

Ep #292: How to Break the Self-Abandonment Cycle



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Ep #292: How to Break the Self-Abandonment Cycle

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 week here on the podcast, we talked all about the self-abandonment cycle, which is a term I came up with to describe what we do as folks with emotional outsourcing habits. We seek safety, belonging, worth and value from everyone and everything outside of ourselves to our detriment.

And the cycle of detriment is through the self-abandonment cycle, where we habitually put others ahead of ourselves because we learned at some point, usually in childhood, that it was the smarter way to get by, usually because it was. So, we talked all about how and why this manifests, and this week we're going to dive into some remedies.

If you want to go even deeper into stepping out of the self-abandonment cycle, if you want to reclaim your authentic sense of self, if you want to remember who you are, what matters to you, what you want in life, and to like really feel it and really trust it in your body, I want you to know that's one of the things that we work on an awful lot in Anchored, my six-month coaching and breathwork program.

We use somatics or body-based practices, mindset work, because we're holistic and they both really matter. We bring in breathwork because connecting in with Spirit is a beautiful thing; however you define that. And so, I want to support you mind, body, and spirit to come on back to you, to stop self-abandoning and to reclaim your one beautiful life.

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If you want to learn more, and you want to apply and join us, we start up again this coming November. I love Anchored. It's my favorite place on earth and I can't wait to share it with you. Head on over to VictoriAlbina.com/anchored to learn so much more.

If you are just tuning into the show, welcome. Hello, I'm so happy to have you here. I really want to encourage you to listen to Episode 163, last week's show, or this week just won't make any sense. And that's silly. So, take a moment, go back, listen to last week and come on right back here, my love. I'm so happy you're here.

Okay, so last week we talked about this cycle: We overdo for others, we over-function, we do things people haven't asked us to do, things people could totally do for themselves. We live their lives for us.

And we do this from our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits because we unwittingly...note the "unwittingly". I'm not throwing any of us under the bus... But we learned in childhood that this is how you get love. This is how you get connection.

How you feel significant and important and valuable in the world is by doing way too much for everyone else, saying yes, yes, yes, all the time, because somewhere along the line, you learned that being selfless is the thing and being selfish is terrible.

I have a lot of thoughts about that, mostly that it's really important to have a sense of self. It's really important to know yourself, to know what matters to you, to know your limits, to have boundaries. And this is a key part of overcoming codependency. And vital to that is knowing who you are in the world, being connected with your authenticity.

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Okay my loves, so how do we heal from this cycle that most of us have been in since childhood and likely watched our caregivers enact themselves in their own lives and often with us?

Well, the first step is of course, awareness. You need to know you're doing it. And we don't know. It sort of catches us unaware that we're somewhere in this cycle, spinning and spinning, and making ourselves and the people we love miserable along the way.

So, awareness, pausing, journaling every day has been such a gift. Journaling and doing thought work, and really doing the work of seeing my own mind, seeing my habitual thinking, and what I'm calling a fact when it's really just my thoughts about the matter.

I also pair that of course with somatic work, with bodily work, so I can be present and aware in my physiology, so I can know what the what is at any given moment throughout my day. So once this cycle has started, there are several points where you can intervene.

One, before doing something for someone else, whether that's agreeing to do something that's been asked of you or inventing something to do to help others, or buying, or making, or cleaning for others, pause and breathe into it. Get present with yourself. This is the somatic piece.

Coming home to you before you say yes and asking yourself, do I like my reasons why I would say yes to this? Do I like the reasons why I am doing this? What is my motivation for doing this? What do I hope the outcome will be? Am I trying to make someone else have an emotion or think something about me? Am I trying to get their validation or my own?

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Am I trying to keep up a perfect appearance here by saying yes to something I don't want to do? Am I trying to win someone's love or care? And does it feel dependent on my saying yes here? Am I trying to feel better about myself by doing this? Am I buffering against a feeling I don't want to have by saying yes?

Meaning, you're trying to take action to try to assuage your guilt. Either you just blew up so you're fixing to over-function or overdo, or you set a boundary and are worried, often from anxious attachment that your partner, date, friend, whomever won't like you or will be mad at you. So, you feel that urge, that pull and drive to make up for it.

And to thus curry their favor because you think that will lead you to feel better about yourself, to tell a different story about who you are because you don't believe you're a good person if you say no. What will the impact or result of doing this thing be in your own life?

Will doing it, whether it's volunteering for a board, to bake cupcakes for the school, or to cook tonight when you've done it every night for the last month, will taking them to the airport or listening to their hard day take you away from doing what you want and need to do for you? And how are you going to feel about it after you've done it?

Which leads us to the last question and this is so important. Are you likely to feel resentful or annoyed if you don't get validation for doing the thing? Is how you will feel about having done this thing dependent on other people's responses to it? On someone else's approval of you? On someone else continuing to think of you as the goddess who does it all?

Once you answer these questions from a place of radical honesty, true honesty, honesty that resonates in your body, you'll have your answer. And

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listen, we are lovers. We are kind, we are people who love to do for others and there's nothing wrong with that. Nothing at all.

And the work in breaking this self-abandonment cycle is to stop doing things that leave you feeling like you abandoned yourself. That's what it's all about. So yes, you can use thought work post facto to decide that you're not going to feel abandoned. Totally a viable, great option.

And you can also decide that you matter too and that you don't always have to say yes to others when it takes you away from yourself. You can decide that you can find your way to interdependence and that you can say yes sometimes when it feels mutually loving and kind.

And you can say no when doing the thing is like buying that one-way ticket to the lousiest vacation destination on Earth; you guessed it, Resentmentville USA, population, just you sitting in the corner feeling resentful and grumpy while everyone else is like, hey, thanks for doing a thousand things for us.

So if that train has left the station and you said yes to doing the thing and you're starting to feel annoyed, irritated, angry, and resentful, that's when you get to remember that 99.99% of the time, no one is holding a gun to your head telling you you have to do the thing.

You get to remind yourself that you did in fact have agency there. That you made the choice to do for others. And you don't have to compound your suffering by telling any other story. You made a choice.

And of course, I'm not speaking to situations of abuse or coercion here. I'm talking about you choosing to do all the chores, or all the work on a group

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project, or choosing to create a lavish meal, or buy everyone complex presents, or do all the emotional labor, and to then feel grumped about it.

You also get to remember that even though you said yes, you're welcome to change your mind. One of the things we work with so much in Anchored is consent. Consent for everything we do. The folks in Anchored consent to be coached. They put their hand up. They say coach me please, and before I do, I say do I have your consent to coach you?

Because this is so important. When we have been riding this train around and around and around our whole lives, we forget that so often, we consented to do the thing and that consent that is freely given is freely taken away. Just because you said yes to baking the brownies or whatever it is, that doesn't mean you have to stay in that yes.

You can say I've changed my mind, I'm no longer available. And we'll be getting into that more in just a minute. So, when you're pausing and reminding yourself, wow, I did say yes to this, I did consent to this, that's when self-compassion is vital.

You only do this thing, the over-giving, over-functioning, overdoing because you were trained to, socialized, and conditioned to by the patriarchy, your family of origin, because you learned particularly in a codependent household that the good girl gets the love, the perfectionist gets the praise, the people pleaser gets the accolades.

You learned that this is a really great way to get through life. And no doubt it was. But over-giving until it bleeds just isn't anymore, when you're swirling in this cycle of abandoning your own desires, getting angry about it, lashing out, and then working to make up for it.

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So please, be kind to you. Be gentle with you. Recognize that this cycle is likely one that was modelled for you in childhood and you're just doing what you were taught. And there is no need to be angry at yourself for just doing what you were taught to do. And there's no need to continue to do it either.

And yeah, people aren't going to like it at first and that's likely to feel challenging and that's okay too. It's okay to choose the discomfort of other people recognizing that you're not superwoman. You're just wonderful, regular woman.

It's okay to choose the discomfort of other people being surprised by your no and having to make accommodations for their own lives when you stop living their lives for them. People will adjust. And it takes a lot of self-love to have your own back while they learn that you're no longer available to do everything for them.

And that's a choice you get to make for you, for them, for your relationships, for your family because you no longer want to choose to self-abandon because you're no longer available to light yourself on fire to keep other people warm.

You also get to remind yourself that the answer to chronically saying yes is not always saying no. The answer lies in the interdependent middle. It's like a pendulum, and people think that if they've been living at one extreme of always saying yes, they need to swing to the other extreme completely and they need to become this wildly independent person who does nothing for no one.

But that's no way to be in a loving, caring relationship. And I imagine that one of your goals in listening to this show week after week is to build more loving, caring relationships with yourself and others. My darling, we don't

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need to swing from being anxiously attached to avoidantly attached. We get to practice being securely attached to ourselves and to others.

We get to learn that it's okay to say yes when that feels right for us and no when that feels right for us. It's beautiful to be loving and kind and to take care of others. And it's beautiful to be loving and kind and to not always want to take care of others, and to let them take care of themselves sometimes.

It's all about that reciprocity and balance, my darlings. That's the place of true loving kindness to self and others. And what a beautiful energetic to put out into the world.

So let's say you agreed to do the thing while your whole body was screaming no. And here you are, neck deep in something you don't want to be doing and you're starting to feel that annoyance or that resentment, that irritation rise within you.

Those protest emotions that have historically led to protest behaviors in your life. Lashing out and being a meany-pants, which as we know, starts the cycle over again. This is when we lean on somatics and thought work to stop the train of destruction that is you from ramming into the people you love at a billion miles an hour.

And it starts with removing yourself from the situation just long enough that you can get grounded in you again before you lash out. My favorite thing to do is to excuse myself to the bathroom. It's a place where you can be alone for a moment. Well, maybe not if you have toddlers. But hopefully you can get a second in there alone to recenter and to ground yourself.

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And what we then need to do somatically is to connect in with our resources, which we talked all about in Episode 135. Often, after we've connected in with our resources, we may need to calm the nervous system.

So that can look like a slow breath in, long slow out. And remember my nerds, it's the long slow out that brings us into parasympathetic. If you're taking a long breath in and a long breath out, that can help, but really, it's the focus on the out. Long and slow, let your body calm.

It can look like gently stroking your hands together or doing an orienting exercise to bring yourself back into this present moment. I have a free orienting exercise download available on VictoriaAlbina.com. Right at the top of the page you'll see a big teal banner. Just click on it and that'll take you to the page. You put your name and your email in, and you get that orienting exercise right to your inbox.

Now, your nervous system may need more than just being calmed. When we feel put upon, unappreciated, resentful, often that comes with sympathetic activation, with adrenaline, norepinephrine, cortisol.

And what we need, when we have that rush of neurochemicals, is movement to complete the stress activation cycle and to release the movement potential that got trapped within us when our bodies were screaming, "No, I don't want to listen right now. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be a part of this," but we said yes from all of our training.

Because that big, 'No, I want to run away. I want to scream. I want to escape' energy, that is what gets trapped in our bodies. And we need to let it out so we can actually find our center. So that can look like taking a deep breath in, bringing your shoulders up to your ears, bringing your arms to

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your side, and tensing, tensing, tensing your arm muscles and your shoulders, and then whoosh, releasing your hands downward.

And I like to make jazz hands at the bottom because it makes me giggle just a little bit, which can bring us toward ventral vagal, safe and social. This can also look like clapping your hands together repeatedly. And if you're in the loo, you can flush the toilet to cover the noise.

If you have use of your legs, then it can look like doing jumping jacks, or going up to the balls of your feet and down to your heels, to the balls of your feet and down to your heels, moving. We're trying to bring movement in.

It can look like squeezing something repeatedly and releasing, and that can be a ball or a rolled-up pair of socks, and you can squeeze and release, squeeze and release. The work here is to work with that energy that's trapped in your body until the energy of resentment and irritation starts to dissipate from your soma, from your body.

And from there, we do thought work. Only once our nervous systems are in a state where we can do that, where we are feeling ourselves, "Okay, I can see straight now. My vision has cleared. I'm not just seeing red. I don't just feel murderous. I'm coming back into myself. Back to my ventral vagal anchor. Back into the safe and social part of me."

Because it's only from there that we can have loving conversations and not project our internal swirling onto others. And then it's boundaries time. It's time to set limits. It's time to say and I know this is super scary the first few times and that's okay. I promise it gets easier; it gets better. It's just a muscle you need to keep flexing and releasing, baby. You are likely to survive it, I promise.

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And by the way, setting those boundaries, setting those limits is so much better than the alternative, which is to continue to do the thing you don't want to do, to lash out, and to overcompensate. So, you get to say, "Baby, I'm not available to make dinner tonight. I'm not in a place to be on the phone right now. I can help you clean up tomorrow but only after you've done your share of it. I hear that you're struggling and I've had a long day myself. Let's talk about this tomorrow."

"My darling, I said yes to having this conversation because we promised we would abide by our Clean Fight Club rules," Episode 162, "and I'm not here for this conversation until you can talk to me the way we agreed to. My capacity has changed, and I'm no longer available to help you with that. I trust you'll be able to do it on your own or to find someone else who can support you."

And then, and then, and I want you to be prepared for this before you set the limit, here's where thought work comes in. So you can manage your feelings around saying no. And again, if you're new to this, you're likely to have a lot of guilt and shame for not being everything to everyone always and that's okay.

You get to let yourself feel it, to really feel all those feels, to cry about it, to go for a run about it, to journal about it, to dance it out. But what I don't want you to do and what I imagine you don't want to do either is to buffer against those feelings. To drink or smoke about it, to eat about it, to over-function about it, to harm yourself about it.

Instead, you get to really let yourself feel it and to be in all the emotions. All while choosing a thought like it's okay for me to have needs, it's okay for me to have wants and desires, it's okay for me to take care of myself. It's okay for me to not want to do all the things, it's okay for me to rest.

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I am a human and I get to have my own preferences and wants too, and it's okay if those don't line up perfectly with what everyone else wants of me, even if I've always done all those things that I didn't really want to do. It's okay to want to change the script now with love for myself and the people in my world.

And you get to remind yourself, when you're feeling taken advantage of or resentful for doing all the things you don't want to do in the first place, that it's okay for others to do what's right for them. Just like it is for you. That it's okay for others to have limits and to set boundaries and not to disrespect themselves just because you always have.

So, let's say you didn't do any of that and you engaged in that old protest behavior. You lashed out, you jabbed, you were mean, you guilted, you shamed, you blamed, you said things like, "Ugh, I do so much for you and you can't do this one little thing for me." Now what?

Well, we start with the nervous system always. Story follows state is something we say in the nervous system world all the time because it's so true. The story you tell about yourself and others is wildly different when you're jacked up in sympathetic activation, closed down in dorsal vagus, or when you're grounded, oriented, and somatically bodily present in ventral vagus.

So, attend to the animal that you are first and foremost. Find your way back to calm and grounded. Release energy like we talked about. Shake your hands vigorously, run your wrists under the cold tap water to bring in a tiny touch of activation energy. If you're feeling shut down after lashing out, come home to you first. Get anchored in you first.

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And then, and then you get to apologize without getting defensive, without protesting and telling your side of the story. I always do so much. No, no, no my darling. We get to apologize from our big, open hearts without making our self-abandonment choices anyone else's responsibility.

And we talked all about self-responsibility in Episode 92 and we talked all about how to apologize, in a loving, kind way, in the mini-series from Episode 72-75. So go listen to those shows to learn about different ways to apologize, what to say and not to.

And you get to apologize to yourself too for not taking care of you the way you most want to, while also not guiltting or shaming yourself because again, you were just doing and being how you thought would get you the most love, care, connection, and acceptance.

You just had an old playbook, my darling. One that no longer serves the you you're working to be in the world. The one who knows that you matter too. The one who no longer chooses situations where you're likely to be resentful and frustrated in the end.

And you get to do it all with empathy, love, and compassion with gallons of self-acceptance of the person you've been. So, you can lovingly become the you with the habits you want to have in the world. And you get to use thought work to choose your next thought on purpose and ahead of time.

To not choose to be mean to you for being mean, and you get to choose your actions ahead of time too, which is such an amazing part of thought work. You get to decide here and now that you won't go back down the rabbit hole of overcompensating for your missteps because you understand now that that just starts the cycle over again.

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And instead, you get to show up in a way that's proportionate, to make amends and apologize without over-functioning any longer, which takes practice, commitment, which we talked about in Episode 151, and a dedication to living a life you love based in embodied, somatically present, interdependence every step of the way.

My beauty, I'll close by saying this. When the people in our world are used to us doing everything for them, it can be a big shift for us to no longer do those things. And it's worth talking about. It's worth having direct communication about so everyone knows what you are and aren't available for.

So they're not as likely to feel abandoned either after years of having you do all the things. And I get that that can feel challenging. But once again, isn't it so much harder to continue to live in this painful cycle and to continue to not have your own back? To continue to put yourself out over and over and to feel like crap about it, and to then treat yourself and the other poorly because of it?

My brilliant colleague and teacher, Corinne Crabtree, says you get to choose your hard. Because both paths are hard at first. And you really do have to pick one or the other at some point. So, which will you choose, my perfect tender ravioli, my sweetest little kitten?

To start to have your own back, to say no when you want to say no, when your body tells you to say no, to build your somatic awareness of what a no feels like in your body so you can heed and honor it, or to continue to try to keep others happy at your expense, to abandon yourself and to lash out?

My beauty, I choose the former. And it's not always easy and it is always worth it. Pinky promise. Thanks for listening, my love.

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Alright, my beauties, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well my sweet one, and 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.