

Ep #158: Why Friendship Matters



Full Episode Transcript

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. Today we're talking about a topic near and dear to my heart. The importance of friendships in our lives. And I'm thinking about this because last week was Valentine's Day and while I had a delightful evening with my darling romantic date, I also had so much fun sending love to and receiving love from my beloved community of friends.

It felt so wonderful to wake up to a phone full of I love you's from all around the globe, and to send those darling, caring, loving misses right on back to the beautiful humans that are my circle of friends who really and truly are my chosen family.

Now, it wouldn't be *Feminist Wellness* if we didn't start with a nerd alert. There are so many studies, like I kind of fell down a Google Scholar rabbit hole. But there are so many studies that show that having quality friendships, however you define that for you, leads to increased life satisfaction, reduce loneliness, and potentially longer lifespan through increased social connection.

I would also add to that that the more loving people we have to coregulate, or stabilize, ground, and calm our nervous systems with, the healthier and happier we will be in the short and the long run. So let's dive in to talk about friendships and why having quality friendship matters, especially for us, coming from our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits.

One of the things we often do is put all of this pressure on our romantic partners to be our everything. To be our one and only. So we end up

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projecting all of our wants and our unmet childhood needs onto our primary partner.

We take a community, a whole village worth of expectations and needs and desires and put them squarely on our intimate partner, and expect that person to be our BFF, our therapist, our chef, our financial planner, our life coach, our coparent, our librarian, our everything, which sets us up for disappointment time and again when we ask one human being to do the work of so many.

It's not kind. It's not loving. And it basically, to put it quite elegantly, it sucks for everyone involved. And of course I used to do this. Of course I did. Remember my darlings, I talk about all this because I was swimming in the same codependent soup you've been swimming in for decades.

And as soon as I realized this, as soon as I stopped demanding, because let's be real, your girl was demanding that my intimate partners fill roles that aren't theirs to fill, I was able to appreciate and love them for being themselves so much more.

And to pour so much more energy into my friendships and my romantic relationships because I was clear on each person's important and well-boundaried role, and vice versa. I was able to start to say to partners, "Babe, I adore you and I'm going to invite you to use a phone a friend option on this one because I don't want to hear about whatever latest obsession of yours or interest of yours that's just like, not really in my wheelhouse or just isn't my thing."

For example, I don't ask my date S to get in the weeds of fashion with me because they are not attuned to fashion the same way this Argentine Leo is. And it's not loving to expect them to be. It's neither their jam nor their jelly.

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For example, I got a new dress the other day and I wasn't really sure about it. I wasn't sure what to pair it with, so I sent pics to Leah Perati, my fellow fem ride or die from the greatest state of this union, that is of course Rhode Island. I sent pics to my sister Genie because she is brutally honest with me in a very loving and wonderful way that I invite. I really love it.

And I tried it on for my Covid pod mate and neighbor, my dear friend Rebecca. But what I did not do was ask S to really go through what shoes do I wear, what jewelry do I wear with this, because they're not interested. It's not their thing. But it is my friend's thing.

So I turn to the people who want to talk about this with me and spared S from being the center of my universe on all things. PS, they all loved the dress. I was concerned about the length because your girl is definitely souvenir sized in the height department, and I feel confident now that with the right stacked heel clog, I can 100% pull it off.

Similarly, there was a very stressful situation that S and I went through together last year, where a series of unfortunate external events happened, everyone is fine now thank you, and we processed it together. We worked through it together. We had each other's backs.

And at a certain point, I didn't feel available to hear about it or process it further, and I told S that. And they were totally understanding and called their friends to talk it out because they were still in the processing place with it, which was totally understandable.

And they could understand as well that hearing about it again was dysregulating for me. They got that. And so they reached out to friends to retell the story, to vent about it, to get heard about it again, which was fabulous for all involved.

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I was somatically present for myself, I felt the feeling in my body that says I'm reaching my limit. I voiced that limit, set a loving, gentle boundary, they met me with love and care, and they honored it. And they turned to their friends and everyone got their needs met.

And the gift of friends is having different people that you can get in depth with about whatever is of interest to you. I call Leah about skincare, S calls their friends who've also lost a parent to talk about that experience. I call Jessie to talk about poetry, Elia to talk about relationships and spirituality, Casta to talk about construction and farm life and country stuff, Anita to talk about supplements and functional medicine, Marie to talk about 1000 different things.

And S calls Mel to talk about sports because I am not interested in sports ball over here. They call their people to talk about spirituality, and on and on. We accept that the other person isn't interested in all of the same things and don't expect them to be because we're not the same person.

And having different interests is a beautiful thing and talking to our friends about them is important, versus expecting our partner to be interested in stuff they're just not about, which doesn't mean we don't share about those things. But oh my God, someone get the smelling salts if S starts to tell me about all the details of a sports thing because I will be on the fainting couch within seconds.

And same same. If I were to talk with them about my many-stepped morning and evening skin or curl care regimen. I can just imagine their sweet eyes going like, totally glassy if I was like, "And then I used the retinol, but only two to three days that week because I really want to honor my skin barrier."

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Meanwhile, Leah is thrilled to talk about skin slugging, look it up for a cold morning walk. And Rebecca and I can talk about optimal curl diffusing for way longer than most anyone else could tolerate.

And it's also important to have friends you can share experiences with outside of your romantic relationships too. I have a client who's super into meditation, her partner isn't. So she has this whole sangha, a meditation crew she can meditate with, can sit with, and can talk about meditation and Buddhist principles with.

Another client is partnered with a vegetarian and my gal loves meat. So she has monthly steak night with a pal. How cute is that? Or if your partner doesn't love cities but you do, then if you had your heart set on London or Paris for your next vacation, you might be better off going with a friend and taking your partner with you on a camping trip.

I talk a lot about acceptance because it's so vital. And from our codependent belief that we can will the world and other people to be different than who and how they are, that we can fix and change them, knowing when to talk with someone other than a romantic partner about something is a huge part of accepting them for who they are.

And from there, looking for what you want from people other than your partner or date is a beautiful gift for everyone. From mutual respect, we are able to accept one another and thus, to not expect each other to be our whole world, our only sounding board.

Acceptance is vital in friendships too because our friends are just there, like our partners are, for us to love unconditionally. Not to meet any particular need, to show up in any particular way, or to be anyone other than who they are.

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And we get to practice unconditional love and acceptance with our friends, and we get to cultivate friendships where we are accepted and loved, and can show up as the most authentic and real version of ourselves. A skill we can then take to our romantic relationships, where doing so may feel currently more challenging from our codependency, perfectionism, and people pleasing.

We also need people outside of our partnerships to talk to about relationship issues. If you're mad at your date, annoyed with your wife, resentful of your husband, confused about a boundary your partner set, friendship is a beautiful place to talk it out, to work it out, to get clear on what you think, feel, and want to say before you bring it to your partner.

And friends give you different perspectives and can be a different kind of sounding board than a partner because we have a different kind of attachment in romantic relationships than in friendships. It can be challenging for our partners to turn us down, to say I'm not available when we ask to process something and similarly, it may be more challenging for us.

And a date might not want to take the risk of hurting your feelings by being direct or blunt. Meanwhile, there's less risk in a friend telling you hard things because they are less likely to be projecting their childhood attachment wounds onto you and vice versa.

It's also a gift to lean on people beyond our partners when the going gets tough. My friend Jules recently went through cancer treatment and it was a lot for her partner to shoulder the burden alone. Fortunately, Jules is so magnificent and wonderful and has friends willing to step up.

In fact, she has a core team of four or five of us close friends. We call ourselves the love squad who keep abreast of her health needs and appointments, and are the crew she can call on for support.

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And when one of us wasn't available, someone else could step in. And her partner could focus on her own wellness and could thus show up for Jules 100% when it's her time to step up. Instead of being worn thin by taking it all on all the time on her own.

Also, friends are fun. Different people bring out different parts of ourselves. And so with friends, we get to experience those different parts, which is so important and can be just really fun and pleasurable and joyful.

With our friends, there isn't the same set of background circumstances as with a partner, especially when you live together. That background din of who did the dishes, we need to replace the roof, will the kids get into the best middle school? There can be simple, light, fun in addition to the deep talk and processing.

With friends, you have a team to bounce things off, to help you reality test, which is something we've talked about here often. We can have a really hard time knowing what the what is in our lives because of our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits, especially when it comes to our relationships.

And our friendships give us a place to work it out and to get an outside perspective. Remember when we talked about attachment styles and coregulation, episode 135. Well, what we learned there is we can experience different types of attachment with different people at different points in life.

My darling perfect nerds, from the studies on relating, we know that until we can bring consciousness to our romantic partner relationships and work on getting to a more secure place there, we tend to replicate the kind of attachment we developed as children, which for us, is most often an insecure style. Anxious, avoidant, somewhere in between.

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In friendships, there's more space to experience yourself attaching in new ways and living into a new and more secure attachment style. I talk a lot about the importance of coregulating our nervous system, where regulating our nervous system is learning how to respond instead of react, and to stay with ourselves in our bodies, our nervous system, so we can process our feelings with our bodies, and can bring ourselves back into calm through ventral vagal, the safe and social part of our nervous system.

What can be so helpful is we can practice coregulating with different kinds of friends and can use those experiences to broaden our capacity to stay with ourselves and our feelings in more challenging moments.

Prioritizing and celebrating our friendships broadens our scope of thinking and feeling into intimacy. I love the Marianne Williamson quote a friend shared the other day. And I tried Googling it and couldn't find it so, I may be paraphrasing here but it's something like, "We can make our friendships more romantic and our romances more friendly."

That really resonated with me. We can take intimacy out of the bedroom and can take our sexual partner off the pedestal being the only one person we can have intimacy with when we cultivate intimacy in our friendships, which deepens our connection with our friends, ourselves, and shows us that we can be safe while expanding our capacity to be vulnerable, to be intimate.

When we can do this in one setting, it broadens our capacity in all settings. And friendship provides a way to practice being emotional and vulnerable in a safer context. Many of us have a lot of hurt around romantic connections and we can learn to regulate and grow with our friends in ways that may not currently feel possible with a date or partner.

This shift also allows us to start to see our sexual partner as a whole human when we don't expect them to be our only source of intimate

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connection and allows us to accept them for who they are more fully and to accept what they can bring.

Being more friendly in our romantic relationships also allows us to lighten things up and not make every little thing feel so darn heavy and so meaning-laden when we're getting support from multiple people and can be more of a friend with our partner, more willing to be emotionally generous, and understanding.

It's also important in the shadow of St. Valentine to remember that we live in a world that talks about singleness as a problem. You're not mature, you haven't arrived, you're not some kind of real fully-fledged human adult if you're not in a long-term relationship.

And we can challenge that notion that romantic relationships are the only ones that matter by strengthening our friendships and leaning in there. Prioritizing the importance of friendships also challenges the notion that monogamous romantic relationships are the only ones that matter.

I'm all about monogamy if that's your thing, but that's not at all the point. The point is we can expand the story that one person has to be our everything and we can experience intimacy in such a beautiful way by creating intimacy with our friends and with ourselves.

Community matters, my darling. I've said it before and I will say it again. Self-actualization in community matters. And creating intimacy with friends is a powerful way to get to know yourself, to challenge yourself, to support and care for others and to grow as a person beyond your individual work, beyond the relative isolation of a relationship built in codependency, which can be a very isolating place to be in for sure.

And if you're sitting there listening to just how amazing friendships are and you're judging yourself because you don't have close friends or a lot of

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friends, take a breath, my darling. There's nothing wrong with you. Nothing at all.

Deep breath in, long slow out. My tender little duckling, you are perfect and you are worthy of amazing friendships. And you may just need to cultivate them if they're not a significant part of your life right now and that's okay. Doesn't mean anything wrong about you.

So how to cultivate them? Well, I want to start by acknowledging because you know I'm out here to keep it real, that it can be challenging for adults to make friends once we're done with school or training. That's some realness for sure.

It takes effort. It really can. So we do what we do around here. We start with awareness. I want to invite you to look back into your history and to ask yourself when and where it felt easiest to make friends. For example, I don't love trying to meet people in a huge crowded party. I do best in a small group.

I have a friend who does best one on one. I've really connected with folks and made lasting friendships and we meet around a shared interest such as activism or ceramics, volunteering at the food shelter. So start by asking yourself what you enjoy doing and talking about and consider taking a class, joining a group, or going to a meetup around something you value.

Meanwhile, I don't drink, so I'm not looking for friends at a bar or wine club. I am a meat-eating Argentine, so I'm not looking for friends at the vegan meetup. I should go make friends at an art convention. But I actually do do that in the pre-Covid times.

My point is go where it's warm, my darling. Don't go all out into the cold and wonder why you're shivering, okay? Go where it's warm. Know who your people are and go to there.

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I mean, on this same point, I asked a friend how she makes friends and she told me silent meditation retreats. I was like, really? She's like, yeah, I've really made my absolute closest, bestest friends at silent meditation retreats. And she looked for her people there because that's who her people are. The people who spend a week in silence.

She realized she liked people who were quiet and introspective, who can sit and hold space, who are in her own words, "Down to talk and think about suffering, and who are prone to being deep. Those are my kind of people." To which I say absolutely, bring on the deep, existential talk please.

Other people, myself also included, might really want to hang out with folks who can help them be fun and light and relaxed and chill and crack up. So ask yourself, who are the people you are most comfortable around. And start there, where it's warm.

And don't discount old friends. Last summer I reached out to my friend Jessie, my BFF from growing up, my first real friend here in the US. And we hadn't really talked in a minute and I missed her. And the feeling was mutual, so she came to my birthday party, which was such a blast.

It was a pool party, it was a delight. And now we text and call each other often. We were able to rekindle a 37-year-old friendship, which has been such a gift. We send memes and we talk about our lives and our relationships, we go deep, and we sing newsies at each other.

And we can get really real because we can say things like, "Yeah, but listen, remember that one time in fourth grade when..." It's such a beautiful thing. And I can hear you maybe thinking like, "Oh wow, it would be so awkward to reach out to someone I haven't talked to in a decade."

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Okay, so what's the problem? I'm awkward all the time. The more you can accept yourself for who you are and just accept, sure, a situation may be awkward but it also may be a beautiful way to step back into friendship. What do you want to risk, my love, to get what you want to gain?

For me, I would much rather risk texting someone and they're like, yeah, no, I don't want to hang out with you. And then I know I can lean on myself, my self-love and my self-trust, I can lean on thought work to decide what I want to make that mean about me, which quite frankly from here I'll tell you is 0.0 things. It means nothing about me if someone doesn't want to be my friend, doesn't want to hang out.

And I know I can trust my somatic experience, my felt sensation. I can trust myself to support my body and whatever sensations come up. Disappointment, sadness, anger, frustration, whatever. I've got me. I've got my back. So why not reach out?

What I might gain is so much more than whatever I'm risking. My beauties, something important to note here is that friendship is in fact a two-way street, unless you live in Rhode Island, in which case you'll get the joke. You got to put in the effort.

I remember I dated this woman a decade ago or so. We met at an event that we both worked at and she was always really I'm going to say annoyed and frustrated that I had so many close friends from that community that she had been a part of for much longer than I had been.

And the reason why I had those connections was I put in the effort. I texted, I called, I sent postcards, I sent little gifts, I reached out. I went and visited them, I got on the bus and went to Philly to see Casta. I did the things because I recognize that friendship is the two-way street.

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You got to put that effort in to get the connection. And that's how it works. It's about mutuality and reciprocity, which is to say interdependence. And that for me is the goal in all of my relationships.

And for me in my friendships, it really about quality and depth of connection over quantity. I'm interested in friendships that can grow over time and that stand the test of time. I don't want or need 1000 friends or even 100 friends. I need a solid 12 with whom I share values, which is what we've been talking about in our episodes about relationship green flags, episode 142, and red flags, last week, the importance of values.

And finding and cultivating friendships based on shared values is key for me in creating bonds where there can be interdependence, where we can both grow and be seen and heard and cherished. And if your relationships feel more like codependence than interdependence, make sure to check out episode 110, Codependent Friendships.

Some of the things I value in a friendship are friendships based in honesty where we are forthright with each other, where we trust one another and we show the other that we are worthy of their trust. Friendships based in common interests, where we can teach each other new things and can grow from being a mirror for one another.

Friendships based on common values, principles, life goals, beliefs, we don't have to be in the same field or believe the exact same thing 1,000,000%. But when we're both interested in growing in similar ways, there's so much beautiful mutuality there.

Friendships based on good communication and mutual support where you can turn to one another, whatever's coming up, knowing that the other person has good intentions, good communication, and good boundaries, and will clearly state when they are or are not available to hear about it, whatever it is.

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Because when I can trust your no, I know I can trust your yes. And that is one of the most beautiful gifts to give to anyone in our lives. To really stand strong in our no, I am not available. So when they call crying and you say yes, lay it on me, they know without a doubt they can trust that you're actually available.

Friendships based on emotional generosity, acceptance, and forgiveness are key for me. Because baby, I mess up. I often suffer from acute foot in mouth disease because I'm a human. I'm just a tender ravioli like you are and I mess up and my friends do too.

They launch into some story without asking consent sometimes, and so do I. They do silly things without thinking, and so do I. And we process it and we move on because we are emotionally generous with one another and we give each other the grace.

Finally, the friendships that matter to me have that intimate quality where we're real and open and honest, where we touch, we hug, we share the deep shit, we honor each other's process and encourage one another to grow. We call each other out on our BS, we express our love and care for each other, and have deep intimacy as friends. Sharing the deep stuff and the daily stuff equally.

And remember, much like in dating, there are life cycles of friendships. Not all friendships are forever and that's okay. And friend breakups hurt just as much as romantic breakups sometimes and that makes sense. Give yourself the grace and love because it's okay for it to hurt when someone steps out of your life.

You get to take responsibility for whatever part is yours, to grow from it, to learn from it, and to release the rest without globalizing or catastrophizing or making it mean anything bad about you as a human that someone was done being friends with you. Okay, my darling buttercup?

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And when you are the one growing and changing and working on yourself, know that your old friendships may no longer feel quite right, and that's okay too. It's okay to walk away from friendships no matter how long you've known each other if the connection, the spark just isn't there anymore.

If your values are no longer aligned, if you're no longer having fun helping one another to grow, or it's simply not your priority. No guilt or shame needed. And I'll just invite you to be loving, kind, and honest, and to trust that you're doing the best thing for everyone involved by ending a friendship that no longer feeds you.

So my darling beautiful love, friendships are a crucial part of living a fulfilling life. And surrounding ourselves with people who can challenge us, who love us, who hold space for us, and can reflect all the beauty that we are back to us while having fun and really enjoying ourselves, it is such a gift to give ourselves and the world.

I want to invite you, particularly if your romantic relationships have always been your primary focus, to ask yourself why. And to see if you can make some space in your heart, in your schedule, in your thoughts to really begin to prioritize your friendships, to really establish and strengthen that shoulder to cry on when things get rough in your relationship, when a relationship ends, when your llama gets leprosy, when you need support so that you're not just leaning on your romantic partners to be your everything.

Because it's not their job. And once again, it's not kind to expect it to be. I want to encourage you to tell your friends you love them. I do it all the time. When I'm with them, with consent, we hold hands, we touch, we snuggle, we lie in hammocks, we have puppy piles.

We cry and we laugh and we play and we process our pain. We are not sexual. We are deeply intimate. And having intimacy beyond your romantic or sexual relationships matters so deeply, my darling, for our growth, self-

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concept, our wellness, our health, our hearts, our community, our liberation. Tell your friends you love them and know that I love you too, really truly.

And if you're looking to make some amazing new friends in a container of people who are interested in changing their lives and in growing the same ways you are, I want to invite you to check out Anchored. It's my absolute favorite place in this entire world. I am just - I love it so much.

It's a beautiful space where humans come together to grow, to look at our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thoughts right in the snout, and to say I can live a different way. I'm ready, I'm ready, willing, and able to live differently, to have new thoughts, to honor my inner children, to shift the somatic experience of being me in the world, to get into contact with my body, instead of just living from the neck up, stuck, spinning in the cycles of my old perfectionism, my old people pleasing, my old codependent habits, putting everyone ahead of me and feeling anxious about it, not knowing who I am and worrying about it.

Come join us in Anchored. You can learn more about it at victoriaalbina.com/anchored and the May group is filling up fast. I know it's only February. It's pretty exciting.

So if you've been interested, if you're excited to really take the next step, I'm here for you. This beautiful, amazing community is here for you too. What a fabulous place to make friends. I feel like it checks all the boxes, right?

Alright my beauties, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so moved. 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.

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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.