

# Ep #261: The 6 Rules of Fair Fighting with Billey Albina



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Victoria Albina, NP, MPH**

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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. This week is particularly exciting. I have to say I'm a little nervous excited. This week, I am introducing you all to my partner, Billey. It has been a really important thing for me over the years to share the stories of Anchored alumni.

To have them come on, and in their own words talk about their growth, their transformation from codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing living to living interdependently. Living the way they're living after participating in Anchored, after doing this beautiful work to come home to themselves.

I have been a relatively private person on this show, and on social media I don't post a ton about my private life. And there are reasons for that, we can talk about it. But I really want to share this part of my private life, which is my relationship. It is a really beautiful thing in my world to be with my Billey. I am the happiest I have ever been.

There's a lot in our story and in how we interact and relate every single day that is really the embodiment and the living of interdependence. And so, I'm really excited to have Billey on and to introduce you all to her. We asked, on Instagram, for questions so we're going to answer some questions. We're going to talk about our love and our relationship and communication. I'm so excited.

Victoria Albina: Hi, Billey.

Billey Albina: Hi, everyone. It's my pleasure to be here.

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Victoria: I think it's super cringy when people introduce me, so I was hoping you could introduce yourself to the good people; the usual pronouns, land acknowledgement.

Billey: Alright. Well, I am Billey Albina. I took your name when we got married. I use she/her pronouns. I am a librarian at Bard College. And I'm here on the Muncie-Lenape land that we call the beautiful Hudson Valley.

Victoria: Indeed. Well, thank you. I'm so happy you're here.

Billey: I'm so happy to be here. Longtime listener, first time caller. I'm literally, professionally a dork.

Victoria: You really are a professional dork. It's so amazing. Billey has a book coming out, which is not why she's on the show. Because when my book comes out next year, I'm going to go on a thousand podcasts to spread the word. But yours is like a dork book for dorks, which is incredible.

Billey: Yeah, I co-edited a book with two other amazing editors, coming out with American Library Association Press. It's called *Inclusive Cataloging*, and it's all about DEI work, library cataloging, and how we can remove stigma and oppression from these legacy systems that we inherited as librarians to make our resources more accessible to our users. Yeah, it's like 28 chapters, and 67 contributors.

Victoria: I'm so in love with your brain. It's amazing. You're amazing and incredible. I've never been this giggly on a *Feminist Wellness* conversation. I've loved talking to Danielle and Sarah, and all the other folks who've been on the show, but there's a special giggle because I'm in love with you, which is different.

So, I posted on the Instagram and I said, "Hey, what questions do you have for us?" Several of you just posted to say that we are cute. Aaron Bree

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posted to say that we have matching teeth, which I think is one of the stranger things that anyone could say, and I love you for it, Aaron Bree. And then we got some really beautiful, important questions.

I do want to start with this, Hugs Trees wrote, “You're the cutest. Can you please tell us your love story? How did you meet, etc., etc.” It's a pretty cute story.

Billey: We have a really good meet-cute. I love telling our story. Well, we met at IRL, which is just so incredible.

Victoria: That means “in real life,” for people who are like, “What is that?”

Billey: Yeah, I thought I was kind of back on the market, and I thought I would like have to go on the apps and such. I wasn't quite ready yet. And I just started really focusing on myself, I was doing meditation and hiking. I was going to this meditation group in the town that we live in, and in is this new person. In walks this new person to the meditation group. I'm there for myself, I'm not there to flirt with people; I'm there to meditate.

So I'm focusing on myself, the whole session ends and I get up to leave, and this woman chasing me down the hallway.

Victoria: I wasn't chasing. I didn't have chasing energy, but I did have, “Hey, you” energy, okay?

Billey: Alright, so this beautiful woman comes, with “Hey, you” energy, skipping toward me, and is like, “Hey, I'm so glad you got the fax I sent you last night.” And I was like, “What?” “The fax,” she said, “The fax. I sent you a fax late last night to wear the queer uniform today so that we would recognize each other.” I look at her and I see that she's wearing black boots, dark jeans, a hoodie and a leather jacket. Which for those of you who maybe aren't in the queer community, that is the queer uniform.

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Victoria: It's a pretty solid uniform. Yeah.

Billey: Yeah. It's one of three options that we have. So, I look at her; she's wearing black boots, dark jeans, a hoodie, and a leather jacket. I am also wearing dark boots, dark jeans, a hoodie and a leather jacket.

Victoria: Except you were wearing the butch version. We had our jeans cuffed the same; they were the exact same dark jeans, but butch and femme, cuffed the same way. The hoodie we had on, both of ours were black with the zipper with the white behind it and the white strip. Every little detail was the same, except butch and femme.

Billey: Right. The moment I put that together I just started laughing so hard. We just started riffing. You made me laugh in a way that I felt like I hadn't laughed in years. This was IRL, during the pandemic. So, we had masks on; we were inside. I remember we were walking outside... You want to take the story from here?

Victoria: I mean, there was this moment. And your girl is a Leo, so I'm never shy about being vain. I'm very upfront with it. I just had my fingers crossed. I was like, "God, I hope she's cute under that mask. I just really hope that she's as cute under that mask as those gorgeous eyes and hilarious, witty brilliance." And, thank goodness she was.

Billey: Oh, my goodness. And, so were you. So, we just started talking and laughing; it was like instant. I remember we exchanged phone numbers. I remember getting in my car and just feeling electric. Who is the amazing person? Who is this? Look what happened to me. We started texting a little bit. It was super cute.

It was really important to me. I knew that I wanted to ask you out. It was really important for me to know what I wanted to do, and to ask you out. So,

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I sent you a little text message. I was like, “Hey, I think you're cute, I think you're funny, and I think you're bold. Would you like to go out sometime?”

To which she responded, “I would love it if you take me out for dinner.” I was like, “Ooh, we're going to go on a date.” So, we went on a date and the rest is history.

Victoria: Herstory.

Billey: Oh, herstory, right. Sorry. My apologies.

Victoria: Aw, it's a pretty good meet-cute.

Billey: Yeah, it's pretty good.

Victoria: I think what it really elucidates is what in so many ways we were both looking for. There's so much about the way we relate that's so magical and healing and incredible. And for me, one of the cornerstones is the energetic, the lightness. We go deep, we have really deep, serious philosophical conversations. We talk theory, but we laugh the whole time.

Billey: Yeah, we giggle the whole time. It's really wonderful.

Victoria: Yeah. And I think, if I may, that part of what facilitates that is that we've both spent so much time getting to know ourselves that we can just be our fullest self and trust that the other can see us, or not, and that's fine. Right?

Billey: Yeah, absolutely. The work that we put in, and the time, on ourselves really allows us to show up in a way that is so beautiful and so present. It's what holds this together. It's really the glue that makes this work so well; all that work leading up to here. We talk a little bit about, “Oh, I wish we had

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met when we were younger.” But we didn't, and in some ways I don't know if I would have been ready for this.

Victoria: Yeah, I know I wouldn't have been a decade ago, or 20 years ago. I had a lot of growing to do, and a lot of thawing of that functional freeze.

Billey: I had a lot of cushions to sit on.

Victoria: Billey is a Tibetan Buddhist, for those who don't know that. So, that's what she means by 'a lot of cushions to sit on.' She's not a Victorian goddess or something. “I've got a touch of the vapors.” No, she meant meditation cushions. Yeah, we needed to get to know ourselves.

Billey: Or at least for me, to know what I wanted and what I didn't want, and how to take action to change the causes and conditions of my suffering so that I could move into a place that was best supportive of me, and also allowed me to be my true authentic self.

Victoria: That's so beautiful, Bills.

Billey: I like you. Thank you.

Victoria: Yeah, one of the things that was readily apparent when we first got together, and for me is actually really important, we were talking about it this morning. There's that saying that for a relationship to thrive, what matters is that you have the same values, not necessarily the same interests, right? And you and I have both the same value and a lot of the same interests.

Billey: I love that about our relationship. I love that we share the same values, and that's sort of the foundation that we build on. But then we also have many, many of the same interests. And that's what allows us to move in the world and sort of celebrate our relationship and really explore things

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together as a couple. I don't see it as holding me back in any way, or keeping me from doing things that I want to do. We just share such amazing interests.

I want to live in partnership with somebody where I can explore our interests together and grow together. That's what I'm interested in. That might work for other people, but I want to be able to be in partnership and interdependence with a partner that supports my interest and we grow together.

Victoria: That's a beautiful thing, Billey.

Billey: It really is, I still can't believe I met you. Every day I pinch you. I'm like, "What are you real? Are you real?"

Victoria: We pinch each other a lot. It's very sweet. Yeah, so, my angel, there's a lot of really, really great questions here. And folks, let us know if you enjoy this episode. Send a DM, drop us an email if you want us to keep doing these. I'm available. Bill?

Billey: Yeah, I'm available.

Victoria: You're not busy?

Billey: No, the books can organize themselves. It's okay.

Victoria: Oh snap. Alright, here's a beautiful question that I really love. We can kind of combine these. So, Snow Pea asks, "How do you communicate when you're upset with each other?" I would feel the urge to run, usually. We're both nodding our heads saying, "Yup." And so, then I think we can combine that with this question from Lilly. "Communication and conflict resolution. Neither my husband nor I had a good example of this." And then sort of following up.



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So, we're going to combine three questions, because I think we're going to go to the same places. Meg asks, "What are the fair fight rules that you established between you two? How did you do it? How do you keep that going when you need to?" What do you think, let's combine all that?

Billey: Yeah, let's combine all of that. How do we deal with conflict, and what were our role models for conflict like?

Victoria: We're both like, "Oh, nothing good."

Billey: Yeah, well, that's exactly right. I grew up in a household where yelling was super common, just straight up fighting. And then the next day we pretended like everything was okay. That didn't really give me very good tools as an adult. I remember very distinctly, when I was a teenager, the first time I saw two adults have an argument but peacefully.

I was in the backseat with my best friend in high school, and she had hippie parents. I remember the dad was driving and the mom was in the passenger seat, and they were fighting about something, I don't even remember what. But you could feel the tension rising in the car. The dad calmly pulled the car over, and they just sat and looked at each other. They were using "I statements." They made a compromise, they kissed, and they went back on the road.

It blew my little 16-year-old mind. I was just like, "What? Adults can actually resolve conflict without screaming at each other and saying terrible things to each other?" That's what I wanted. That's what I wanted for so long, but I didn't know how to get there. I didn't know how to get there.

Victoria: I come from "everything's fine here," right? So, I didn't really hear screaming fights going on growing up. But I knew when my parents were fighting. Because I was the oldest immigrant daughter I would put my sister far away. There wasn't violence, but I would put her far away emotionally

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and energetically. “Get in the bunk bed with your babies and close the door,” and I’d sit at the top of the stairs.

It felt like I needed to know what was going on at 6 and 8 and 10 and 12, right? The way kids do. And similarly, there was no conflict resolution.

Billey: There's no repair.

Victoria: Oh, my God. There still isn't. I mean, there's still no repair in my family. There's no apologizing. There's no “I effed up.”

Billey: It's like, “I'm only making the repair for myself now.”

Victoria: Absolutely. So, that's where we both come from. I will share, that in previous relationships I've replicated that. It's called “reenactment.” I was going to nerd for a second.

Billey: Same. Ooh, nerd out. I love your nerding. Get it, girl, get it.

Victoria: It's called “reenactment” in the nervous system. Which is where our nervous system, in short, repeats the experiences it's had in the past in the hopes that this time, this time, it will turn out differently. And it doesn't until we do the work to make it change, right? But that's the nervous systems do so right.

Billey: That's all we know.

Victoria: It's all we know. And so, I, for sure, was in relationships where any conflict meant that I was going to get gaslighted. I don't know what the proper... Anyway, I was going to be made to feel completely bonkers for telling someone that I needed things to be different. I was scapegoated a lot growing up; it was a really cozy place for my nervous system. I was like, “Oh, okay. Yeah, I know, this particular version of hell. Alright, here we are.”

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Billey: Yeah, where I would bottle and bottle up. I would build up this resentment and resentment. And I was like a shaken up, either like a volcano, or like a shaken-up pop bottle, soda bottle. Where one little thing, and I would just blow up. That's all I knew. I would have these rage cycles that were just so not me.

Victoria: So not you. But also understandable, right? Yeah. You can only have so much sympathetic activation stored in your tissues and hidden away within your posture, within your body, before your nervous system is going to demand a release of that energy. I mean, it makes pretty simple science to me. The problem then, of course, is that you become the bad guy.

Billey: Right. Exactly. Very quickly.

Victoria: It's so funny to think of you raging. That's just not who I know you to be. I understand we contain multitudes. That we grow and change, and we can have habits that we then rewire. But you're just such a tenderoni.

Billey: I think we've had, for lack of a better word, one moment of conflict where I started to raise my voice, and you very quickly were like, "Please don't use that tone with me." And, I like felt it, and I recognized right away what I was doing. I felt the sensations in my body, and I just started crying. I just melted, because that's not how I want to talk to you. Then we reconnected and we were able to talk it out. We'll get to these details later, in our good fight rules.

Victoria: Yeah. Should we dive into that, our fair fighting rules? Okay.

Billey: Sure. Oh, wait, that's actually a good one. I don't say "sure" anymore.

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Victoria: Oh, let's talk about that, because that was a shift really early on and it was really powerful for me.

Billey: Right. So, a lot of my journey has been reclaiming my discernment, understanding my Yes and my No, and my boundaries. Because in the past I would really go along with things. I would just say, "Sure. Sure. Sure."

It was really just to people please, and to try and smooth things over, be the peacemaker. But in my heart, I would start to build up that resentment because maybe I didn't really want to do it. And maybe I really didn't like what was happening. But I would just say, "Sure, sure."

And when we first started dating, I caught myself not saying "sure" because I didn't want to do something or anything, it was just out of habit, honestly. And I quickly caught it. I was like, "You know what? I don't want to say 'sure' with you. I want to either say yes or no." And it's been really transformative for me, just to very clearly say, "Yes, I want a cookie. No, I don't want a burger."

Victoria: She always wants a burger, everybody.

Billey: That's true, I do always really want the burger.

Victoria: She married an Argentine, smart woman. Yeah, I love that shift. One of the things I say in Anchored is that "sure" is not consent. And I say to people in coaching, when I'm like, "Do you want to move from cognitive to somatics around that, and do some somatic experiencing?" If someone says, "Sure," I'm like, "I shan't proceed based on 'sure'. I'm going to need a yes or no."

So, it's been really powerful that you've shifted that. And I can see it in your posture, and the way you hold yourself.

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Billey: Yeah, it's been, like I said, transformative and really insightful as well.

Victoria: Okay, so should we share our rules? They're guidelines. I mean, some of them are rules, whatever. We don't need to get that semantically obsessive, do we?

Billey: I mean, we have our pinky swears.

Victoria: We do have our pinky swear.

Billy: Yeah, those are real important. And then, we have ground rules, I'd say, that we've talked about, out of our experience and previous relationships. There's how we want to show up for each other in our relationship.

Victoria: Yeah. One of the things I talk about so much when I talk about somatics, everybody wants, "Okay, but what's the practice? What's the movement? What's the thing I do when I'm really freaked out? When this happens?" And I can give you that, but what I think is so much more important is the work we do before the moment of anxiety, before the moment of stress, right? Our fair fighting starts at every morning when we wake up.

Billey: That's right. Every morning when we take a walk, make space to sit in meditation, do some stretching, making sure we exercise regularly. Just taking care, taking care of myself so I can show up for you. I love it when you support me to go do my CrossFit or go do my yoga. Because when I take care of myself, I'm taking care of our relationship.

Victoria: For sure. And I think, in the interpersonal energetic, we talk a lot about how we promise one another to always assume best intention.

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Billey: Yes, yes. We always assume best intentions.

Victoria: And through the flip of that, is to always assume... This isn't the language we've used, but tell me how this feels... Silly gooseness.

Billey: Yes. Silly gooseness, absolutely.

Victoria: It's actually a really important relationship tool. So if I'm like, "Alright, Bill, I'm going to pick up XYZ today while I'm running errands. I promise I'm going to do it," and I don't... What I'm likely to hear from you is...

Billey: "You silly, goose. What's going on?"

Victoria: We're real. Like, "Oh, man, girl, I was really expecting you to do that. I'm disappointed and maybe a little angry. But you silly goose." What that does, is it diffuses it. It makes it not so serious and not so heavy. For me, when I was so deep in codependent relating, everything felt really heavy, because everything my partner did or didn't do was directly related to my worth and value. It was some moratorium on whether I was worthy as an animal, if lunch was gotten, or if... whatever. I no longer put all that weight on anyone else's shoulders.

Billey: Right, because I can't hold that, only you can hold that. So, the silly gooseness does allow us to have the lightness but also communicate the, for lack of a better word, disappointment or the anger but without the aggression.

Victoria: Ooh, yeah. It takes the sting out of it a bit. And maybe it takes the personal attack out of it, a bit too.

Billey: Right. Yeah, it does. Absolutely.

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Victoria: Which allows so much more space for responsibility when you're not feeling attacked. The other thing we talk about a lot is offering emotional generosity. Which I think fits within that same assuming best intentions, giving each other grace, and giving ourselves the grace too. And then we remind ourselves, and one another, pretty constantly our positive mutual regard.

Billey: Oh my gosh, yeah. Dear listeners, she calls you so many beautiful names. Can you imagine being her partner? There are so many sweet pet names that we just have for each other. And it's really a practice that I heard about first through Thích Nhất Hạnh. He's always talking about calling your loved ones my darling, my dear. I didn't grow up in a household where that was a practice. And I didn't have that in previous relationships.

It's our pet names, not only are they so sweet and caring, but they also add this lightness. It's a little hint back to the silly gooseness, because sometimes our pet names can be quite silly and quite sweet. But it allows for that care and that mutual regard, and that respect that we share for each other, and that love. It flows that love through these sweet pet names that we share.

Victoria: Yeah, we both have done a lot of work with and for our inner children. And being with you has been so healing for so many of my sweet little inner children.

Billey: Me too.

Victoria: Yeah, who've really needed a safe place to land and to feel seen and heard and respected.

Billey: The same with mine. It's everything from my inner children to my inner teenager to... For me, it's a lot about feeling safe, but also asking for

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and receiving my wants and desires. For me, it's a lot about understanding what I want and asking for it.

Victoria: We'll get into the fair fighting rules, but this is one... we were talking about this morning. Which is releasing the need to understand, and instead accepting and empathizing. So, the example we were talking about this morning is we both have water bottles, like everyone. But I'm an herbalist, so I put tea and greens powder and magnesium. I put all sorts of...

Billey: The first time she made her water bottle I was horrified. She was like, "Do you want this powder in yours? And that one? And..." I was like, "Oh, no. Please, no, I don't want any of that in my water bottle."

Victoria: I put a whole cauldron full in there because that's how I do, and it's just like whatever to me. But you don't like it.

Billey: No, I only want water in my water bottle, please.

Victoria: Right. I grew up feeling like I didn't know anything. Somebody in my household was way smarter than me, and I was always judged for that. That's how it felt growing up; I could never be smart enough, could never measure up, would always be negated. And my inner child's response was to be a bit of a know-it-all in my early 20s.

Billey: It was also part of being in your early 20s.

Victoria: Anyway, I think part of that carried through of wanting to be the savior and the fixer, and wanting things to be really nice for my people, as a way to protect myself. And I probably would have, in the past, pushed back and been like, "Yeah, but you can get all these nutrients if you just put it in them. And I'm going to blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."



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Billey: And in the past, I would've been like, "Okay, sure." And then I would have been totally disgusted by my water bottle, the smell of it, and the residue.

Victoria: So, everyone would have people pleased and been miserable.

Billey: Yeah. But instead, I said, "No, only water in my water bottle, please." You've respected that, and I appreciate it. Yeah, well, it's such a small little example.

Victoria: But it's such a good one, right? The quotidian is where all this stuff really shows up. I used to believe that I needed to understand your request, and I don't. I don't need to understand it at all, when it's just for you. When it's something that impacts the both of us...

Billey: Then that's different because it's the both of us. But when it's just me...

Victoria: It's just your water bottle.

Billey: Yeah, you don't need to know why I tuck my shirt a certain way, or how prefer my socks. No, it's just this me.

Victoria: Not my business. What is my business is to love you. Loving you means accepting you. I coach on this so often in Anchored. People being like, "I just wish that so and so would accept my care." I was actually coaching someone recently, and she wished her aging mother would accept more care from her. And it makes me think of our dog.

Billey: Ziggy Stardog is a great 13-year-old Chihuahua grump. Yeah, I'm sorry, I brought him into your life. But also, you're welcome.

Victoria: Thank you. He's a great metaphor, I have to say.

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Billey: He really is very good at communicating his boundaries. And he's also a very good judge of character.

Victoria: Yeah, he is such a potent reminder that we don't need to understand, because who can understand a Chihuahua brain? But he will not be touched, and there's a consequence. He sets healthy boundaries.

Billey: Yeah, he does. He's very clear, he doesn't want to be touched. He doesn't like pets. He's not that kind of dog. And he'll tell you. He'll tell you real clear if he doesn't like what you're doing. But other than that, he's a sweet, sweet dog, and I'm really happy that I rescued him.

Victoria: I'm glad. I'm glad you did, too.

Billey: I'm glad you put up with him.

Victoria: I love him, c'mon. I love the little stinker. Listen, we should get back to the fair fighting rules though. We've sort of laid this groundwork of saying that having fair fights, having conflict in a loving, supportive way that leads to growth instead of more yuckiness, starts long before the conflict, right? In how you address each other, how you regard each other, how you relate.

And so, conflict doesn't happen that much in our experience, because we are so thoughtful and careful about how we communicate. It usually doesn't get to there. And frankly, I feel like, mostly, when it has gotten to there it has been blood sugar related. When someone... Two thumbs are pointing at me, let's be very clear... has had a drop in her blood sugar and being a crappy, crappy goose...

Billey: Someone needs a sandwich.

Victoria: Someone needs a sandwich, stat. Milanese bliss.

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Billey: When we first started dating, we had such an instant connection that I had to be reminded that we were still getting to know each other. It made perfect sense that even though we felt this connection, I'm still human, you're still human. I don't know all of your triggers or what might activate you or what might upset you. I remember early on I stepped in it, like I really stepped in it one night. I just didn't know, and we worked it out.

Victoria: Yeah, we worked it out, again, by assuming good intention. We have a couple of really beautiful rules. Do you want to go through those?

Billey: Yeah, our first big rule is no name calling. I grew up in a household where name calling was pretty regular, and I just don't want to have it. What's tied with that too, is no screaming, no yelling, no raised voices. And so, if we feel activated we take space.

That example that I mentioned earlier, where I stepped in it, oof, I took a walk around the block. And then, I think I sat on my cushion for a little while. Once we were both in a calm state we became back together and we talked it out. It actually allowed for a lot of growth and healing and understanding in our relationship.

Victoria: We're going to get into a bunch of our ground rules, but the core thing underlying them is this three-part reminder: One, pause for breath, touch, or space. And so, in our conversations, we've realized that who we are, our attachment styles, our inner child baggage, historically we need one of those three things.

So, to take some slow, deep breaths together. Both of us really appreciate touch, like a hug, holding hands. That's really grounding and really coregulating for both of us. I want to name that that's not for everyone. Some people, if they're mad at you, no way, do not touch. Like, Ziggy. Honestly, we honor and respect that.

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But for us breath, touch, or, like you were just saying, space. And the goal of that is to come back into presence and to ground all nervous systems. So, we have a very strict rule that everyone's regulated or there's no conversation. Which doesn't mean you can't have some sympathetic flavor, that's normal and natural, you're having like a heated conversation. But you can't have flipped your lid.

Billey: Yeah. So, we're minding our tone, we're using those pet names, we're connecting to calm our nervous systems down.

Victoria: Then the third is, reaffirm love. Constantly saying, "I love you, and I don't like the way you said that. I love you, and that is really not working for me. I love you, and..." It's not, 'I love you, but...' It's, 'I love you, and...' That's been so powerful for me to have those connected, "I love you, and here's a problem. Let's solve it."

"Check out the hook while my DJ revolves it." The jukebox in my head actually never stops. Shakira, Shakira. It's part of the ADHD magical wonderland that is my brain.

Billey: Keeping me on my toes.

Victoria: You know what? Someone's got to, Bills.

Billey: The books aren't doing it.

Victoria: Listen... Alright, so should we go through some of our ground rules?

Billey: Yeah, yeah, let's do it.

Victoria: So, the first is around timing. I already said all nervous systems have to be regulated. Big emotions are always welcome. Explosions,

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attacks, meanness, never, never allowed in our household. And it is really incumbent on the person who is bringing up the issue to make sure that it's an appropriate time for discussions.

I've talked here on the show about getting emotional consent before a challenging conversation, it's no different for us. We always check in. "My love, I need to talk about something, are you available right now for emotion level," 0 to 10; where 0 is nothing and 10 is the end of time and space, like nuclear winter. "Are you available for a 5? I'm pretty grumped. I don't want to murder you with my hands. But I'm grumped." Or a 4 or a 12?

Billey: Timing, checking in and seeing if the person is available. Our next ground rule is no archaeology. So, don't dig up the past. We don't need to bring things up to either escalate things or to just try and, I don't know, prove a point or something like that. It doesn't help anything. So, we're not digging anything up. We're trying to just have a discussion based on what's happening in the present moment.

Victoria: I think people do that often because they feel at a loss, or like their grievance or their issue isn't significant enough. And so they need to compound it, right? They need to, like strengthen their case by being like, well, two years ago, well, when , 20 years ago..." or the, "Well, you also do that." It's never productive.

I think part of what makes that possible is that we don't like obsessively over process every little thing. I've definitely been in that lesbian relationship, where you're like, "Oh my God," and everything gets processed to death. Can I just live?

Billey: I think the worst advice I was ever given was, "Don't ever go to bed angry." You know what? Actually, sometimes you need to give it space, and you need to just not over process. Just give it some space.

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Victoria: De-escalate, too. So, talking it out in the moment, or giving it a little space and then asking yourself 24 hours later, “Does this still warrant a conversation?” And then, I think this is where the somatic work really comes in, and meditation, and thought work. Can I actually bless and release this? Can I actually let this go?

And if the answer is not yes, then let's talk it out. Right? It's so much better to talk it out when it's fresh and it's small and it's little, and we can meet each other with, “Oh, geez, I hurt your feelings? I would sincerely like to apologize for that,” instead of letting it fester.

Billey: When you let it fester, that's when the resentment builds, that's when you explode, that's when you dig up the past and you hurl it as a defense mechanism, and it's no longer productive.

Victoria: To that end, we promise to always use “I statements,” and make it about, “I feel...” We both have training in NVC, nonviolent communication. So, we bring that to the table, “I feel, when you...” Which I know that doesn't jive with the thought work thing. But I think there's a place for all tools in our toolbox. And this is really helpful for me to stay on my side of the street instead of being accusatory. Because, again, a silly goose is just silly goosing. And so to say, “you never...” it's never what I want to do.

Billey: No, and it doesn't help the situation. So using those “I statements” keeps the focus on yourself. What happened affected you, and what do you need differently from a person.

Victoria: Yeah. And I think in there, what you need differently from the person. So, it's not saying, “You did something wrong,” it's saying, “I feel ouchy.” And so, for me, that takes out so much space for possible defensiveness because I'm not being attacked, right? It's not about me doing anything wrong, it's about you saying, “This doesn't work for me.”

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Because I love you, and I accept that there's only water in your water bottle. And you accept that any raise in volume, and my nervous system is going to shut down. We can meet each other with love and acceptance.

Billey: About those "I statements," you really need to listen to the other person say those "I statements." So, we really practice active listening. Truly listening to that person. We often will do mirroring. So, "I heard you say," and I'll repeat what I heard.

We don't get hyper fixed on exactly saying what was said. In past relationships, I've been in situations where I was expected to say exactly what was said, and I actually would lose the thought of what it actually was because I was trying to remember it so hard. In some ways, it just became this controlling mechanism that didn't work.

So, what we're trying to do with our active listening is just understand, reflect back and understand the meaning of what the person said. It doesn't have to be the exact thing, just understanding the meaning of what was said.

Victoria: We have a lot of interesting overlaps in our herstory, which is fascinating.

Billey: The Universe brought us together for a reason.

Victoria: Yeah, that's true. It's true. It is actually interesting. I feel like our exes were very similar, in a lot of really painful ways. And I think it's because we are both givers who are with take-take-take-take takers. And for all my givers out there, find yourself a giver. I highly, highly, highly recommend it.

Billey: The nurse/librarian combo is pretty choice.

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Victoria: It's amazing. Yep, it is amazing.

Billey: Let's get all the lesbian stereotypes here.

Victoria: Every single one. She also does Flannel Fridays; in case you're wondering. You look so great in a flannel. And she drive a Subaru, let's just be clear.

Billey: And I wear Birkenstocks. I mean, I'm the full stereotypical butch lesbian. I'm right here for it.

Victoria: I love it. I'm here for it. I'm forever here for it.

Billey: I wore my finest flannel on our first date. So...

Victoria: You really did. Y'all, it was deep pandemic so I didn't have this... Because I hadn't left the house in a hot minute. And so, I am really lucky. One of my best friends is Judith Gatton, who's an incredible stylist. Amy Fox, who's also an incredible stylist, a dear friend. I torture those poor women. "Does this dress go with these heels?" I ordered like a thousand dresses. I returned 99.9% of them, but I was so excited to go on a date.

Billey: Oh, my gosh, she showed up in a beautiful dress, a beautiful, beautiful dress. Oh, my goodness. Beautiful heels, makeup on point. All your jewelry. All your earrings. Ooh, I melted. I completely melted off that chair. And I was wearing my finest flannel.

Victoria: Finest flannel, y'all. Finest flannel. It's true.

Billey: It was a nice buffalo little plaid.

Victoria: It's a beautiful...



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Billey: It's upstate New York.

Victoria: For fuck's sake. For goodness sake. Anyway, active listening.

Billey: Active listening. So, "I heard you say..."

Victoria: "I heard you say that that was a great flannel. Am I hearing you right?"

Billey: "Yes, you heard me correctly."

Victoria: "Okay, great." I will say that active mirroring, when your nervous systems are coming back into co-regulation, is also a potentially beautiful time for silly gooseness. "Because I heard you say that you smell a pirate fart." Do you know what I mean? You can make silly goose jokes when your nervous system are aligned.

Which is ground rule number five. That it is each of our jobs to regulate our own nervous system. Amen. And in this family, we do not believe in codependent or independent frameworks for living. We aim for interdependence, which means that we're here for mutuality and reciprocity. Which Bill calls...

Billey: Mutuacity.

Victoria: Mutuacity, which is one of the top 274 cutest things I've ever heard any animal say. You've said all of them. And that means that whomever is more able to regulate themselves in a given moment, is lovingly asked to support the other one to coregulate as they are able.

And this reminds us that we are a team, not adversaries. And that, depending on what we're talking about and what's going on, and when we've eaten and who slept how... Like, "Are you tired? Are you ovulating?"

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Are you hungry? Did your mom just text?” One of us may have more regulatory capacity than the other. And so, neither one of us is saying, “It is your job to regulate me.” Absolutely not. But what we're saying is, “Can you help a gal out here? I'm floundering.”

Billey: Do you need a hug? Do you need a cup of tea? Do you need a sandwich?

Victoria: Yes, the answer is yes. Yes. I need all of those things. For me, generally, touch first while you put the kettle on and get the salami out of the fridge. And we do that for each other in really sweet ways.

Billey: Yeah, absolutely. Rule number six: Never use absolute language. Never, ever, ever. Never, ever.

Victoria: Not once. Don't you dare.

Billey: Don't use absolute language. Yeah, we don't like to use absolutes because it's not necessary. It doesn't allow for fluidity and grace and understanding. It can feel accusatory, and it's often inaccurate. It's also just not kind or loving.

Victoria: We are very clear when we state our boundaries, and that has been a growth point. We've been talking about that this whole hour. For both of us in the past. Let me come back to speaking just for me. I didn't know what boundaries were.

Billey: I was so bad at it.

Victoria: Okay, well, I'm going to defend your nervous system and your capacity, and say that you were doing the best that you could, given your nervous system capacity, given where you came from, and how you grew up. And your window of tolerance.

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Billey: Thank you, dear. You're right. No, that's true. I appreciate that perspective. Thank you. So yeah, I wasn't very skilled at boundaries years ago. But it's a tool that I've had to really work on. Because the better boundaries I have the more that you can respect my No, and the more you can fully embrace my Yes.

Victoria: Absolutely. Sure, it's not consent.

Billey: It took me so long to feel that and understand it. I started with something really simple. Preparing for this, we were talking about examples. And for people who struggle with boundaries, starting with something just very clear, very simple. And for me, it was when I sit in meditation I don't want to be disturbed.

And so, when MV and I started first dating, we were sitting in meditation together. It just was this feeling that I had to share with her. Like, "Hey, don't mess with me when I'm in meditation. Don't tickle me, don't walk behind me, don't poke me." I could feel it so clearly in my gut, and I could feel the sensation of this clarity of "this is a line, don't mess with me when I'm meditating."

Understanding that so clearly, and then the feeling of that, I was allowed to communicate it and you respect it. And you were like, "I'm absolutely not going to do that." And so, once you can tap into what a very clear boundary feels like, it becomes so much easier to understand more nuanced boundaries.

Victoria: Yeah, that's such great advice. It's the kitten step of boundaries advice.

Billey: Yeah, or turtle steps.

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Victoria: Turtle steps, little teeny tiny newborn turtle steps. When I brought up your capacity, and that you were doing the best you could, it reminds me of another important rule of ours. Which is, we have both promised to ask the question: How does this choice that they made, that's maybe not working for me, make sense for their history? Make sense for her history?

And for ourselves, right? Like, "Oh, man, I really stuck my foot in it. How can I bring in compassion for myself?" But really understanding that empathy and mutual care are always an option. And so, when we can ask ourselves... For you, you're the baby of four girls from a rural Pennsylvania coal mining family. How does it make perfect sense that you would react that way? That you wouldn't think to do that? That you would think to do this thing? How can I bring in compassion for what makes obvious sense, given exactly who I know you to be and what I know of your history?

Billey: That's the interdependence. That's knowing each other, and being familiar with each other's histories and patterns, being able to show up for that person in a way that has compassion and loving kindness. Being able to bring that sympathetic joy of when you do things that are exciting, and I'm proud of.

Victoria: Another question, sort of in that same category is: What if I'm wrong? I want to put a little cautionary note on this. One of the big problems in my last marriage was that the gaslighting was all around me being wrong. That was the central tenet of how I ended up staying with them for so long. It was that they were very insistent on my being wrong, and my being the problem, and my being the identified patient.

And so, if that is your lineage, your history, if 'I'm wrong' is a big story in your head, fast forward this little moment. This is not for you. You have other work to do. That was the work I needed to do, to recognize, hold up. No, no, no, I'm actually not the problem in this given moment. I'm not actually wrong here. I'm asking for something really reasonable.

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So, having done that work, to step back into my power in that way, and now in a relationship where you have no interest in doing anything other than being kind and loving and caring, and gentle and sweet and wonderful with me, there is the safety within myself and within our relationship for me to say to myself, "I'm mad at Billey for doing XYZ. Okay, how could I be wrong here? What if I'm wrong? What if she did actually tell me?"

Billey: We're getting curious.

Victoria: That is what it is. Yeah, I complicate, she simplifies.

Billey: It's the Buddhist way.

Victoria: I love it. Middle path us, baby, middle path us.

Billey: It's just getting curious and having that compassion. "What if I'm wrong? Oh, you should be doing it this way." Well, maybe not, there are so many other ways to do things. And what if the way you do it is perfect for you. And I've got a new way of learning how to do something.

Victoria: Yeah, for me, it's like a little fire extinguisher. My Leo, my South American Leo righteous. That doesn't rear its head too often, because again, I don't need to push against you to be right. So, I feel like gratitude is maybe our closing rule.

Billey: I think so, gratitude and affection. So, whenever we have conflict and we start to resolve it, we'll end that discussion with cooing and affirming our love and appreciation for each other. It doesn't really necessarily matter the outcome. Really, we're just reinforcing that foundation of our relationship, and it resolves the conflict.

Victoria: That's a beautiful thing.

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Billey: It really is. This relationship has been so healing, and also uplifting.

Victoria: Yeah, I think the biggest thing, after my lousy marriage, ease was the thing I've been saying. Ease, ease, ease.

Billey: For me, it was, because I was a people pleaser, I was a fixer and a rescuer. I just kept falling into a trap where I felt like I had to fix people. It was exhausting. I had to learn that lesson, that I can't fix people. I can't control people.

I'm always going to remember when you said the most romantic words to me. Oh my gosh. It was like our third date and you're were like, "I need absolutely nothing from you." Oh my gosh, it was incredible. It was so freeing. That you, yourself, are a whole perfect woman. Whole complete. Good just as you are. You're great. You're actually pretty frickin amazing.

You need nothing from me, and I need nothing from you. I'm good, too. I'm totally good. And with that mutual understanding of each of us being perfectly good and whole just as ourselves, we're able to come together and soar. It's incredible.

Victoria: That's beautiful. And through that we've built so much interdependence. Where I do depend on you to do certain things, and you depend on me.

Billey: I pick up the mail every day. And you make my lunch, it's like the sweetest thing.

Victoria: I love making your lunch. What I love is going to the supermarket and getting one little treat. You've had chocolate to macaroons this past week.

Billey: Oh my gosh, it's so sweet.

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Victoria: It's so fun. I actually talked about this on the show two weeks ago or something, because it's a big part of my life. It's how I start my day, is making your lunch. And I hope folks can hear the smile as I'm talking about this, because then I picture you having this nutrient dense lunch and finding a little note and feeling so loved and having a little treat. And your lunch is very glucose balanced.

Billey: It's the best part of my day. When I open up my little lunchbox and I see my perfectly nutrient dense lunch. And I get my adorable little note, which I save in my desk; I have a little pile of them. Sometimes I put them in my pocket so that I have them with me. And then, I have my little sweet treat. I just feel so loved. It's really incredible.

Victoria: I'm so glad. That's really great. And I know you don't need me to do it.

Billey: No, I can go to the cafeteria.

Victoria: Or you make yourself a lunch to go and I know you're fine. And I think that's the beauty of knowing that we are both, like you said, whole grown-ass women who can take care of ourselves. It then makes it so joyful, because it's not this, like, pulling, grasping would be the Buddhist word. There's no grasping, neediness, on me.

Billey: The attachment is not there.

Victoria: Right. Attachment in the Buddhist sense, folks. We'll just clarify. We talk a lot about how this is the first time I've had secure attachment in dating, romantic, anything. And it's really from that secure attachment that I know that it feels really good to make your lunch, and not like I'm trying to make you feel anything or make myself indispensable to you, so you won't abandon me and I won't die alone on a mountaintop. It's really just pure giving. It's giving, giving.

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Billey: I love that. That lands really nicely.

Victoria: I'm so glad, you sweet pea. Is there anything else? We're coming up on the hour mark. We'll definitely do this again.

Billey: This was a lot of fun.

Victoria: It was so fun.

Billey: It feels really nice to flex these muscles. I'm a trained meditation teacher and I give talks, but this is a nice muscle, to have these conversations about relationships and psychology.

Victoria: All the things we're passionate about. Billey is going to be coming to Anchored and doing meditation classes, leading group meditations in Anchored.

Billey: Monday morning meditations.

Victoria: Yeah, it's going to be really exciting and really fun. I'm really excited. Thank you.

Billey: I'm excited. I'm excited for the opportunity.

Victoria: What a blast. Well, my love, anything else on your mind that you want to make sure that people know about?

Billey: I just want to thank you. Thank you for having me on and for having this conversation. It's not often that you get to do this in a relationship, where you talk about the relationship to an audience. This is really pretty special. It really gave me an opportunity to reflect on our relationship, and just to have so much gratitude, and just feel really thankful that I have you in my life.



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Victoria: Well, likewise, baby. So, so, so grateful. Thank you. Thank you. And we'll have you back on soon.

Billey: It sounds good. Thank you so much.

My loves, thank you so much for listening. That was such a fun, heart filling, heartwarming, beautiful conversation. I know that it is the work that I have done, and that Billey has done, to heal ourselves and to come into interdependence that has made this kind of love, this kind of relating possible.

That is the kind of work we do in Anchored, my six-month program to overcome codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits, and step into interdependence. To step into your capacity to love and be loved the way you, we, want to be in this beautiful life. So, we're enrolling right now for a group starting early this spring.

I'm really hoping that you will join us. Head on over to [VictoriaAlbina.com/Anchored](http://VictoriaAlbina.com/Anchored) to learn more, to apply now. It costs nothing to apply. Get all the details and join us. It is an absolutely life changing experience. It brings together my 20+ years in health and wellness, in psychology and somatics, in breathwork. It brings it all together to support you to live the interdependent life that you want to. Oh, it's so good. It's so good. I love Anchored, and I love you.

Let's do what we do. A 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.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you want to learn more all about somatics, what the heck that word means, and why it matters for your life, head on over to [VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar](http://VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar)

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for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day my darling and I'll see you next week. Ciao.