

## Ep #160: Conflict & Codependent Thinking



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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## Ep #160: Conflict & Codependent Thinking

Hello my loves, this week's topic is conflict. By which I mean a conflict between two people, meaning two people in a romantic relationship, a parent and child, someone and their boss, and this episode was set to go live this week long before Russia invaded Ukraine. So I just wanted to acknowledge that conflict and that I am talking about a wholly different type of conflict here.

Okay that's it, I hope you enjoy this show and have a beautiful day.

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. Oh my goodness, I am just so enamored of the sunshine up here on occupied Munsee Lenape territory in the Hudson Valley of New York. It's so glorious. So it's like, 40 degrees out, which feels warm these days compared to earlier in this winter, and the sun, the sun has been so glorious.

The front of my house doesn't have any trees blocking it and so I get this direct intense all-afternoon sun, which is going to feel a little different in July and August. Let's be clear. But for now, when the air outside will bite your face, it is so delicious to sit right there in that beautiful kitchen seating area and to drink all that sunshine in.

It was 92 degrees in my kitchen today. 30-something outside. It's pretty spectacular. And you know this little South American beach baby Leo sun worshiper was all about it. I do want to of course give a shout-out to my friend Leah who's my unofficial dermatologist in that she works in advertising, she's not actually a dermatologist.

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But she knows the most about skin of anyone I know, and she's got me to start wearing sunscreen indoors every day. And I'm so grateful because you know, it's important to take care of your skin. It feels like some really nice self-love.

So I guess this episode is a shout-out to sunscreen. Just kidding, but maybe. Anyway, this episode is not about sunscreen. It's about conflict and our codependent thinking. So my love, raise your paw if you've ever said, "Ugh, I hate conflict," or, "I'm just conflict avoidant, I don't want to talk about it, I don't want to tell anyone that they hurt my feelings, or that I don't like what they did because I'm conflict avoidant, I'm not into it."

I hear it all the time from my clients in Anchored and while I don't know that I've ever said exactly those kind of things before, I totally have thoughts that when I dig down into them, make it clear, I've totally acted from conflict avoidance many, many a time in my life.

So I want to talk about what conflict is and how our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits confuse the issue. And how to shift out of thinking that disagreements are conflict is part of what we're talking about today and we'll be diving into a ton more detail about it next week.

Here, as always, I am not speaking to abusive or violent situations, but rather to the everyday conversations and discussions that we often label as conflict and run from like a horse escaping a burning barn, or lean into like our own tail is on fire.

Alright my beauty, so I want to start by testifying that it is possible to shift our story around conflict, our relationship to it. But first, we need to understand what it is and what it isn't. Conflict is defined as, and I quote, "A serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one."

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Well, that's some heavy language indeed. And we, from our thought habits, have the habit of making any little thing into a moment with the weight of an extended stay in the pit of despair. And we can have conflict internally with ourselves, like around a decision, which is something that can be quite challenging for us, or we can have conflict with another person or a group of people.

But it doesn't have to be that way. We can start to see and feel into the difference between conversations, discussions, loving disagreements, and situations with the weight of this definition of conflict. A serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one.

And what is so interesting about us from our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits is that while we say we hate conflict and avoid it at all costs, what we often really mean is that we fear direct, open, and honest conversation. We don't know how to do it, it wasn't modeled for us, it's not our norm.

And at the same time, we sure do have the habit of causing conflict or stress in relationship through our codependent thought habits and the way we enact those habits in all of our relationships.

Some of our faves include, one, we tend to take things personally, which is a cornerstone habit of codependent thinking, which as a reminder, here at *Feminist Wellness*, we define codependent thinking as chronically sourcing our self-worth and validation from others instead of from within ourselves.

So we believe that we need everyone in the world to like us, to approve of us, to think we're awesome and amazing, or at the least, maybe kind of worthy of the air we breathe. And if they don't, it's really challenging for us to believe it ourselves.

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From that place, it makes sense that we would take things personally because it feels scary not to. We might miss recognizing that someone doesn't like us, which is something we think is both a problem and something we need to personally solve for.

When we sense that someone likes us, we step, we hop, we jump into hyperdrive to fix it by fawning, appeasing, shape-shifting, chameleoning so that we can make sure that we come across as the person we think they want us to be. The pleasing person who people pleased.

And because we take things personally, we are so quick to get offended, to get upset, to get annoyed, to take things personally that just might be like, someone doesn't like the dinner you cooked and all of a sudden you're like, "You don't like the dinner I cooked. Okay, when's the last time you cooked dinner around here? When's the last time you went to the grocery store?" And it all comes exploding outward.

Two, having little to no sense of internal or interpersonal boundaries leads us to do things like tasks for others when we don't actually want to, or have the time or energy to. And that leaves us feeling resentful because we then tell the story that it's the other person's fault that we said yes.

We were just trying to make them happy after all. How altruistic of us, wouldn't you say? But in fact, we're being controlling and manipulative without even realizing it. And if they're not over the moon thrilled about us doing the things for them that they didn't ask us to do, and probably likely didn't even want done or don't care about having done, wow, claws out central.

It's like a full-on showdown at the I'm so resentful because you don't value me saloon. Seriously though, right? So three is the habit of not expressing our displeasure in the moment because we fear that doing so will displease

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others. And we fear that because doing so was something that was not safe or okay in childhood, which we'll come back to.

And in the patriarchy is definitely not something okay for humans socialized as women and humans living in marginalized identities to do. We are to be pleasing, polite, demure, elegant, quiet. We are supposed to be good girls, right?

So instead of speaking up and saying I don't like that, or, "Hey, that hurt my feelings," instead, we shove it all in the pile of other disappointments and resentments we hold against the people we love. And side note, we do this so that when they abandon us, which we believe is inevitable, we can be like, see, I knew it, I was right all along about how much they suck.

Doing so, holding all that resentment in is like holding a massive helium balloon under water. It's eventually going to come shooting up on out of the water and it's going to smack you and the people around you right in the face through blowups, passive aggression, snarky comments or jabs, on and on, with the indirect communication, yuck.

Habit four. In episode 71, we talked about the fixer habit, that deep desire to control others that we feel that drives us to try to micromanage the people in our lives, often without their consent. And listen, let's be real. No one likes to be controlled without their consent, right?

So of course that habit leads to conflict when people ask us to cut it out. We then take that personally and get resentful, and the whole one, two, three codependent cycle starts spinning once more.

Habit five. We stay in relationships where there's frequent conflict. Heated disagreements that end in one or both partners yelling, accusing, name-

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calling, because from our codependent behaviors, we believe that we need the other person, our partner to love us in order for us to be okay.

And we're scared at our core that we are truly unlovable. So we stick around, even when unhealthy conflict is the norm, and often perpetuated ourselves from our desire to be constantly validated.

Habit six. Over and under-exaggeration. So we have the tendency to make someone saying, "Hey, I asked you to do this by Wednesday and it's now Thursday. What's up?" Or a date saying, "Hey, I want to talk about how we communicate our needs," into something massive. A potential life or death kind of moment that we need to defend and protect ourselves against. We need to meet as though it is a conflict.

Or we tend to shut down in those moments. Take all the blame, make it all about how terrible we are. Or shut down in another way, which is to minimize the other person's wants, needs, opinions, or ask in an attempt to avoid conflict and the potential self-flagellation that may ensue.

It's our habit for sure to make things bigger than they are from sympathetic, or to play like it's nothing from dorsal. To freak out and think doom is neigh, or to be dismissive, which can sound like, "I just wish he didn't make everything such a big deal," or, "Why can't they just stop being so sensitive?" when someone is trying to communicate with us.

And we do this again in an attempt to avoid conflict. Often at a very high cost to our relationships with ourselves and others, and to our own mental and physical wellness as our bodies get flooded with all sorts of stress hormones.

Seven, we have the habit of blaming others instead of taking personal responsibility for what we do and how we feel. We talked about this in detail

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way back in episode 92, Radial Self-Responsibility. We say things like, “She made me feel sad. I did it to make them happy. He guilted me.”

Check out that episode for more details because when you blame someone else for creating your feelings instead of stepping into your power to create them for yourself, of course you're more likely to lash out or to be in blame, to come to conversations from that blaming place. Makes sense.

Eight. Finally, you don't know how to have your own back. This is something that happens for us, right? The core thing of codependency is that our focus is outward on everyone else instead of focusing on ourselves and we forget. We forget to have our own backs because we are so invested in having everyone else's.

So for example, your date says something and your tender heart goes ouch, that hurt. And you want to say something that this voice inside you that feels old, as old as the sand says, “Don't speak up. They'll tell you you're wrong, they'll make fun of you. They'll negate you. They'll tell you you're not actually feeling what you think you're feeling.”

My beauties, I know this one all too well. It was a wound from childhood that I carried that was strengthened when I was in an emotionally abusive relationship with a lot of gaslighting.

I was often told that my feelings were wrong, that I wasn't feeling what I thought I was feeling, or what I said I was feeling, that I had no right or reason to be upset or hurt. That it was my fault that I had “made them say that mean thing,” which were literal words I heard more than once.

And conflict with this person was so intense, aggressive, and triggering in the clinical sense of the word that I learned to deeply fear conflict with them. From the skills I had then, I went dorsal. I shut up. I stopped talking. I



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did the old go along to get along, which was the safer choice then, instead of leaving, which I didn't have the capacity to do.

In the moment, I didn't have the capacity to do it until I eventually did, which I learned through thought work, through somatic practices, through reconnecting with myself, mind, body, and spirit, I remembered how to have my own back in the face of a bully who had no interest in hearing or seeing me.

And that was a process, let me tell you what. A whole freaking journey for sure. So when you hear me say things like we don't know how to have our own back, that's not an attack. It's just acknowledging what is in this moment, which is something that I know you can move through and get to the other side of.

So while I could go on, I could probably add another 10 things to this list, I think that's just about enough for today and it's time for a self-compassion break. So today's self-compassion break is brought to you by of course you did.

In episode 113, we talked about the useful tool of of course they did. And today, I want to say of course you act this way. Of course you avoid conflict. Or of course you lean into conflict and make it mean the whole world is collapsing for all the reasons we just talked about.

So for example, if you tell someone that you don't like how they spoke to you, well, then you're running the risk that they won't like you. And that can really feel like a serious problem if your mindset is all about that perfectionist, codependent, people pleasing.

You walk around with all this worry and fear about what others think of you, which when activated, can send you right into sympathetic, fight or flight, or

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into dorsal shutdown, which is that freeze part, that disconnection, depression, I don't want to connect with humans, I want to be at the back of the cave.

And you go to there, your nervous system goes to there because you think it's not safe to not be liked, which makes sense to the lizard brain, the limbic system, the place where these kinds of fears live. And for more on the old limbic system, check out episode 153, Inner Child Science. It's such a nerd fest.

And I say this because I want to remind you to be gentle, kind, and loving with you. You're just a mammal, my beauty, mammaling along, and doing your best with the skills you have in this little minute. And you're gaining more skills right now by listening to *Feminist Wellness*, so please, give yourself the grace, my little perfect tender ravioli.

So let's talk about root cause, like proper little functional medicine nerds. Well, many of us avoid conflict because of hypervigilance, which means your nervous system is always on high alert for threats to your sense of self and thus, your safety.

If we didn't feel safe either emotionally or physically growing up, we didn't see healthy conflict in our families, didn't see adults respectfully discussing an issue and coming back into love after a misunderstanding, we don't have a roadmap for that.

We don't have the language or script for that. We don't quite know how that one goes. And most of us handle conflict the way we saw it handled at home, the way we learned to as kids until we step out of emotional childhood and into emotional adulthood, which we talked about in episode 23 and 24, and until we learn so much more about our perfect nervous systems and how to care for them.

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For so many of us, the blueprint for relationships we saw growing up was not the most mature or healthy one. It was either the stiff upper lip, everything is fine, we don't talk about Bruno kind of thing, or maybe you saw what the authors and relationship researchers Dr. Julie and John Gottman call the four horsemen of the relationship apocalypse.

Stonewalling, contempt, criticism, and defensiveness. And if those were the norm in your household, well, then it leads to this low-grade anxiety in the home where our nervous system and sense of self are developing. And so of course, conflict, or even just a for-realsies-let's-be-serious conversation can feel like death and doom because we didn't learn that there's any other way to do it.

We believe that the everything going to hell in a handbasket way is the only way. So of course we live in hypervigilance. From our codependent wounding, we are adept at reading other people's energy and tend to be highly sensitive, tender people, even if we don't seem that way on the outside.

We pick up on energy and interpret it through the lens of our codependent, relational habits. Empathy, compassion, reading other people's energy, none of that is a problem. Those are actually superpowers.

But all of that becomes a problem when we make it a problem. We take on the things we're picking up as something to fix, or we make it mean something about ourselves. And this can sound like, "Hey babe, is something wrong? I don't know, something feels off in your energy, are you sure you're not mad at me? Are you really sure?"

When your partner's just sitting quietly at the table, sipping their coffee. Which can create conflict when sure, the other person may be grumped,

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but they may be consciously taking a beat to work through it, to breathe through it, to sort it for themselves.

They may just know in their heart that it'll pass if they just breathe. And instead of us being okay with others speaking up in their own time, being in their own process, we create tension and conflict by pushing someone else to make us feel safer, which they can't even really do and is certainly not created by pushing the issue until there's conflict.

But our brains believe that conflict - this is a funny one, it kind of just hit me as I was saying that. So when there's unknown, our brains are like, wow, that's 10 out of 10 scary. But if there's a conflict, if someone's like, "Yeah, I'm mad at you," then that may be scary in its own way. But it's less scary than not knowing. Brains.

I want to also say this so clearly; for folks living in marginalized identities, people of color, queer and trans folk, disabled folks, immigrants, women, the undocumented, economically disadvantaged folks, neurodivergent folks, on and on, conflict is something to be avoided, especially in the context of interacting with systems, with employers, schools, oppressive forces like the police.

Because the risk of actually catastrophic outcomes are significantly higher, which is a very real real, which is also something that gets written into the nervous system and is often an intergenerationally carried trauma response that makes a lot of sense.

And can be exacerbated if one has codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits, on top of being told from birth that the dominant society doesn't find you in all your magic and glory as valuable, or as worthy of love as cis, het, blonde, slender, able-bodied, neurotypical, white folks of European extraction.

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So how do our I'm-not-worthy-of-love thought patterns make conflict avoidance worse? Well, if you have a habit of people pleasing, seeking approval externally, or perfectionism, lots of things can feel like conflict that aren't, or don't even need to be.

So I'll share the example of Karina, a client of mine in Anchored. She had some work done on her house. When the folks that she hired did what she called a half-assed job, she approached the situation as if there were already a conflict because she was anticipating a fight, disappointment, being disrespected by the contractors.

Ready for a conflict snowball. From there, she then created internal conflict around paying them and spent hours ruminating about what she would say, how they would response, how she would respond in turn. She played the whole scenario out in 1000 ways.

She then spent hours crafting a carefully worded email to try to avoid conflict while also worrying about and future forecasting all sorts of conflict yet to come. And then she made it about her integrity, asking me in coaching if it would be unethical if she decided not to pay them for not doing the job they said they would do.

She also wondered if maybe she was being too demanding in wanting them to actually finish the job they said they would do, the way they both agreed it would be done. Was she being a bother, she wondered? Would they think she was a nag or a bitch or terrible? Would they be rude to her when they came back?

And then there's conflict energy that spreads out into the rest of her life as she complains to her friends, her partner, anyone who would listen, and spent all of this time self-coaching on this over and over. Karina was

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expending all this time and energy on a “conflict,” which is what she reported it as that hadn’t even happened yet.

And through the coaching process, we dug in and found fears of abandonment under it all. That the workers wouldn’t make it right, and she would be left alone with all this mess, which is a fear her inner children often carry.

And that fear of abandonment, which is a very much human and mammalian fear, led Karina to take this whole situation quite personally. She and we make it all about us, while simultaneously fixating on the other person and what we fear they will think and feel about us.

Because we feel so unsure in our sense of self and safety, we project that onto the need for others to like us. We create conflict in subtle ways, if not directly.

Some people with codependent habits are so used to feeling constantly attacked that they tend to strike first and walk around the world with their claws out all the time. Others will create more subtle conflict from that same energy of fear and insecurity like a chihuahua at a dog park.

You feel small energetically, so you attempt to look fierce and give off that don’t fuck with me energy, which can look like lashing out first because well, for some of us, our nervous systems are most cozy when we’re in conflict because that’s what they know.

And either way your nervous system tends to go, claws out or barking like the chihuahua, shutting down, when conflict is coded in your nervous system as an event with a high risk of death potential, you better believe your nervous system, your body, your soma will react because it’s supposed to. It’s doing its job the way it has learned is the way to do its job.

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So once again, compassion and love, alright my darlings? Compassion, gentleness, love, and a dedication to changing our habits. And as adults, we get to learn how to respond internally and externally to our nervous system dysregulation so we don't attack ourselves or the people we love, so we don't inadvertently gaslight or negate someone else's wants or needs, so we don't avoid or engage in conflict from an unconscious, unintentional place, so that we can speak our wants and needs from a place of self-regulation and can reach out to safe people to co-regulate our nervous systems with.

And so we can learn to have our own backs, instead of taking things personally, which is when we make other people's thoughts, feels, and actions about our core value and worth, and we can learn, we can remember really because every little baby knows how to do this. We can remember how to have our own backs.

So we no longer stay in situations where we are not being treated well, where we are not being cherished, honored, and spoken to in a loving way, and we can learn to speak in a loving way to ourselves.

Learning how to regulate our nervous system, how to get back home to ventral vagus, which is the safe and social part of the nervous system with and for ourselves is the core of what I teach in Anchored, my six-month course.

It's what we do from jump because it is so vital and we layer thought work and breath work on top so that we can step into greater emotional radical responsibility for ourselves and our lives, and so we can be a more loving, kind, and interdependent member of our families, our chosen families, our friend groups, our communities, the collective.

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My beauty, next week, we will be talking in detail, you and I, about conflict management and resolution. And I'll be sharing some of my favorite ways to reframe conflict so you can have healthier, more loving conversations with the people in your life and less dysregulation in your magnificent nervous system.

And you know I'll be providing my favorite heavy convo do's and don'ts because at the end of the day, your girl's a nurse, right? I love it when we keep it very practical, we get practical skills, practical tools. I love the philosophizing, I love all the in-depth psychology, I just did it for like a half hour, but I love the practical.

So next week, in part two, we'll be getting really practical because remedies. We all need remedies, right? I talked about how we didn't have a healthy version of conflict modeled for us, so let's model it for ourselves. What do you think?

And if you're not subscribed to or following the show, now is the moment to do that so it slides right on into your phone's podcast app automatically, which means you won't ever miss a show. How delightful is that?

And if you want to hear more about the interplay of codependent thought habits and the nervous system in somatic practices, you are going to want to join me for a free webinar on Tuesday, March 15th at 7pm Eastern standard time.

And you can register for that right on my website, [victoriaalbina.com/codependency-somatics-webinar](http://victoriaalbina.com/codependency-somatics-webinar). That's a lot of words, but they're the important words here, right? Codependency somatics webinar. And if you need to see that in writing or click it, you can head over to [victoriaalbina.com/160](http://victoriaalbina.com/160).



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So it'll be right there in the show notes for you. Sign on up. It's free. Tuesday, March 15th, 7pm Eastern standard time. Learn how to heal yourself from codependent thinking by tapping into the wisdom of your body. Why not?

Oh, and if you can't make it, we're going to send a replay the next day. So don't stress, don't worry about it. You don't need to email me to ask if there will be a replay. There shall be. So don't worry about it, baby.

Alright, that was a lot. So let's take a nice slow deep breath in if you feel so moved. Long slow out. Let's do what we do. 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, and 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](https://victoriaalbina.com/masterclass) to grab your seat now. See you there. It's going to be a good one.