I feel that beautiful call to be of service from my overflow.

And so I've been doing webinars, live question and answer sessions, sharing some clips from coaching over on my Instagram @victoriaalbinawellness. And it has been such a delight. Truly an honor to be of support to folks and to hear back from you all that these extra resources have been helpful.

If you are not on my email list, meaning you're not hearing about these things, you're going to want to get on the list. Email podcast@victoriaalbina.com and we will both put you on the email list and if you haven't already gotten my suite of meditations and nervous system orienting exercises, grounding exercises, I would be so delighted to send those to your email for free on the house, just to spread the love.

So drop us a line if you want the meditations and you want to hear about free upcoming events. It is such a delight to share them all with you. Okay my beauty, so today I want to talk about something that I hear about a lot. This came up a lot in the Q&A sessions.

I always do a Q&A after a webinar so I can answer your questions and help you out, support you, coach you, however I can. And a theme that kept

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coming up is this question. Can I be codependent or have codependent habits in relationships other than romantic ones?

And the answer to that is very much yes. One relationship that people don't think they can be codependent in is friendships, and I see this all the time. I get question after question about what to do if a friend doesn't give as much as you do, if you feel taken advantage of in a friendship, if a friend doesn't text or call as much as you do, if a friend leans on you for a lot of advice even when you are really going through it.

And I hear the hurt in your tender hearts about these moments when things feel imbalanced. So let's talk about it. So one of the things that's often missing when there is this imbalanced codependent energy in a relationship is boundaries.

As codependent and people-pleasing thinkers, we're often challenged by the concept of boundaries. Often because we didn't grow up with healthy boundaries or limits modeled for us by our grownups or because we learned, thanks patriarchy, that to be the good girl, to be lovable, we have to give more than we really want to, to keep other people happy.

And because the core wound of codependent thinking is believing that we have to be everything to everyone, other than ourselves of course, paired with sourcing our worthiness externally from other people, all of that makes us think it is our job in life to manage other people's lives and moods for them and to be a chronic yes person because disappointing someone by speaking our truth and saying no is just unthinkable at first.

And so it can feel really painful when someone else has healthy boundaries. When they say no when they mean to. When they don't text back for a week because they don't feel like looking at their phone. So

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boundaries are vital to happy, healthy, mutually supportive, interdependent relationships, which is of course the goal of overcoming codependency.

In codependent thinking, we don't know where we end and someone else begins, and boundaries are a way to separate that out. When we don't speak our limits or set and keep boundaries, which we defined in episode five, as saying if you do x, I will do y. And I highly recommend you go back and listen to that one.

When we don't do that, we're not taking care of ourselves or the relationship. Because without boundaries, we can get enmeshed with the people in our lives and can take their life on as our problem, as ours to manage, when that's just never the case, which we talked all about in episode 71, fixer fantasies.

And so we lose our individual identity and take on the likes, preferences, opinions, emotions of the other person as though they were our own. In codependent thinking, we have lost our anchor within ourselves, not believing in our own worth just because we exist. And we have lost our connection with our authenticity.

Instead, we chameleon. We shape-shift to be and say and do what we think others want us to do and say and be. And when you're enmeshed with someone else, a partner, friend, parent, job, child, you deepen the bonds of codependent thinking there and in your own mind and heart.

And from that enmeshment, you lose track of who you are and who you want to be in the world more and more each day. And when you don't know what you truly want, how can you take care of yourself? How can you attend to you? How can you parse out your own needs and wants?

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My nerds, as human mammals, we need one another. Connection, communion, coregulation of our nervous systems is a vital part of being a pack animal, which we are, and being connected with other humans, with friends who really have our backs is vital to our wellness.

And like so much of what we talk about here together, the issue is one of degrees and energetics. The thoughts and feelings you bring to the connection. So there's a really huge difference, and feel into this, my beauty, between, "I think it'd be really nice to talk this decision out with my BFF, she makes really sound calls and I'd love to hear what she has to say" and, "Oh my god, I just cannot make this decision without Megan's input."

What I'm pointing to here is this Buddhist concept of grasping, which is a form of suffering that comes from clinging to something or someone for our emotional safety. And this grasping, this needing of someone else more than we look inward leads to unnecessary suffering. When we make one person our everything instead of making ourselves and our own opinion, wants, and needs our true north star.

And when there is no emotional distance, detachment, unclear boundaries, it's so easy to slip into making someone else, be it a friend or a lover, your absolute everything. Which in turn can lead to painful imbalances in the power dynamics, which is also a key component of codependent thinking.

So when one person is the giver and one is the taker in ways that are unbalanced, we become reliant on that energetic exchange. And we lose track of our own minds. We can get overly reliant on our friends to fill a painful hole in our hearts. I've totally done it.

And so we become to depend on them to validate our choices, to give us permission to do what we want to do, we turn to our BFF to tell us that we

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are okay, good enough, worthy enough, in a classically codependent way that takes us out of living in our own power and sourcing our worth internally, which of course begs the question, what will your sense of self be? Who will you turn to if you have lived a life of turning externally for validation, for support, for decision making, and have prioritized that over building those skills internally?

What if she moves? God forbid, what if she dies? What will happen to you when that person is not available and you haven't learnt how to turn inward? What are the signs of a friendship all riled up in codependent thinking?

Well, let's start with the one I most loved to do back in my old codependent thinking days, which is rescuing. I've talked a lot about the fixer archetype in codependent thinking, where one person feels an urge to fix other people's problems like it's their job in life.

When that's your mind's habit, it's very convenient to find a BFF who wants chronic rescuing and who leans on you to manage their life and their mind for them. And vice versa, if you don't believe in your capacity to mind your own mind, to make your own decisions, to decide what you want without someone else approving of it, if you are not taking responsibility for your life, it's so cozy to find a BFF who is happy to step in and do it for you.

Now, obviously here I'm not talking about wanting extra support in a pandemic or after a divorce or a loss. But rather, the chronic constant daily or weekly rescuing that codependent thinkers just love to be on either side of, which leads to imbalance in their relationship because the give and take is off.

Here, the giver often ignores their own wants because they're busy rescuing. And the taker continues to externalize their lives, trusting and

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relying on the giver and her opinion, her thoughts more than their own. This kind of imbalance can often lead the giver to put their friends wants and needs ahead of their own and the taker to put the giver's opinion and preferences ahead of their own, which is at the core of codependent thinking and often comes from and leads to a lack of boundaries and limits, where one person's needs rule the roost.

And either role, you're so enmeshed, you're so deeply up in each other's business that taking care of someone else takes the place of taking care of you. So it makes sense that in a codependent friendship, you agree with your friend when you actually don't agree with her.

You tell her she's right when you kind of think she wasn't. You look past her being late, not texting, being unkind because you want her attention more than you believe you deserve kindness. You look to that other person to tell you what to do, think, say, instead of checking in with yourself first.

You dump all your problems out on him without asking if he has the emotional room to hear it because you just assume he does because you always do. You make choices for your own life based more on what your friend wants than what you do.

Logically, this leads to mixed together emotions, where our beautiful natural human empathy gets confused with the desire to be liked and thought well of. And through this process, you lose track of what you feel and what they feel. It all gets jumbled up.

So day by day, you are less connected with yourself and your own beliefs and truth. From this emotional enmeshment, it feels challenging to want to do what you want to do when your friend wants to do something different. You feel guilty for wanting to spend the night alone, for wanting to go for a

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walk or a hike when she has cramps and wants you to couch it and watch a movie with her.

You feel guilty when you start dating because you spend less time with your friend. And you worry about having different opinions that your friend might not agree with, like that maybe her boss is right and it's not just that he's a jerk, or that her partner isn't treating her well and you'd like to share your thoughts about it, but you're so worried about upsetting or losing her that you bite your tongue and hold back a part of yourself to please her without even realizing you're doing it.

When two people are so deeply enmeshed, jealousy is so common. A new friend or date or hobby or job feels like a threat to your source of validation and the friendship can get controlling when one friend feels threatened.

Finally, and this one is a big red flag for me and my clients share this one so often. Feeling just exhausted after spending time with your friend because you're being asked to give more than you're able to and you don't know how to set healthy boundaries because of the enmeshment and people pleasing we've talked about.

So when hanging out isn't a healthy back and forth of support and love and care but rather you're just giving and giving and giving, or you're reliant on that giving instead of looking within, of course you're wiped out. That makes sense.

Listen, I love giving. It truly brings me so much joy to be of service and it has to be balanced energetically in my life and relationships. In a loving, mutually supportive, interdependent friendship, there needs to be a balance of give and take and not just set rules that don't adjust for individual needs.

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And if this is resonating for you but you're like, I don't exactly do this in my friendships but I guess I really do this at work, or totally with my mom, then I'll invite you to just apply what you've heard and the remedies to follow to your own situation, my tenderoni.

So let's talk remedies. You know a nurse loves a remedy. Well, here, it's our tried-and-true favorite. Awareness, acceptance, action. So starting with awareness, it is now my habit to pause when I realize that I'm a pattern I don't like or don't want to stay in and I ask myself questions like how did it get like this? What part did I play in creating this dynamic?

And we do that with love, gentleness, and compassion. Not to blame or shame or guilt yourself ever. I ask what were my internal motivators for showing up in a relationship this way by being the chronic taker or giver? Do I go along with my BFF's opinions or plans because I actually want to? Or am I doing it so she'll continue to think well of me?

In those moments where I'm putting her ahead of me, do I like me? Do I like the version of me I'm showing up as? Am I trying to source my self-worth by being the dependable one with no needs? Does having frequent crises and demanding my friend's attention around them make me feel loved and taken care of in ways I am not providing for myself?

Am I playing out an old family dynamic in either role? In the past, I can answer yes times infinity for both roles for sure. And for me, the remedy was learning to support myself, to manage my own mind first, to honor and attend to my own inner children as my most loving parent first.

And then to turn to a friend, to give from my emotional overflow when my cup is full and to ask for support when I've done what I can to have my own back. Finally, recognize that in a codependent friendship, you rely on each other so deeply, you source your self-esteem and lovability from the other

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and are there by putting all your proverbial emotional eggs in one basket, which can be a setup for a lot of potential pain.

That does not mean to not get close with someone. Quite the opposite. But rather, to be vulnerable, open-hearted, and close without resting your sense of self on your friend's shoulders. It's not their job to carry that for you. That is your job to do for yourself, my darling love, and that's actually fantastic news.

After awareness comes acceptance. So here it starts with accepting, wow, I do this. This is real in my friendship or some other relationship. So often we create extra suffering for ourselves by fighting reality, by saying, "Nah, it's not really like that," and thereby not getting real with what's really happening and the impact it's having on our wellness.

Accepting that your boundaries are not clean and clear is vital if you want to set healthy boundaries moving forward. To answer the question I get so frequently, what do I do when my friend is a lousy communicator, when I text and call and they just don't text back for days and weeks, I will say this; if you want to be happy and you want this person in your life, you get to stop judging that person, their capacities and choices.

You get to stop wishing and wanting them to be different. So they don't text on the same schedule you do, okay, they don't like going out as often as you do, okay. You get to start with accepting them. With dropping the judgment, wishing they were somehow different and truly loving them for who they are, not who you want them to be.

And from the place of lovingly accepting your buddy just as they are, then you can drop your codependent attachment to them and can ask for things to shift if you want something to be different. And if your friend isn't game

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to, for example, text on the schedule you prefer, you get to remind yourself that you have options here.

You can look at why this is important to you. Why do you have that urgency within you for them to validate that you are important by texting your right back? You can choose to love them as they are, or you can stop being friends with them.

But being mad at them for being themselves, that's not loving or healthy for either of you, my sweet potato pie. So take a look at where you may be doing that and invite some more acceptance in as you manage your own mind so you can truly let others just be themselves.

You get to feel as much love as you want to in your friendships, regardless of how the other person shows up. And what's key here is understanding what you want. What your own limits are so you can practice putting yourself first, by setting those healthy boundaries and prioritizing them.

I find it's easier to start with smaller no's like saying, "Hey friend, I hear that you're upset, but I'm having a rough day and I don't want to go out tonight. If you'd like to come over, I would love to see you but I'm staying in my PJs." From there, you can gain trust in yourself to have your own back and to speak your truth in whatever situation.

I will quote the great Dumbledore and praise of Neville Longbottom here in saying, "It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends." That is, you get to say what you think and feel. Speaking your needs and letting your friend show up as their best self, or you can continue to struggle in a relationship built on codependent thinking, swallowing down your truth in order to keep this friendship going.

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And for you and your relationships to flourish, you get to build your self-love outside of the friendship so you can be your authentic self in the friendship. Like we talked about in episodes 27 and 28 about asking for and giving emotional consent, practice asking yourself what you're available for and start making the practice of asking for and giving emotional consent the norm in your friendships.

Before you dump your problems on your BFF, ask them if they're available to hear about it and get ready to hear no, which may totally hurt at first, and that's okay. When you honor your own needs and those of the people you love, you'll start to see when you are not emotionally available and can honor when other people aren't either. And can stop taking it personally because it never is.

When I'm not available to hear about a friend's hard time, it's not that I don't love them or don't want to be their friend anymore. It's actually exactly the opposite. It's that I love them too much to say yes when I mean no, which I know is a setup for resentment and annoyance and will make me less likely to answer the phone the next time they call, even if I do feel emotionally available.

Healthy limits, direct communication, and boundaries are key to taking care of ourselves and the relationships and people we love. It's not meant to say no and it's pure love in action, my darling. And sometimes when we set boundaries where we haven't before, the other person may no longer be interested in being our friend.

And that hurts, it totally hurts. Feel it. Be with it. Don't try to leapfrog over it by making them the devil. Feel it. And then you can do your own thought work on it so you can see that their thoughts and feelings have legit nothing to do with magnificent you and then you can ask yourself, do you actually

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want to be friends with someone who only wants to be your friend if you're abandoning yourself?

If you realize that you're in either the giver or taker role, remember, we step into these roles because that's what we're used to. What was modeled for us in our family of origin, what's cozy for us, because it's what we know, even if it hurts.

So your friend may not even realize they're giving or taking more than serves them or the friendship and this is where we bring compassion to ourselves and our BFF and get bold, even when it's super uncomfortable, and address the elephant of energetic imbalance in the friendship.

And from there, you can start to shift things. From being the taker, you can ask more questions about your friend, from being the giver, you can ask your friend to hold space for you. Paired with learning how to manage your own needs first, stepping out of over-reliance and into connection.

Connection based on wanting to give or get support, not from the needing energy that may have been your relational norm. You get to realize that it's not that you will lose friends if you show up as yourself, but rather the people who will really truly love and care for you, who love you as you really are, want you to be your total weirdo self, your crying self, your annoyed self, to be you.

And if someone doesn't want to be your friend because you showed up in your authenticity, then my love, is that someone whose friendship you really want? Because I'm done with that. I'm done with trying to get the mean girls and the cool girls to think well of me. I'm just no longer interested because it doesn't serve me to chameleon anymore, to try to be someone I'm not when I love the person I am within.

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Last but not at all least, I'll invite you to start to conceptualize and visualize what a more balanced and healthy connection could look like when you are coming from love first, which means not asking your friend to sacrifice their needs for yours and not agreeing to do that either anymore.

The more anchored you are in you, your wants and needs, the more you trust yourself to speak them, the stronger your interdependent friendship bonds can be, and the deeper your friendship will grow as you take care of yourself first, them second, with love.

If this has been helpful my love, if you've been enjoying and growing from and learning from all the free resources I put out, I want to invite you to check out my six-month program, Anchored: Overcoming Codependency. Head over to victoriaalbina.com/anchored to learn all about how you can spend six months with me and a group of amazing humans who are working to overcome codependent thinking in our lives, to step out of perfectionism, and people pleasing, and to step into true radical self-love, self-acceptance, self-awareness.

It is such beautiful work. We start up again on April 5th and at the time of this recording, there are just a few little spots left. So if you've been thinking, "I'd really love to work with Vic, I really am ready to dive in and to put an end to this codependent pattern once and for all," this is your chance.

I don't know if I will be offering this course again in 2021, and if I do, it won't be until way later in the year. So act now. If you're ready to make change now, step out of indecision. Be bold and say yes to yourself and your own growth.

Alright my beauty, let's do what we do. Sweet little hand on your heart if that feels supportive. Attend to and attune to your breath. Nothing to

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change there, just notice it. And remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. I'll talk to you soon.

If you've been enjoying the show and learning a ton, it's time to apply it with my expert guidance so you can live life with intention, without the anxiety, overwhelm, and resentment, so you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive intimate group coaching program, so head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there. It's going to be a good one.