

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

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. Last night in Anchored, my six-month program, we were talking all about roles and how there's so much role confusion in homes where codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits, aka emotional outsourcing, are the norm.

This role confusion happens because, generally speaking, everyone in the household is lacking a secure connection with the three vital, essential, most crucial human needs, which are to feel safe emotionally, physically, and energetically. To have a really profound and embodied sense of connection and belonging. To know that you, as an animal, you particularly, you matter to at least one grown up.

The ACE's study, Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, showed us this. Kids just need to feel like they really, really matter and can count on one person, minimum. And finally, validation, value, worth. It's an extension of this you matter-ness.

When we don't feel really secure in our connection to these three essential human needs, well, of course, we start to doubt ourselves. We start to doubt our safety writ large. And we spend a lifetime, until we learn to do it otherwise, grasping for, searching for, trying desperately to connect outside of ourselves. It's why I call it "emotional outsourcing" with people, places and things that can help us to feel safety, belonging, and worth.

Problem is, most of those calls need to come from inside the house, right? Right. And so we step into this role confusion, where we kind of don't really know if we're supposed to be doing a parent's job, a kid's job, a teacher's job, a therapist's job, a million jobs, other than being ourself. Because

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

remember, being yourself isn't good enough or we would be loved and praised for being ourselves, right?

And so, in that role confusion, it's so super common to step into the rescuer role, right? Telling the story in our minds and bodies that 'it's on us. It's up to us to save everyone in the world. To focus on them, their wants, their needs. And we're supposed to make it come true for them.'

Because in codependent thinking and experience, if other people aren't happy, we take that on as our fault, our problem, our doing. In many ways, we believe that if they are not happy in their lives, we can't possibly be happy, in part, because they're going to be unhappy with us. Right? It gets really complex in there.

The main point, is that we spend a lifetime in this rescuer role for everyone else, secretly hoping that if we rescue them enough then they'll come take care of us. If only, and it's not really great for anyone involved. And as always, we get to celebrate that our inner children are doing it because they truly, truly, truly believe it's the most important thing for keeping us alive in that moment.

So, before I give the whole episode away, I will try to hush my little buttons. But first, if you could take a moment, wherever you get your podcasts, head on over there, and make sure you're subscribed to or following the show so you don't miss a thing. Take a moment to give us a five-star rating and write a written review. It takes two minutes of your time.

It really helps the show to come up higher in the search feature, which helps this free, wellresearched, well-resourced educational program... that I think is pretty darn fun and helpful, thank you very much... get into more ears. So, I thank you so much for helping me in this work to spread the message of *Feminist Wellness*. Take it away past me.

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

This week, I want to talk about this key component of codependent thinking, which is the misguided belief that it is our job to rescue others. So today, we'll be talking about the trope of the rescuer. Why and how we do it, and what we can do instead, which is to be supportive to the people we love.

Codependent thinking is this really fascinating thing where we're constantly seeking other people's opinions, validation and approval. Because the story in our minds and bodies goes, "I need them to constantly prove to me that it's okay for me to feel loved and lovable, to feel okay, valid, and worthy in this life."

My nerds, because we're not embodied in our sense of worthiness, we feel this constant need to seek evidence to support the hypothesis that it's actually okay for us to be alive and partake of all this darn oxygen. So, in order to try to gain that external approval, we do things for other people that they can very well do for themselves.

We often do things that they didn't even ask us to do, or don't even want us to do, because the subconscious story in our minds that often comes from our inner children, from what we learned by watching the adults in our lives, is one of the two primary thought tendencies I see in my clients in Anchored. Of course, there are folks who are one way in some relationships and other ways in others.

And I see that overarchingly. Either we carry a belief that we are not capable of handling our own lives and we ourselves need rescuing, we need to be told how to do our lives in every way, how to adult. And this tends to be a form of anxious attachment driving this particular bus.

Or à la avoidant attachment, we swing the other direction and over function. We are wildly independent, and we believe that we can do everything all by ourselves, thank you very much. This is the old "I am a rock, I am an island" school of life, where we don't ask for help, support,

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

care, coregulation. And we believe that we are the only ones we can count on. No one else will show up for us. That we need to do everything on our own.

And from either overly dependent on others, where we seek to manage other people's lives in the hope that they'll reciprocate, because goodness knows we can't manage our own lives. Or from wildly independent, where we seek to prove our independence by overdoing for others. One of the ways we can show up in relationship from either stance is as "the rescuer".

We've talked about "the fixer" archetype before, and what I want to expand on here is the concept of rescuing versus supporting. Because something folks say to me often in *Anchored* goes something like this. "I am a loving, caring, kind person, of course I want to care for and about the people in my life. Of course, I want to support them and be there for them, which is why I do so much for them."

To the first part of that I say phenomenal. Do that. Care about your people. *And* you get to recognize that there's a fine line, and an important one, between supporting the people you love and attempting to rescue them. Between giving from your emotionally full cup, giving from your overflow, and giving when you're running on empty.

There's a vital difference between giving from obligation, from "has to", from stories that you were socialized or conditioned to believe. Like, "good girls, good wives, good humans do X, Y, Z, so I have to." From taking care of others from that subconscious, or even conscious, story that 'if I do for you, then you will do for me.' Ooph, there is such a difference between all of that and giving with a full and open heart, which means giving it without a goal, without the old tit for tat.

Because part of this codependent narrative is that it's all about keeping score, which again, we do some subconsciously. I don't think you're out

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

here being like, “Okay, I’m going to do the dishes, so they will have to do the laundry, right?”

The difference I’m highlighting here is the difference between giving to others, taking care of your family, friends, community, the people you love, from an energy of reciprocity and mutuality. Collective love and care versus the desire to rescue them.

The former means you trust yourself to be an autonomous human who can take care of themselves, and also needs other people for coregulation, support, love and care, because the collective matters. And simultaneously trusting that those you love are also autonomous humans capable of taking care of themselves too.

This is the basis of an interdependent framework for living and is markedly different from the codependent framework, which says, “I will take care of you because then you must take care of me. You are obligated. I operate and move through the world from obligations, so obviously, you must do the same.” Obviously.

What that leads us to, is to engage in the self-abandonment cycle; which we talked about in great detail in Episodes 163 and 164. Which leads us to have these expectations of others that are not feminist, because they’re not consent based. Other people are consenting to be a part of our grand scheme to garner love and care and affection from others by taking action to try to live and manage their lives for them, to rescue them.

So this week, I’ll be sharing some examples of supporting, loving, interdependent care alongside examples of rescuing others. Remembering that when you’re in rescue energy, you’re often giving more than you healthfully can. You’re taking on other people’s problems as your own, and you’re emotionally enmeshing yourself with them.

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

So, if we remember the basics of the think-feel-act cycle, my darling, you can do the same action from an energy that is supporting and self-loving and mutually loving, and you can create a beautiful result for yourself. Or you can do the same thing from an energy like rescuing. And that same action can create a wildly different result in your life.

You can give to others for the joy of giving, and it can feel beautiful. You can give to others because you want them to rescue you someday down the line, and it can feel graspy, not sincere, not aligned with your integrity. Furthermore, from rescuing energy, we do things we don't want to do. We don't have healthy boundaries. We don't know when to say 'enough already. Basta.' We don't know, when we don't know our own limits.

You may be completely exhausted. Maybe the baby was crying all night, or the dog kicked you in the belly, or you worked the double shift, or you're busy writing your book, and someone else says they need you. Or you believe they need you because you believe it's your job to do their life for them. So, you do for them. Often without checking in with yourself or with them. Often without asking if they actually want to be rescued.

So, without realizing it, you exhaust yourself, your nervous system, your adrenals. You take time away from nourishing yourself, doing what serves you. And you create potential resentment in your own life if they don't praise you for doing something they didn't ask you to do.

Meanwhile, you rob the other person have the opportunity to deal with their own life on their own terms. You take away their chance to figure it out. And of course, to be clear, if someone's about to drive drunk, have a conversation. Take their keys. Say, "I don't think it's safe for you to be on the road."

I would like to offer alternatives. If the barn's on fire, go pull the babies out. I mean, for goodness sakes, right? And if someone says to you, "I'd like your

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

opinion. I'd like your thoughts. What do you say here?" Then, by all means, share your opinion when you've been asked.

But what we're talking about here is something so different. It's inserting ourselves into other people's lives, from this belief that that will create love for us, and that they're not able to manage their lives. And that's the part we can't see when we're doing this. What we're actually saying when we try to rescue others is, "I don't trust you to live your own life, to take care of your business on your own. I believe in my mind, in my heart, that you need me to step in and to manage your life for you."

We don't realize... I mean, of course, we don't realize... how yucky and paternalistic that is. Again, I don't think you're consciously thinking that. I certainly wasn't. And oh, my goodness, I was such a rescuer. I was always giving opinions that weren't asked for. I would insert myself and try to rescue folks, especially the people I was dating, from their own life. I would do for them a thousand things they had never asked me to do.

And I came to see that they didn't want me to rescue them. That they were on their journey, on their own path, and that I was robbing them of the opportunity to figure it out on their own, and thus, to design their own unique solutions. I was robbing them of the chance to live their lives for them.

The truth is that if people wanted my opinions, thoughts, guidance, they could ask for it. But from that rescuer archetype, who we don't even trust or believe, or even think about the fact, that other people could actually be able to manage their own lives. Because we are so scared that we can't manage ours. So, we project that fear onto them.

We believe it's our job to go in there and manage their world for them. We believe that what's right for us is what's right for everyone. And it's just not. This habit is so painful and damaging in our lives and our relationships, in the lives of the people we love. And we believe that we are doing this



## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

because we love the people in our lives. We don't want them to suffer, to be in pain, for things to be challenging for them.

From my own lived experience, and I am speaking only for me, I now know that I needed to go through all the things I've gone through in my life to become the person I am. And if someone had attempted to rescue me, I wouldn't have been able to hear them until I was ready to. Ooph, trying to force someone to hear you when they're not available, they're not ready, that ends so poorly for everyone involved.

Because we tell people how to live their lives, and they don't hear us and so we get offended. We get pissed off. We take it personally. We turn it into this whole thing. But it's actually just they're not able to hear us because they're not in a place in their own growth, in their own development, in their own emotional maturity, where that's possible. So, the remedy is to honor and accept that.

Another reason why we step into the rescuer role is when we have a core disbelief in our own value and worth, when we doubt ourselves so strongly, sometimes we show up as though we had not a doubt in the world. We show up with this deep confidence when it comes to other people's lives. because we have to overact our self-belief. We feel we need to pretend, in a way, that we're super self-confident, as a cover up job.

We think we need to show up as know-it-alls, as perfect and amazing in other people's lives because we are so insecure in our own. Isn't that wild? I think it's wild. And we do it, you know. I talk about the things I talk about here because your gal did it too. And we do it so often that it keeps us in this role of rescuer for others, versus being in loving support.

And we do for others instead of living our own lives, which means, listen up, that being the rescuer is indeed a form of buffering, of not facing our own emotions, our own lives. Instead, we focus on everyone else. When we are rescuing others, we believe we are protecting them from the

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

consequences of their actions. And we do so instead of just letting them experience the consequences of their actions.

I can think of someone I dated whose mom would literally do their homework in middle school and high school, because she knew that they weren't going to do it for themselves. And then, they got to college and things were challenging. And then, when they tried to take a postgraduate exam, they failed three times because they didn't know how to study.

They didn't know how to manage themselves; to have a study schedule, and to do that kind of academic work for themselves, because their whole childhood development time their mother had been attempting to protect them from potentially failing in high school. It's ironic, right?

And so, what happens if we think someone is taking a wrong turn? We scream it out. And if they won't change course, we're like a dog with a bone trying to get them to see the error of their ways, and the brilliance of ours. The other day, my date was over. They were brushing their teeth...

And I know this is a silly example, but I think it's an important one. Because remember, our codependent, perfectionist, people-pleasing habits, they're all relational and they show up in the quotidian b.s., right? It's the small everyday things that make up a life, and make our lives from these habits feel so painful and challenging, rife with strife and stress. It's these small everyday interactions between ourselves and the world that leave us feeling so terrible.

So, we're brushing our teeth before bed and I, ever the perfectionist, had spent a lifetime brushing my teeth so hard that now, in my early 40s, I've scrubbed the enamel off of so many of my teeth. Ouch, right? And so, my date was brushing their teeth and I believed that they were brushing their teeth too hard. And oh, my goodness, was I about to say it! I was about to say, "Babe, really, stop brushing your teeth so hard."

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

I could feel the words trying to come out. Instead, I was able to pull back, take a breath, center myself, anchor into myself, and I said nothing. Because they're an autonomous human adult who can take care of their own teeth, right? They don't need me to come in and be like, "Let me tell you how to brush your teeth, buddy."

It's not my job to protect them from the potential consequences of their exuberant brushing without their consent, they have a dentist, after all. Gut that's what rescuing is, it's non-consensual. And in the end, it's not kind. So, we think we're protecting others from the consequences of their actions, but we're not. We're just temporarily shielding them instead of letting them experience what comes when they take a certain action.

In the think-feel-act cycle, we put a stop in their path that they haven't agreed to. And then, in turn, when we are rescuing, if we take responsibility for other people's thoughts, feelings, lives, we take responsibility for things that are not ours.

If our partner goes out, leaves the house for work and they forget to take a raincoat, we take it on as our responsibility that they're going to get wet. They're going to be sitting at work with wet hair all day. We say to ourselves, "Why didn't I remind them?" We make it a problem with us. If we pick a place for dinner and they don't like it, we take on this immense personal responsibility that can be, ooph, so much to carry.

We take on responsibility for things, big and small, that aren't ours. Particularly other people's feelings, their experience of the world, the results in their lives, their choices, and ours. But a core part of thought work in the think-feel-act cycle is to recognize that, of course, our choices influence and impact the people around us. *And* they get to choose how they want to think and feel about any experience in life. And so do we, but we take ownership for their feelings.

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

It's a core part of our codependent and people-pleasing thinking. We believe we need to please others constantly instead of focusing on pleasing ourselves and making the decisions that are best for us and the collective. Instead, we make decisions because we don't want someone else to have a feeling they might not enjoy.

The remedy, the more supportive thing to do when we don't like the potential trajectory of someone else's life, is to be there and to show them love. To stay on our own side of the street and to ask ourselves, "Is this my business or is it not?"

And then, when someone does come to us with a problem, an issue, we get to listen with care and emotional generosity, to empathize, and to ask if the other person would like supportive words or suggestions, without taking responsibility for their feelings.

Next, from rescuing, we make excuses for other people's behavior. We excuse away other people hurting us or harming the people we love. We excuse away abuses of power. We excuse patterns of behavior instead of holding people in our lives accountable.

And it's important to say, many of us learn this habit in childhood. Because for some of us, there was a person who was not held accountable. Who everyone in the family enabled to continue to have whatever behavior they had that was problematic for the family as a whole.

And so, of course, you continue to do what you learned, until you learn to do it differently. You find yourself saying things like, "Oh, yeah, he just had a little too much to drink. Oh, it's not that she's angry with you, honey, she just had a really hard day at the office. You don't even know how stressful her job is. I know they were short with you, they called you that name that hurt your feelings, but they just don't know any better."

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

Instead of honoring that other person's capacity for self-awareness and change, we preemptively let them off the hook as a way to rescue them from the effects and impact of their own behavior and choices. And it bears saying that we may do this particular rescuing protecting now, if in childhood we saw one parent doing this for the other. Because it actually was a smart way for them to keep themselves and us safer; physically, emotionally, financially.

So, of course, we honor that. And so, the remedy, the supportive choice, is to honor the duality of your experience in relationship. To both hold the person whose behavior isn't working for you in love, care, curiosity, compassion, and acceptance of who they are and how they behave, while acknowledging that their behavior is not working for you.

Saying, "This behavior is not behavior I'm available for, that I'll allow around me in my space and my children's, my family space. This, this doesn't work for me. And I love you. I have love and care for you. I can see you as a human in all your complexity. And that doesn't mean I condone your behavior. It definitely doesn't mean I need to enable it or to make excuses for it, to write it off, or pretend it's not happening."

And so, in holding that duality, I love you and this doesn't work, we both get to make steps to correct the behavior in our space. To set healthy boundaries that honor us, the relationship, the other person, and we get to do so from that big open heart.

It is so important to recognize that the core of these resting behaviors is a deep discomfort with discomfort, your own and that of others. So, most of us would rather throw ourselves under the bus in order to keep the peace. And that's what we say out loud, "I'm just trying to keep the peace here." But we're definitely not keeping the peace in our hearts, not at all. We're creating so much more stress and distress for ourselves under the guise of just keeping the peace. Right?

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

So, the remedy to excusing away someone's problematic behavior is once more to hold that duality in our hearts, and eventually to start practicing setting boundaries to protect our tender hearts in our relationships.

Next up, we attempt to rescue others by offering... usually imposing... our own solutions or advice; our answer for their problem. We tell them, "If I was doing that, actually, I would do it this way," when they didn't even ask. We attempt to control others by imposing our way of doing it because we believe it will make us feel safer. Because we are trying to control outcomes.

And we do it in the subconscious hope, as well, that they'll do the same for us. And that then people will think we are important. We are someone they should keep around and not abandon. They'll think we're too valuable to dismiss. We think all this rescuing will make us matter in their eyes and our own. That we'll get to say, "See how helpful I am?"

And so, that's often the undercurrent of attempting to force our opinions, or any other kind of rescuing, onto others. The more supportive way to show love and care to the people in our lives starts with getting consent. Episodes 27 and 28 are all about giving and getting emotional consent. So, please go give those a listen if you haven't. It's been like two years since they came out, so if you haven't heard them in a while, maybe do a refresher because it's a really important skill.

So, getting consent before we give advice is a key remedy for stepping out of the rescuer role. And that sounds as simple as saying, "Hey, I have thoughts I'd like to share about topic X. Let me know if you'd like to hear it." This one has been so huge for me. Because before anchoring myself in me, before learning to manage my mind through thought work, and connect with my body through somatics, I would give all this advice.

And not just about health and wellness or nutrition, about friggin' everything. Like, how to fry an egg, how to make that soup; pick a topic, I

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

have an opinion. I would just foist it upon others without a check-in or without their consent. I was just foisting left and right. It's not a loving way to be in a relationship. It's really not.

It's not kind, because, again, there's this underlying assumption you may not even recognize that says 'they don't know how to manage their own lives.' It's not trusting others. And it puts everyone in an unnecessary relationship dynamic in which, once again, you are the rescuer and they need rescued. You are the person who knows better, and it creates a dependency on you to continue, ad nauseam, to solve their life for them.

And I get it, that there's a part of us that wants that, for others to be dependent on us. But at the end of the day, do you really want that? I mean, also think of the potential resentment, right? So, you're managing someone's life, you're telling them to do X-Y-Z and it doesn't turn out the way anyone wanted. Do you really want to be responsible for that? I don't. I want to let others live their lives. And if they want my advice, I can offer it, and they can accept or not.

Because doing it otherwise is not feminist. Consent is feminist. Check-ins are feminist. We honor each other's autonomy; that's the name of the game. Yeah, more. So, checking in and getting consent before you go ahead and give advice is the remedy. And it's a beautiful and loving way to be in relationship with others and yourself.

Finally, there's a piece there about acceptance. Accepting that other people may not want your help. You may be the world's leading expert on sunscreen, and people may not want to hear your opinion about it. You may be a James Beard award-winning chef, and your partner may not want to hear about how you think it's best to fry an egg. They may be all set, thank you very much.

But it can be challenging for us to accept that other people might not want our advice, or expertise or brilliance, when it's so tied up with our worth.

## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

And I get it. You know I've been there. My darling, your specific advice may not be wanted in that moment, and you get to let that be okay. For your own sake. By not taking things personally, by not making their preference for their life about you, you create so much peace in your own heart. They have their preference and you have yours.

What you may want is to share your opinion, and what they may want is to not hear it. So, I'll ask you, why is your want more valid than theirs? I'll invite you to ask yourself that. Because again, we don't realize that that's what we're saying, "My want matters more," but it's what we're saying.

I'll ask you as well, what unmet need from your childhood are you trying to have met by having this person tell you, "You matter. Your voice, thoughts, opinions? They matter." Is that a want or need that you can meet for yourself? Can you come into acceptance here? What can you do to show up for you, and to anchor yourself in you, so your self-worth isn't dependent on others wanting your advice, your rescuing?

So, in closing, when we try to rescue people from their own lives, we continue to strengthen the codependent neural groove in our mind that believes that our worth, your worth, is contingent on how other people behave, what they think about me, about you, how they feel in relationship to us.

When we allow ourselves to keep stepping into the rescuer role, we strengthen the story 'my value comes from controlling and managing others,' instead of just holding space and letting them be their own human with freewill.' We strengthen the story that we have to act as though we're that important, because we fear that we're actually inconsequential and don't matter.

That story says that we need to actively prove our worth and value. Instead, we can actively learn to stay on our own side of things. We learn to prioritize ourselves and to take care of ourselves. And yes, to show up for



## Ep #282: Stepping Out of the Rescuer Role

the people we love, for our communities. And to show up in a consensual manner that respects them in their autonomy, in an interdependent way, by being supportive, caring, kind, instead of rescuing.

Alright, my beauties. Thank you. That's it for this week. Thank you for joining me. If this show has been supportive to you this week, as always, and you haven't subscribed to the show, if you haven't given a five-star rating and a written review, I would ask you with love to go do that now.

The reason I keep asking is because it helps to get the show into more ears, and that's what I want. I want this free resource to be heard far and wide. I feel so privileged to have all the education that I have, the time and energy I have, to write this show. And I want to share it freely with the world.

So, I thank you in advance for taking a little moment. Because when you give the show a five-star rating and a written review, it bumps it up in the search. I know it's silly system, but it's the system we've got. So, every little review helps.

Alright, my darling, 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 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](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar) for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.