

Ep #111: Curiosity



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With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #111: Curiosity

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. I've been thinking about how humans are such funny, funny little animals. We're born these wildly curious creatures who put literally everything we can reach into our mouths.

We explore the world with this passion and excitement when we're little. We're born so curious. So comfortable in not knowing anything. I picture my nibbling Layla, when she was like, one or one and a half, holding any new object that she had managed to grab. Let's say the remote control.

She would hold it up to a grownup, stare at it, stare at the grownup, and then she'd put it in her mouth. She'd taste it, she'd stare at it, she'd smell it, and she was so content to not know what much of anything is ever because she hasn't learned to have shame or defensiveness yet around not knowing.

Her whole jam as a baby is all about not knowing and curiously learning. And that is such a gorgeous thing. So this week, I want to talk about the power of curiosity. Taking my cue once more from tiny humans and puppies as to how to best live our adult lives. But you know, they really do know a lot about living from a big open heart, about trusting, about living your truth, about getting your needs met, and about being curious.

One of the things my father Jorge always says is that there is no proof in science. There's just today's evidence pointing us towards what we think we know. And the core of science is just that. Recognizing how little we do

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know so we can ask curious questions and can learn what else there is to know.

The difference between scientific inquiry and codependent thinking is that in our mindset, from codependency, we assume we know the answer, that we're right, and believing that we're terrible, we're lost, that we can't trust ourselves, our minds, our bodies, that our opinion doesn't matter, that people are taking advantage of our kindness, that we're selfish and bad if we have boundaries, that resentment is the right path, on and on.

In my coaching work, I invite my clients to step into the scientist role. To put their lab coats and their goggles on and to get curious about their own thoughts and feels, to hypothesize, which after all, is the cornerstone of the scientific method, which is based in not knowing and being curious about what might happen next.

As humans looking to overcome the habit of outsourcing or externalizing our self-worth, the habits of codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thinking, we get to learn to get curious about our own minds, our conditioning, our socialization, how we learned to have these habits and how they're showing up now.

How we learned to not believe in ourselves without someone else validating us, how we learned to push ourselves to the brink and beyond to get that A+ gold star all the time, no matter how exhausting it is, how we learned to put other people's needs ahead of our own, to go with the flow because conflict, even small, tiny conflict feels just not okay.

So we don't speak our wants and needs, so we end up resentful on the other side of it. Getting curious about our outsourcing, our externalizing thoughts is so key to changing them, to learning to live in a different way.

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Curiosity allows us to see the realities of our life so we can change it. And so it's time for the old fish in water metaphor.

So when you are a fish and you've only ever lived in water, you don't realize you live in water because it's all you know, right? I mean, okay fine, there are some wild assumptions about fish psychology in there but anyway, the point still holds. When you're raised in the patriarchy and white settler colonialism and capitalism, especially if you're socialized as a girl, patriarchal thinking is the water you swim in.

Judging your body, wanting it to be smaller or look a specific way, thinking you need to be quiet or not speak up or not create conflict or have an opinion, maybe the lessons you learned. Thinking there is something wrong with you if you haven't met societal norms like being married or having kids or some specific career by some specific age.

If you grew up with family who modeled codependent ways of living or caring more about what the neighbors think than what you actually think, family who push you to get the A+ always, and made your being lovable feel contingent on your performance, or if you didn't get the love and care and attunement that children need, if you grew up learning to do the dishes instead of going to play, to put the family above your own joy, those are all lessons you need to get curious about if you're going to change them.

So you can imagine other ways of living and thinking and being, so you can decolonize your relationship to your body and your mind. Curiosity is magical. I mean that truly. Magic happens when we are in that space of not knowing and wondering and being open to possibility, to playing and being playful around our own thinking, or open to being wrong, to getting taught, to learning.

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And my nerds, what do we love more than learning? Curiosity is about staying present and presently interested in what's in front of you. Not future planning, not ruminating on the past, not asking what's next. Not half-listening and planning your retort or reply.

Curiosity is about being where you are when you are. And given that this present moment is the only one we're promised, could there be a more beautiful way to live than by being here in this moment, heart open and curious?

Curiosity allows us to show up to life and to ask questions like, how can I make this simple? How can I make this fun? How can I learn here? How can I move forward in the most self-loving way? What other way of moving, thinking, relating, existing in my mind and body is possible? What assumptions am I making and what could being assumption-less look like?

How am I judging others and what could be more accepting look like? How am I judging myself? And how could it feel in my physical form to release that self-judgment?

Curiosity is wide-eyed playfulness, imagination, and curiosity leads to creativity, to finding creative solutions in new ways to move forward. And through that process, we can release our expectations. Our stories about how things and other people should be, so we can explore what is possible and can create new possibilities that might not have existed had we stayed in the energy of knowing.

Because when you show up from knowing, from believing you know the one and only right way, the best way, you lose out on so much possibility. The possibility that curious creativity brings. Sometimes not knowing and instead accepting and honoring that energy leads us to the most astounding outcomes from curious questions and curious interest.

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When we are truly being the scientist, from curiosity, we are not in judgment. We are in that open-hearted place. And the grounding principle of my work, this healing work, is to inhabit and embody being our own watcher, to think about our thoughts and feel our feels, which means getting curious about our own minds, our own bodily responses, to be open to learning, and thus, growing.

In my coaching work, we use two modalities. A top-down cognitive process through the think-feel-act cycle, the thought work protocol, and a bottom-up somatic process to get to know ourselves, to grow intimacy with ourselves. So we can understand and love ourselves and make decisions that serve our wellness overall.

Somatic is all about curiosity, about asking your body what it wants and needs and knows. Learning to listen in and honor our deep bodily intelligence. In thought work, we have to get curious if we are to understand what our socialization and conditioning have instilled in us. What the message is to be a good girl, a good daughter, sister, partner, wife, parent, employee, good person have led to in our lives.

From curiosity, we can ask ourselves, is this thought in my mind right now actually mine or is this an old cassette tape that doesn't serve me anymore? Curiosity can be the most potent path to integration, to finding deeper healing.

By asking open-hearted questions and seeing what comes, versus staying in the defensive stance that comes from thinking you need to protect your tenderness against the world. For us emotional externalizers, folks with these codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits, getting curious about our habitual reactions to life lets us see for example, where we jump to that pressured energy to please others, to do

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what we think they want us to do, to chameleon and shape-shift ourselves to try to make them happy and have them like and approve of us.

When we cultivate curiosity, we can pause in our daily interactions. Curiosity happens in that pause and allows for the shift. From noticing someone is upset and checking in, grounding ourselves in loving kindness for them and ourselves, instead of just jumping to do the thing you think they want you to do to save them from having their own human feelings.

Curiosity that lives in that pause allows us to ask, what's up for you, my love? Versus jumping to getting defensive, which comes from that codependent and people-pleasing impulse to protect and defend ourselves because we have the habit of taking everything personally.

We do that because we're not anchored in ourselves and our self-worth, so we believe we need to take everything on to mean something about us to stay safe, and curiosity allows you to shift. And so we shift from scared that another person may be having a feeling that's uncomfortable, to wondering what's up and how we can be of support or can learn.

From jumping to people pleasing to asking ourselves what is right for us in that moment. From presuming someone won't like your choice to getting curious about what you really want and need. From assuming someone is mad or annoyed at you to asking them what's up for them with an open, loving heart, knowing you have your own back.

Shifting from that fear-driven story that we need to know, to curiously wondering what is going on and staying open to possibilities. When our responses are curiosity based, we can depersonalize any situation and can be open to learning. How can I do this differently? What is this person thinking and feeling and how do I want to respond? How is this not about me but about their own think-feel-act cycle? Does it serve me to make this

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about my worthiness or can it just be about my behavior and their thoughts about that behavior?

Curiosity comes when we pause. When big, high energy, sympathetic-driven reactions arise, like being worried, scared, angry, or frustrated. Curiosity is presence in ventral vagal. The safe and social part of our nervous system. And being in ventral vagal opens up the possibility of curiosity. Isn't that beautiful?

In sympathetic or dorsal, there's little space for curiosity. So you can start to invite curiosity in by grounding yourself, by orienting yourself to time, place, and space. And my love, I have a free orienting exercise for you available right at the top of victoriaalbina.com because orienting is such a beautiful skill to help regulate your nervous system so you can anchor yourself in ventral vagal and can begin to invite more curiosity in.

What's really amazing about curiosity is that it's an emotion as well as an energetic state and it's one we can cultivate using the think-feel-act cycle because we create it with our thoughts, which is so beautiful and so empowering because it means it's yours. You can cultivate it with practice, by choosing to get curious and put knowing aside for your own growth, your own internal peace.

I know my nerds love their homework, so I want to invite you to get really curious throughout your day and to ask yourself, what if I didn't just assume I knew the answer here and instead, what if I got curious? Some other guiding questions for you to practice asking yourself are why am I getting defensive here? What am I making this mean about me?

What am I trying to prove? Why don't I speak up when I feel upset or hurt? What feelings am I chronically buffering against and how could I slowly allow myself to feel those feelings in a way that won't overwhelm me and

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my nervous system? Why do I placate others and do what they want to do when it's not what I want to do? Why do I make assumptions about what other people are thinking or needing instead of getting curious, asking, and getting clarity?

When we aren't in curiosity and asking these questions in a big, open-hearted, self-loving way, it's so easy to believe that we are broken, that there's something inherently wrong with us. But nothing, nothing could be further from the truth, my beauty.

It's just we learned to not get curious. And that may be because your inner children, your protector parts think it's safer to believe that you know the answers and because so many of us were conditioned by our society, by our schooling, by the patriarchy not to ask curious questions, but rather to walk in lockstep with what we were taught.

The things that teach us we are good to society's standards. To go with the flow by not asking questions, not rocking the boat, and I'll invite you to get curious about what these ways of thinking and acting have created for you in your life.

Is it a life you love and are excited to live? Are your life goals your own life goals? Are you living an intentional life like we talked about in episode 84? Or are you on autopilot, just moving through life the way you were taught to?

And listen, I get it, asking these questions can be so uncomfortable. I think we don't ask these questions because we're scared to hear the answers. We're scared to change. Scared to hear that maybe some ties need severed, some strong boundaries need put in place, and I get that. Totally.

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And my love, is your status quo enough? Aren't you curious what life could be like on the other side of your habitual externalization of your self-worth? We also don't ask the curious questions because we're scared of what others may think of us. That someone will tell us we're dumb for asking that question or quite frankly, we'll tell ourselves that.

Someone will say that the answer is obvious, that we totally should know that already, that we're somehow deficient, not worthy, or good enough for not having figured that out already, for not already having all the answers. We may feel like we're behind or the answer will just be so duh that we'll beat ourselves up for not having already known what we simply don't already know.

And that is evidence of perfectionist thinking at play because perfectionism is the BS story that you should already know absolutely everything and that there's something wrong with you for being a human, ever-growing, ever-learning, and not a walking encyclopedia.

The truth is my daring nerds, my perfect tiny tender raviolis, that it's hard to make change when we don't have curiosity because we can't see what our habits are and how they're impacting our lives. That is what we walk through in the thought work protocol. Literally writing down our habitual thoughts and seeing what comes from thinking mean thoughts about ourselves or buffering against our emotions instead of holding space for them in our bodies, when we believe that our circumstances cause our feelings, which they don't.

The thought work protocol is an amazing tool of curious inquiry because it helps us to see our own minds on paper, in black and white, so we can decide if we want to make other choices. And this is where working with an experienced and knowledgeable coach comes in because this work is challenging to just do on your own, my darling, which is why I have a coach

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and always will, in addition to my own daily self-coaching because it's challenging sometimes to see the truth behind the thoughts you've been thinking for 20, 30, 40, 50 years.

And it's the job of a skilled coach to help you ease into greater curiosity, to support you in posing a hypothesis and then running the experiment to see what comes of it. To help you see what your mind is habitually doing so you can get curious about other ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, to create different results for yourself and your life.

This is the power of coaching and it's the power of curiosity. To help you imagine a new life. A new world. One in which you put yourself and your wellness first, others second, with love.

I'll close with the words of the great poet Mary Oliver in her poem, *The Summer Day*. An ode to deep and powerful curiosity. "Who made the world? Who made the swan and the black bear? Who made the grasshopper? This grasshopper, I mean, the one who has flung herself out of the grass, the one who is eating sugar out of my hand, who is moving her jaws back and forth, instead of up and down, who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes. Now she shifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face. Now she snaps her wings open and floats away. I don't know exactly what a prayer is. I do know how to pay attention. How to fall down into the grass, how to kneel in the grass, how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields, which is what I've been doing all day. Tell me, what else should I have done? Doesn't everything die at last and too soon? Tell me what it is you plan to do with your one wild and precious life."

Mary Oliver. It's reverberating around me, the power of that poem. So beautiful. Well my darling, if you are looking for support, guidance, care as you ask what it is that you plan to do with your one wild and precious life,

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I'm here. The doors are closing for the April 5th cohort of my six-month program, Anchored: Overcoming Codependency.

This episode goes live on April 1st, so if you want to join us, you need to apply today and I do mean today. If you're ready to dive in and get the guidance you want and need from a loving, experienced coach who's been where you stand, don't delay. Get curious about the possibility and take action for your one wild and precious life. Go to victoriaalbina.com/anchored to learn all about it.

Now, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart if you are so moved. 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.