

Ep #285: How to Overcome the Habit of Catastrophizing



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine expert, and life coach Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well.

This week, I am sharing one of my absolute favorite all time tools, which is a super important question. It sounds really simple at first and the power of it, it's just unmatched in my life. It's been one of those top, most important question, reframe tools and it's, "What if it's not a problem?"

There are so many reasons. You know, we talked the other week, we talked last week about attachment. Previously, we talked about roles and the roles we get put in, put ourselves in, continue to play out patterns in our families that lead us to have all sorts of stories about conflict.

And so, it felt just perfect to follow that up with talking about our habit of catastrophizing, globalizing, making things into massive, dramatic big deals that don't really need to be; where it just doesn't serve us, our families, our friends, the universe, anyone or anything, to make that situation into a problem.

Osea, that's not really true. It serves our younger self, right? It serves the parts of us that don't feel worthy, don't feel belonging, don't feel safe, and believe that if they make whatever inconvenience, whatever annoyance, whatever, whatever into a really big problem, then we'll finally get the support we want and need. It is of service to that part of us.

And that's super valid, right? We get to love up on those parts, but I wouldn't say it serves our adult selves to continue to make everything a problem. So, without further ado, I'm really excited to share this episode with you.

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If you are enjoying what you're hearing on the show, please give us a subscribe or a follow, five-star review and a quick little written rating. I can really be like, "Show is good. I heart show," whatever. It helps us to get found in search. And so, the more reviews, the more people find this free resource that I pour so much time and energy into. And that's all I want. I want more people to get this free information.

So, thank you in advance for helping with that mission. And here we go.

Okay my love, so this week, we are talking about a habit I see in my clients pretty much every day. And as always, totally did myself for so long. And this is the habit of making things that don't need to be problems into problems in our own minds and worlds.

So, let's back up here. When your sense of worth is externalized, which is the core wounding of codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing tendencies, we tend to source our own wellness, worth, and value from others.

And especially if you grew up in chaos or see yourself as a fixer, that person who takes on other people's issues or lives as things you need to help them with or solve for them, then you may be creating problems in your mind where there aren't actually any, so you can step into being the savior, can prove your self-worth, and we do this all with the hopes, subconsciously of course. I don't think you're actually thinking this, that someone will step in and say, "Thank you. You really saved the day. You matter as a human."

So, our focus here today is on the language that we choose to use to talk about the circumstances in our lives. The way we think, talk about, and label things as problems in our own minds and interpersonally. And as always, I'm not out here labeling things in the world as not problems. Always quite the opposite.

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Anti-Black racism is a problem that leads to the thought error that some people are better than or superior to others. And that's a problem. Poverty is a problem, transphobia, homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny, patriarchy, these things are problems. Prejudice and structural inequality, those are massive problems that must be addressed.

And today, we're talking about something really different. We're talking about this concept of what is a problem in terms of our day-to-day lives and how we think and talk about problems because language matters. The way you think about and describe your life creates your experience of it.

And I know this matters because I can feel the difference in my body when I shift my language and my clients share this day in and day out. I made a small shift in the way I thought about and talked about something, and it brought me so much peace.

It changes my life in such powerful ways to get really clear about the language choices I'm making and the stories I'm feeding into my nervous system, thereby freeing me up to think about the things in life in less intense and problem-focused ways, which then in turn frees up energy to be of service in the world, to do my part to affect social change around the issues that are in fact problems in our society.

So, my beauty, let's dive in. When your internal habit, your focus is on the problem, with calling it a problem, experiencing whatever may be happening in your life as a problem, and jumping to that knee-jerk reaction, and we've talked about this before.

When you think something is a problem over and over and over again, it will always feel like a problem. And so, when that is your life story, when you've never paused to ask yourself if it's really a problem or just something you've habitually called a problem, you stay mired in the problem-ness. Your energy is focused there.

I know in my own way I start labeling and calling a situation a problem, I am as far from being able to see it objectively as humanly possible, and I start

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rolling around mentally like, oh no, all is lost, this is terrible. And that train of thinking takes me further and further away from potentially or possibly even seeing the solution because my world, my mind becomes absorbed in the problem-ness.

Simultaneously, my body braces. There is more and more tension within me when I tell the story that there is a huge problem here. And so of course because science, my digestion doesn't work the way I'd like it to. Of course I have jaw, shoulder, hip, and neck pain because my whole body is bracing for a blow like a boxer in the ring.

I am armored in my physiology against this problem, and so it continues to consume me, mind and body. To the codependent mind, discord or disagreement can seem like a problem in your world.

So, I'll ask you, my sweet love, what if it's not a problem if other people have different opinions, wants, needs, hopes, dreams, ways of reaching their goals? What if it's not a problem for someone else to already have the things that you want, and for you to be in process?

I'm thinking here of how often my clients say to me, well, my friends from high school are all married, they all have the house, the children, the picket fence. That's a problem. But thinking that that's a problem, the difference between you is a problem keeps you stuck in thinking of it as a problem.

What if it's not a problem to want something different from the people you love? And from what the people you love want for you? The work around this is to learn how to just want what you want, which I know can be really, really challenging for the codependent thinking mind. Please, I get it.

But that's the work, right? To learn what you want and to allow yourself to want what you want for your life and to stop questioning that, and to sit with the discomfort of having emotions that are incongruent with those of someone you care about, or society at large, or your conditioning.

And this process is really challenging at first, until it isn't. So, let's look at some examples from my clients and walk through the thought work protocol

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around this first one. Circumstance, your kid got a C in a class. If you are this parent, your mind may go to, “He’s going to fail out of school and make nothing of his life and he’s going to live in my basement until I’m a million years old and dead and I’m such a bad parent, how did I let this happen? Our lives are ruined. I have to fix this.”

So, when that’s your train of thought, when the totally neutral circumstance, your kid got a C in a class is posited as a problem in your mind, of course that train of thought will make you feel anxious, worried, upset, maybe angry at him, angry at yourself.

And so, the action you take may be to berate him and you, to criticize him and you, to complain to your friends and to continue to focus on the problem as a problem, which leads to the result of this situation continuing to feel massive and terrible and seriously like a for realsies problem. And problem is in all caps here.

Now, alternately, I’ll invite you to ask yourself, what if your son getting a C is not a problem? What if it’s an indication that this human needs different supports? What if it means that he just doesn’t enjoy that particular class or isn’t being challenged enough or is being challenged beyond his current developmental capacity, or that something else entirely is going on?

If you focus on the problem as a problem and work to insert yourself to fix it, you are both continuing that codependent way of thinking and you’re missing the opportunity to show up for him in a different way. With an internal focus on getting neutral, you can see what the what actually is and can then move forward towards a solution or hold space for the other human, here, your son, to get to a solution on his own, or to co-create it, instead of insisting that your way is the way.

I want to invite you to feel into the difference between seeing the C in history for example as a problem, which often leads us to say, “What? You got a C? Dude, what is going on here?” From this anxious, judging, not accepting energy.

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Versus pausing to shift into self-love, love for the kiddo, to shift into a calmer, supportive energy and to say, “My love, you got a C. What’s going on here?” And saying that, showing up from the energy of this isn’t a problem, it’s what is right now. And I’m choosing to stay neutral about it, to not assign it value or meaning or call it anything much.

See how different that feels? Both in your body, and if you can put yourself in the kid’s shoes, so different, right? And energy and emotions matter, my darling. Our nervous systems are set to pick up energy first. Tone and energy matter to our physiology.

Let’s do another one. Let’s say your best friend is chronically late to your dates. When you focus on that being a problem and getting all riled up about it, you miss the opportunity to see that she has shown you time and again that this is how she rolls. And you can choose in that moment instead of call it a problem, instead of getting upset, to just step into acceptance about it.

This friend is always late. I am an adult and I get to decide if I want to make dates with her or not. You also miss the opportunity to set a healthy boundary and to say if you do x, I’ll do y, which here sounds like, “Babe, if you keep showing up late, I won’t be able to make plans with you, my love.”

We make situations into problems when we are not in acceptance of the facts, when we are fighting reality. That things are exactly how they are, and are often out of our control. And so, we make situations into problems when we feel that lack of control and want to feel it, which is completely human, but I don’t believe serves us in a lot of situations.

Because when we are not in acceptance, we are not truly in our power. And sometimes we have the power to change the situation and sometimes we don’t. And we get to decide to change our thoughts around it. To either find that solution or to find peace within ourselves in the face of a situation we don’t like.

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And life is full of situations that are not exactly what we want or like. I mean, I am not loving month 753 of this pandemic for example, but the sooner you stop calling life's circumstance problems and start accepting what is and changing what you can, the more peace you'll feel in my heart. My perfect little ravioli.

Another way our brains may habitually attempt to manage a situation we call a problem is to see them as immediate and urgent, chaotic, and messy. And when our brains go to there, there's not a lot of space for pausing, breathing, centering, and thinking. Not a lot of breathing room in which to pull back and get a real handle on what the what is.

And remember, when you are functioning from urgency, from chaos, you are in sympathetic activation. And remember, my sweet, sweet nerds, when your body is flooded with adrenaline, norepinephrine, eventually cortisol, you can't think so goodly.

Once again, because science. Versus, pausing, slowing it all down, and connecting in, orienting to what's real, getting grounded in this moment, however that works for your body, so that you can actually get to a solution that makes sense.

Because when life feels like a series of problems, urgent problems to fix now, there's a lot of pressure on ourselves to find a solution and fast, versus trusting and doing our internal work to hold space for the solution to appear, opening ourselves up to creativity, to being flexible to the possibility, versus forcing a solution because we think the thing in front of us is an urgent problem that must be solved immediately.

And for the fiercely independent stripe of codependence that means a problem is yet another thing that only you can solve. Meaning you need to do that thing where you drop everything that matters to you personally so you can step in to be that savior, fixer, the resentful problem-solver who then screams, "Why do I have to do everything around here?" Into the void, where the void is often folks who literally didn't ask you to turn a simple situation into a problem, much less to solve it.

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For the self-doubting codependent thinker, another stripe of us, we also can come to feel this urgency for confirmation of our thinking when we believe something is a problem. So, we get on the phone with a bajillion different people, repeating this story of woe, seeking external validation, first and foremost, that something is a problem, that it's logical for us to be upset, which can sound like, "Hey, I mean, you'd be really upset if your partner did this, right?"

And in so doing, in painting the situation as a capital "P" problem, we unrealizingly strong-arm the people we love to chime in, to give our story and thus our struggle and thus our sense of self, value. And we end up strengthening our internal story that this situation is a problem, which again, either keeps us spinning in our story and not seeing possible, simpler solutions.

And listen, if you're standing there holding your own eyeball, that's a problem. Please, get to care. But if you're not sure if you want to quit your job or go to grad school or get married or get a divorce or get a dog or a thousand other quotidian things, baby, that's not a problem. It's something that you can solve for without creating more stress and drama in your life.

Because from that urgent place, let's be real, we all just make more and more problems. We move fast and frenetically. We make mistakes. We trip over our own feet. Some of us more than others.

And we do all of that, versus pausing, and finding that calm energy within that comes from trusting yourself, that a solution is possible. And one of the things we love to do is to create these relationships with a problem focus. Not a solution focus.

We connect by complaining, by spinning others into our problem narrative. And I'll ask you, is that who you want to be? Do you want to create relationships around your problems? Listen, I run a six-month course with a problem as the starting point. But that's not what bonds us.

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We don't stay there for long. We don't spend six months focused on what sucks. I mean, of course, we hold space for all the terrible, the sad, the annoying, the angry making always. But our focus is always on the possibilities. The ways we can connect with mind, body, and spirit, to shift our story that we need problems in order to validate our existence.

Because that's not true. And we can come together around the moving forward, the being with, the accepting of what is real, deciding the story you want to tell about our lives and what the next right thing is to do. And when stress, chaos, worry, drama are your norm, what you're used to living in, what you grew up in, it feels cozy to stay there.

And the work of self-love and self-trust is learning to rewrite those experiences and that internal story that you need them to be comfortable, that discomfort is comfortable, to simplify, and to see the solutions, or to hold space for the solution, versus calling the facts of life a set of problems and then spinning in that story and rushing to frantic solutions or throwing your hands up to say, "I can't possibly know what to do next because this is a problem."

My beauty, what emotions do you want to live in, do you want to show up to your life in? Do you want to live full up with urgency, pressure, and worry? With the frenetic internal energy, which may be what was modelled for you as a child? Or do you want to show up feeling capable, resourceful, and resourced? Ready, willing, and able to handle what life hands you, and to focus on that rather than on labeling life as a set of constant problems that are keeping you from living your dreams?

The choice is yours, my beauty. This is challenging work, but my goodness, I think it's so much more challenging to live life as leap-frogging from problem to problem. Putting out fire after fire.

I'll invite you, my darlings, to see how much more you can accomplish when you allow your brain to rest, allow your body to not be awash in tension and anxiety, and to focus on self-love, on gentleness, on pulling back and seeing what is possible and to see what you can accomplish and

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how beautiful you can feel when you focus on the remedies and your own wild capacity to show up for yourself and your life.

Thank you for listening, my beauty. Life isn't a set of problems. See what it feels like to stop calling it that. Let's do what we do in this beautiful family. Put a gentle tender hand on your heart if that feels right to you. Nice breath in. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well. 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 for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.