

Ep #305: Emotional Outsourcing at the Holiday Table: Staying Grounded and Setting Boundaries



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. So today we're diving into a topic that might feel uncomfortably relevant this time of year, dealing with challenging family members and really challenging conversations, especially when the family dynamic is a tangle of emotional outsourcing. And if you're new around here, that means our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits.

Now, I think most of us have been there. You walk into a family gathering outfitted with the absolute best intentions, maybe even a little casserole of something delicious to share. And within minutes, your once calm nervous system is doing absolute backflips, and you're just kind of hoping that maybe the couch will swallow you whole. Maybe, if you're lucky.

Your cousin is making passive-aggressive comments about your career, your mom is laying on the guilt about how little you call, or making so many comments about your weight, your skin, your hair, your... Oh wow! And of course someone has inevitably brought up politics over dessert. It's a lot.

And here's the thing, my angels. Navigating these moments with grace and self-respect isn't about memorizing a script or nailing a witty one-liner. I mean, don't get me wrong, a well-placed zinger can feel amazing, but if your nervous system is in full-blown red alert mode, heart racing, seeing red, contemplating murderations, breath shallow, or maybe you're halfway dissociating, it's gonna be really hard to land that quick with the mic drop energy I know you're going for.

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And that's why we start with the foundation, regulating your nervous system, staying present, grounded in your body because that's where your choicfulness lives. If your inner wiring is screaming, fight, flight, freeze, they're probably not going to execute that perfectly crafted boundary or deflect Uncle Kevin's racist political rant with the finesse I'd know you'd like to bring.

I've said it before and I will say it again. You can't think your way out of an activated nervous system. My angels, because science, right? So if this is resonating, but you kind of need a bit of a primer on the nervous system stuff, I've got you covered.

Episode 61 on regulating your nervous system, episode 264 on co-regulation, episode 275 on creating an embodied safety. Those are all great places to start. And if you're super duper ready to go super deep on the nervous system and have my support while you do it, the Somatic Studio is a great place for you to turn to. It's my 12-week Somatic Deep Dive program. It is so nerdy, and you get to ask me questions, and I answer you in a private podcast. It's so fun. Learn more at victoriaalbina.com/somaticstudio.

Okay, where were we? So, nervous system, learn how to regulate it. That's really the go-to, the place to start, to set the stage, to show up as your most grounded, most fabulous, present, choicful, thoughtful self. And here's where the magic comes in.

Once you've got the foundation of regulation, having a plan for what to say, which is what we're gonna go over today, can be super grounding in and of itself. Think of it like having a flashlight in the dark, even if things get murky, when you have something to guide you. And having a flashlight available, whether you use it or not, yeah, just that, knowing it's there can be really grounding.

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So today I'm sharing my top tips for talking to challenging family members, complete with examples and even a little pizzazz, because you know I can't resist. We'll cover everything from setting limits with love to managing political conversations. I want to say without wanting to scream into a pillow afterwards, but maybe less wanting to scream. Maybe the kitten step is like, you don't want to murder them this year, and then we'll practice together, regulate our nervous systems together for another year, really ground into it. Or maybe by like the spring holidays, that's it. That's the kitten step.

These winter holidays, my goal is to support you to not do any murders. And then in the spring, you'll just like not even want to scream into a pillow. You'll just be cool as a cucumber. How does that sound? Okay. So if you've been wishing for a way to navigate family gatherings without feeling like you're being pulled into the emotional outdoors in the Olympics, this episode is for you. Grab a cup of tea, a cozy blankie, maybe put your headphones out, let's go for a brisk walk together. Let's get into it.

One, set limits clearly and compassionately. So limits are where the magic begins, my darlings, without them, you're setting yourself up to be the family emotional sponge, soaking up everyone's drama and resentment while you're over here just trying to enjoy the pie. Limits, a.k.a saying what you are and are not available for, aren't just about saying no. They're about saying yes to yourself, to your peace, and to relationships that have a shot at thriving when mutual respect is the foundation.

And if the mutual part of mutual respect is not exactly forthcoming, then that respect is you for you and you knowing, because you're learning how to regulate your nervous system, so you're learning how to feel your own limits within your body, trusting your intuition and your discernment along with your thinking, right? This is what we work on here so that you can say basta. Enough is enough.

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And before you even think about setting a limit, regulate your nervous system. Ground yourself. Get present. So you can download my free orienting exercise from my website. Just head right over to victoriaalbina.com. At the top of the website there's like a little teal banner. Click it. You got to put your email in, right, obviously, because we need to know where to send it to. Grab that orienting exercise, practice it before you go to a family gathering, and have it on the ready, right?

So that before you like on the subway or bus ride over, if you're driving over, in the airplane over, before you go into the house, in the car, standing in the vestibule of your building, whatever, take a moment and let your body settle into the here and now. Feel your feet on the floor. Notice the rhythm of your breath. Look around the space you're in to orient your nervous system. Maybe even name what feels steady in this moment. Your heartbeat, the texture of the chair you're sitting on, the solid ground beneath your feet.

From this grounded place, letting yourself breathe and be present, limits become less intimidating and more like the invitation to connection that they truly are. So remember, a boundary is a limit plus a consequence, yeah?

And it's only about you taking care of you, never you controlling anyone else. The math for a boundary in my world is if you do X, that's cool, you do X, do it. That's on you, babe. Do it. If you do X, I will do Y to take care of myself. That's it.

Right? So if we're in, we've been watching *Mad Men*, so thus this example just popped to mind. If we are in a small space and you light up a cigarette, you do you. It's your house. I'll be walking out because I'm not going to sit here and like soak up your cigarette smoke, right? It's not if you light up a cigarette, I'm going to badger you to put it out because we don't do that to

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other people. We just take care of ourselves. That's what a boundary is. A limit, this is what is and is not okay for me, plus a consequence.

If you do that thing that I've told you is not okay for me, cool. I mean, not cool, but you know what I mean? Like, cool, cool, cool, cool, cool, I will do why to take care of myself. Often, we don't even need to set a boundary if we're super duper clear on our limit, right? So if a limit is just like really direct, really easy to understand, we don't need to go to the point where we're like, there's a consequence, it's just clear.

So let's go through some examples. The first is declining to be the emotional dumping ground. So let's say your Aunt Marla always expects you to listen to her endless spouse complaints. You love her, but the drama leaves you emotionally wrung out like a washcloth twisted dry. The old you might have nodded along, trying to seem supportive while silently screaming inside.

Grounded you? Pfft. You say, Tia Marla, I love you and I can see how much you're struggling. I just can't be the person to have these conversations because they're emotionally hard for me. I hope you can find a therapist or someone else who can really help you and support you with this. If she circles back and tries again, you can gently hold the line. Marla, I hear you, and I would like to remind you of what I said before.

I love you and I care about you, which means I can't be the go-to for this kind of conversation, because it's exhausting for me. And it means I'm not really paying attention to you and that's not kind to either one of us. Let's focus on catching up about something lighter. And if she keeps going, give yourself permission to disengage. Marla, I need to step away for a minute. Let's talk again later when we're on a different topic.

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This approach is warm, loving, honest, direct, and honors your limit. You're not attacking her or invalidating her pain. You're simply protecting your emotional capacity. You're saying what you can and cannot be available for. And what I hope you heard in the language there is I don't have the capacity to truly be present for this. And so it's a disservice to both of us if I just sit here and pretend.

And a lot of people are going to have a really hard time hearing that. And sometimes we just got to say it. You know what I mean? Like we just have to be direct and honest. I mean, because here's what it really comes down to. Do you want a relationship where you're just sitting there just like mostly checked out while someone yammers at you and calling that love and connection? Or do you want to be direct and honest and real and say like, I can't or I'm not willing to or I'm not available to, and I love you and I want to hear about other things.

For me, it's the latter, right? I value deep, real, honest connection. And if I know that something's going to push me over that line towards I'm resenting or being annoyed or irritated or frustrated or angry that someone's like talking at me, I don't want to have those feelings at someone I love. So I'm not going to let it happen.

And I would rather be honest and direct and real and have them be grumpy with my truth, then have me be disappointed in myself because I'm not living into my values, right? Because I value honesty. I value respect. I value kindness. And it's not kind to sit there fuming while someone's talking about their problems with their spouse that you don't have any bandwidth to hear.

Example two, saying no to hosting with less guilt. So your cousin Andrea insists you host the December holiday again because you're so good at it. Old you might have felt too guilty to say no, shouldering the burden, until

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you were resentful and exhausted. But grounded you knows that saying no is an act of self-respect, and it models healthier ways of engaging. You might say, "Andrea, I've hosted for the past five years and I need a break. If no one else wants to host, let's consider going out to eat or getting catering. I'm happy to help coordinate, but I can't take on the entire burden this year."

And when she tries with the guilt trip that you knew was coming, "Aww, come on, but you're the best at it." You can keep it light but firm. "Thank you, Andrea. I really do appreciate that, and this year, I'm the best at resting. Let's brainstorm together about other options." It's not passive-aggressive or sideways. It's direct and honest, simple and strong. No thank you. You're not apologizing. You're not explaining yourself to exhaustion. You're holding your boundary and offering solutions that honor your capacity. And again, you're not letting yourself get set up to resent the people you love.

Example three, handling limit pushers who just need a favor. This one. So your uncle Tim calls the week before the holiday and says, "Hey, since you're already bringing the tamales, can you pick up some wine, stop by the bakery for a pie and grab a gift for grandma? I just don't have the time." The old you might have sighed said yes, and quietly fumed while juggling yet another to-do, "This always happens. Why do they always do this to me?" Baby, you're right back at Resentment Central and it sucks to be there, right?

Meanwhile, grounded, anchored, settled you, takes a breath, orients to your surroundings, gets present, and names your capacity and limits clearly. "Uncle Tim, I won't be taking on all of that. I'm happy to bring the tamales as planned, and that's what I'm available for. Let's figure out another way to get those done. Maybe someone else can help." If he protests, "It's not a big deal. You're already out." You can hold firm.

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It might not seem like a lot to you, but it's too much for me, and I'm not available to do so much this year, even though I've done it in the past." And I think it's really important to name that, right? I've done it in the past. I know that, but I'm not doing it again. Tim, I'll be sticking with what I already agreed to.

This response is clear, calm, and prioritizes your own limits. You're offering a path forward, but you're not letting guilt or pressure push you into overextending. It's not your job to carry everyone else's load, and modeling that limit can inspire others to step up instead of outsourcing everything to you.

And of course, if the bakery was literally next door to your office building and he pre-ordered and pre-paid the pie, of course you'll hop in and get it. But this scenario is for us who overfunction, us who live in emotional outsourcing, us who put ourselves dead last, our whole lives, and put the Uncle Tims of the world, the Cousin Andreas of the world, ahead of us in each and every way, constantly and chronically.

And that's why we need to learn to step up, to step in from grounded, oriented nervous systems to say, basta, enough. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, right? And to say yes where it's not going to be something that exhausts us or pushes us too far and really practice flexing that clean, clear, no BS, no guilt, no shame, no passive aggression, no thank you, the rest of the time.

And embedded in here is this huge shift we talk about all the time in Anchored. The move from, I can't, you know, Uncle Tim, I just can't to, I don't want to, right? Because we really need to reclaim our desire because most of us, so many of us have never really known our own desire anyway. Like what do you actually want?

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Oh my goodness, the amount of time we spend in Anchored talking about, like, I don't know what I want for dinner, much less for my career or in the bedroom or for the next five years, et cetera, et cetera. Right? So we need to reclaim what we want and don't want to do. And the way to voice it in a loving, kind way is I'm not available.

Right, because of course we can self-abandon and go do all of Tim's errands for him, including a present for his mom. Of course we can. Women's invisible labor. We've been trained up. Like, we know how to do this. We are too competent, too responsible, too over-functioning on the whole, right? So yeah, of course we can. Doesn't mean we have to or that we will.

And I love talking not about what I'm physically capable of because the amount of stuff I will get done but what I'm available for because it puts me back in my agency, which is a place I did not live in for so way too many years.

So let's talk about why this works. Setting limits is not about shutting people out. It's about letting them in, in a way that works for both of you. When you're clear and compassionate, you're teaching people how to engage with you in ways that create space for mutual respect and care.

And here's the kicker, my loves. Limits, like boundaries, are only as strong as your follow-through. If someone repeatedly crosses the line after you've named it, your limit turns into a boundary and you tell them what you will do to take care of yourself if they cross your line in the sand again.

And here's the tricky part, right? Because then it's on you to enforce the boundary by stepping away, changing the subject, or ending the interaction altogether. Limits and boundaries aren't just for your peace. They're a gift to

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your relationships. They allow you to show up with more energy, more presence, and more love, and that's the magic.

And of course, I always want to remind us we are, say it with me, taller toddlers, right? We are just little kids in bigger bodies. So before you go to a family gathering and try to set a limit, especially if it's new, make sure you've eaten, make sure you're hydrated, that you sleep well the night before, limit your alcohol the night before. Like really try to take care of yourself the way you would a little kiddo. Maybe have a nice little nap, maybe call a little friend, maybe read a little storybook. I'm not kidding. But like just take care of your animal self before you get to there.

Two, manage your expectations. Family dynamics don't change just because you started working on yourself. Sometimes they do. The more we work on ourselves, the more the family sort of sees it and sees us modeling, but right away? Nah. Especially with folks you don't really spend time with, right? The emotional outsourcing Olympics? Well-worn tradition, my love. And you are not going to win the gold by expecting everyone to suddenly see the light.

That's why managing your expectations is essential, not just for your peace, but for showing up in these relationships in a way that feels true to you. On this point, we have two powerful mantras. You ready? You may feel attacked, but it's love, I promise.

One, it is not kind to expect them to change just because I want them to. Oof, that one's got a kick in the teeth. I mean, we've all been there, wanting someone to be someone they aren't. And the more you can release that, the better for everyone involved.

And two, their behavior is not about me. Let's say it louder for the folks in the back. Their behavior is not about me. Internalizing this truth frees you

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from the exhausting cycle of personalizing every comment, glance, guilt trip. It's about them projecting their pain, their worry, their anxiety, their fear onto you.

Yes, it impacts you. Yes, react to it, respond to it, for sure. But it's not about you. It's about their story about you. And when we can get really, really clear on that, life gets so much easier. Because when we respond, it's not about calling people out. It can be about calling them in and naming how their words or actions makes us feel and then inviting them to reflect on whether they want to meet you with respect or not at all can create space for healthier, more conscious interactions.

So, example one, your brother Randy loves a good passive-aggressive jab about your career. Maybe he says, "Oh, you're still doing that little coaching thing?" Or, "Oh, are you still broke? I mean, teaching high school?" The old you might have enacted violence. Or scrambled to defend yourself, listing all your accomplishments in a desperate bid for Randy's validation, which we all know is not coming, right?

Grounded you no longer grasps for it. Instead, you pause, take a breath, find your feet, orient, and then name how his words affect you. "Randy, help me understand why you'd say something like that. It feels dismissive and hurts my feelings. It makes me not want to share with you. Can we have a conversation where we're supportive of each other's lives and choices instead?" And now this is my favorite. "Are you available for that?" Because what that's doing, We've talked here before about getting emotional consent, giving and getting emotional consent before big conversations. So "are you available for that" as a way to ask for consent? Randy, are you in or out?

You could also give him a clear path to better engagement. "I'm proud of the work I'm doing, Randy. I'd appreciate it if you could talk about it with

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kindness and respect or not talk about it at all. Are you open to either one of those? And if so, which one?" Right? And so again, you're getting consent, you're getting clarity, you're like cutting to the meat of it.

And if he brushes you off or keeps pushing, you can calmly disengage. "Randy, I'm not up for talking about my work right now. Let's catch up on something else." This approach invites reflection without being defensive. It gives Randy a chance to shift his tone and meet you with the kindness you deserve, and if he keeps being a schmuck, boundary time.

Does it suck that at the end of the day, sometimes the only way to take care of ourselves is to disengage? Yeah, it really hurts. It's not great. I don't love it. And if we are to remain in relationship, if that's a choice we're making, to stay in relationship with folks who are chronically and habitually unkind to us, then sometimes disengaging is the healthiest, most protective, most loving choice we can make.

Example two, your mom guilt trips you about how little you call her. Maybe it's a classic like, "I guess I have to call you since you never call me." Instead of internalizing her guilt trip or letting it steer the conversation, you name how it feels and invite her into a more collaborative way of connecting.

"Mom, I hear that you're upset and when you say things like that it feels like you're trying to make me feel guilty. That's hard for me to hear and I'd rather focus on how we can connect in a way that works for both of us. So can we set up a regular time to talk?"

And then like name it. Like if you know she's going to go to there because she always goes to there, maybe you look at your calendar before you walk in and you're like, you know, lunchtime on Mondays at the office is pretty

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quiet anyway. Why don't I have that time prepped? "Can we set up a regular time to talk? Mondays at noon would be amazing for me."

You're not agreeing with her narrative, not dismissing her feelings. Instead, you're redirecting the conversation towards a solution that honors both of your needs.

Managing your expectations doesn't mean tolerating bad behavior. Never, not at all. It means accepting that some family patterns are deeply ingrained and aren't going to change overnight, and maybe never at all. What you can change is how you show up and what you tolerate.

By naming how you feel and inviting others to meet you with kindness or not at all, you're not just protecting your peace, you're modeling healthier communication and breaking cycles of passive aggression and guilt. You're not responsible for fixing their feelings, proving your worth, or bending yourself into a pretzel to meet their demands. You're responsible for protecting your peace, speaking your truth, and choosing how you engage.

So the next time you feel your nervous system start to rev up, whether it's from a passive aggressive comment, a guilt trip, or a loaded silence, take a moment to ground yourself. Orient to your surroundings, feel your feet on the floor, take a slow deep breath, then choose a response that reflects who you want to be, not who your family expects you to be.

Three, anchor yourself in the present moment. When family drama kicks up, your nervous system might want to pull you into fight-flight, dorsal, freeze, disconnect, check out, fawn, anything out of ventral vagal. Maybe Your heart starts pounding, your breath gets shallow, you feel that heat rising in your face, that like whooshing feeling. I get like a whoosh in my body. And that's your body trying to protect you, my darling. Again, it's biology and not a problem.

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Here's the magic. You don't have to get swept away. Anchoring into the present, which is one of the hugest things we practice both in The Somatic Studio and in Anchored. It's like planting your feet in the eye of the storm. It's where your power lies. This does not mean ignoring what's around you. It means choosing how you respond instead of getting dragged into old patterns of reaction.

So as always, before the gathering, ground yourself, get present, and one, diffusing gossip and triangulation. So your sister tries to pit you against another sibling, Sarah, maybe it's a comment like, can you believe Sarah did that again? They are so selfish. The old you might've jumped in, defending Sarah, feeding into the gossip, wanting to smooth things over. But grounded you paused and named how that comment felt.

I hear you, but when you talk about Sarah like that, it feels unfair because they're not here to share their side of it. I'm not comfortable having this conversation without Sarah here. If there's an issue, maybe we can all talk about it together. Should I text her? We can all get together?

This response is rooted in your values. No gossip, no triangulation. And it invites your sibling to reflect. Is this really the kind of conversation, the kind of relationship, the kind of lived experience she wants to have where she's talking about people behind their back? If she keeps pushing, then yeah, then maybe it's a yes to those kind of questions, right? And no judgies, you let her be her and you hold your limit while anchoring yourself in the moment.

Sweet pea, I've said how I feel about this. Let's leave Sarah out of it and talk about something else. How's your new job? Or, as always, you can pull the parachute. I'm gonna take a quick break. Let's reconnect in a bit.

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As you step outside or find a quiet spot, orient to the present. Notice the textures around you, the rough bark of a tree, the coolness of the air, sound of laughter from the other room. Let the world and your senses be your anchor, not the drama. And remember what you value in life and that you're acting in service of yourself, your values and what you truly care about when you decline to get into the gospel and triangulation.

Two, handle criticism with grace. So your dad starts criticizing your parenting choices at the dinner table. Maybe it's a loaded comment like, if you'd just disciplined your kids better they wouldn't act like that. Ouch, right? Old you might have felt the need to defend yourself with a detailed explanation or a heated argument.

Grounded you, takes a breath, feels your feet on the floor, gently orients to your surroundings, and perhaps you start with curiosity. Dad, I wonder what you think it's going to accomplish to say that. I'm genuinely curious. And then you just kind of smile and stare. Not to be a jerk, but like, and this is the thing, if you're just saying words, but like, your feelings aren't connected, it's not going to come across the way you want because it's not genuine, right? So you need to be genuinely curious to use curiosity as your tact, right? Step into genuine curiosity. What do you think that's going to do? I don't know. Let him tell you.

Or another tact is you could calmly name how his words feel. Pops, when you say things like that, it feels critical and unkind. I'd like us to have a conversation that feels more supportive. And again, here's our consenting statement. Can you meet me there? This approach invites him to consider the impact of his words and to consider shifting his tones.

If he's anything like a lot of men of his moment, he may brush you off and keep going and you can hold your limit and redirect. I'm confident in how I'm parenting, Dad. I'm not available for your opinions. Let's move on.

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How's your garden this year? Ah, if he doesn't respect that limit, that's when you can set the boundary.

Pops, if you keep talking about my parenting without my consent, because I'm definitely not available for this conversation. I'm going to need to step away from the table, and I don't think that's what you really want. But if it is, keep on keeping on, right? You're set in the clear boundary. If you do X, I will do Y. So you can disengage with kindness.

If he keeps pushing, okay, I hear you. I need to step away for a minute. I'll be back soon. And as you walk away, ground yourself in the present moment. Notice the rise and fall of your breath, the warmth of your hands, the feel of your chair beneath you. Reconnect to your own center and what you value, for example, kindness, consent, not judging others, before returning to the table.

Example three, managing an overstepping family member. So your cousin Amelia starts asking deeply personal questions in front of the entire family. Maybe it's something like, hey, so when are you finally going to settle down and have kids? You're not getting any younger, you know? Cool, cool.

Old you might have laughed it off awkwardly or tried to justify your choices to save face. Grounded, you take some breath and calmly names the impact of her words.

Amelia, when you say things like that, it feels intrusive and uncomfortable for me, and doesn't really deepen our bond or make me want to share with you. I'd appreciate it if we could focus on enjoying our time together instead of discussing my personal choices, especially at the table like this. Can you respect that?

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If Amelia pushes back with, you're so sensitive, I didn't mean anything by it, you can respond with grace while standing firm. I get that you didn't mean harm, but these are sensitive subjects and it still feels uncomfortable for me. And being very clear and direct about that, you ready? Because I love you and I want to have a positive, loving relationship with you, not hide myself from you. I would like us to keep this conversation lighter and move on to another subject. How's your new job going?

If she continues to push, you know what time it is, boundary time. Tell her that if she keeps pushing, you're going to leave the table. You're just not going to be in conversation with her anymore. You got to finesse that language based on what's going on. You can also just say, hey Amelia, let's have a chat in the hallway, just you and me for a second, because part of what feels really challenging in these moments is not just the one-on-one like, hey, are you going to have kids? Which I frankly don't ask anyone that. Leave people alone. They will let you know. You know what I mean?

If she continues to push, disengage confidently. Amelia, I'm going to take a little break from this conversation. Let's circle back when things feel more respectful and when you can honor my clear wishes. This response is direct, honest, and leaves no room for further overstepping while modeling how to protect your limits and set and keep a boundary with kindness and mutual respect.

Anchoring yourself in the present isn't about shutting people out or ignoring the conflict. It's about staying connected to your values and your nervous system so you can respond with intention rather than reactivity. When you name how someone's words affect you and invite them to shift their behavior, you create an opportunity for reflection and growth. And if they can't meet you there, choosing to disengage is a powerful act of mutual respect. It's self-respect to start, but it's respecting them because then you're so much less likely to explode on them, right?

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So the next time you feel your nervous system revving up, remember, your anchor is right here in your breath, your body, your connection to the present moment. And finally, what I know you've all been waiting for, navigating political conversations and standing up for change.

Politics is the ultimate family minefield, my love. And yet these conversations can be opportunities to educate, challenge, and call people into accountability. And as always, but like even more than in the other scenarios, regulating your nervous system has to come first, because if you're revved up and ready to shout, the person across the table probably isn't hearing anything except their own defensiveness and their puppeting of whatever talking points they heard on their right-wing news show. They're not going to be in thinking, in presence. They're just going to be pushing back against someone who's pushing at them.

So if you want to actually be a part of real change, an ally, an accomplice, a co-conspirator for marginalized, racialized, attacked communities, coming at it with a regulated nervous system, but we're like sitting across the table at a holiday. I'm not talking about a protest. I'm not talking about direct action. That's not the context here. This is like the kitchen table, right? The dining room table.

Taking a breath when you feel your heart racing, your jaw tightening, when your inner dialogue is screaming, how do they not see how wrong this is? Taking a moment to take a deep breath, orient, anchor yourself, and remember the goal here isn't to change someone's entire worldview in one sitting. It's to stand in your truth, to use your voice effectively, efficiently, and to protect your peace.

Because that jaw tightening, that heart racing is your body telling you something doesn't feel safe right now. And if your inner mammal doesn't

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feel safe, your wise, grounded, capital S self can't lead the charge towards meaningful change.

So let's equip you with a toolkit to navigate these moments, whether you choose to redirect, use humor, set a boundary, or call someone in, you'll have options that match your capacity in the moment.

So option one, redirect the conversation. Let's say you and your partner got in a fight in the taxi over to your aunt's house. Your bandwidth is low, you're not in the mood to engage, or like your flight was delayed and instead of being on the 9 a.m., you were on a red eye and you're exhausted. And you know that any engagement will lead to like, full claws.

That's when redirection can be your best friend. There's no point in jumping into the fray. Steer the ship away from rocky waters, mind the sirens, and head towards calmer seas.

Uncle Joe, we're not solving this tonight over turkey. Tell me about that new fishing boat instead. Auntie Lisa, before we get into politics, can I just say your cranberry sauce is legendary? Can you share the recipe?

Wow. My goodness, that is sure a big topic for the holiday table. Why don't we leave that aside? I've been meaning to ask you about... and insert neutral topic here. What's your take? Right?

And like make it something, hey, you know, I heard that the local botanists have been asking us to leave the leaves, like not rake up our fall leaves. What's your take? I mean, a lot of people in my neighborhood really think it looks better, but gosh, if it's better for like the bugs and the birds and your lawn will come back better in the spring, I don't know what to do.

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Now, before you're like, wait, that's buffering, that's avoidance. Yes, it is avoidance, but it's intentional. And we've talked about the difference between buffering and conscious distraction. We talked about it in episode 105. Wow, that was back in February of 2021. My, how time flies.

But sometimes we're conscious of how limited our capacity is. And so we don't choose to spend our energy where it won't be productive. Or again, trying not to like strangulate somebody, like not pull a Homer Simpson. Yeah, go to avoidance. I think it's a really great management tool when you know what the outcome is likely to be, right?

Option two, use humor. So humor can disarm, diffuse, and shift the energy of a conversation. It is a great option to have on hand when you're exhausted, when your capacity is low, when you don't want to get into it because you know that it's not going to turn out well if you do. It's playful but pointed, just enough to nudge the vibe and change the channel without escalating tension.

Now, it's important to say so many of us who grew up in emotional outsourcing, myself included, were the jester, the joker. Like we were the funny guy as a way to buffer, right? To not feel our own feelings, to not let others feel theirs, to not allow their feelings, to like try to manage energies, emotions, life in ways like it wasn't ours to manage. We were just trying to keep the peace.

So, I'm not denigrating that. I'm not saying that's a problem per se. I'm saying if we're doing it without intention, that's when it takes us out of presence, right? And so, what I'm continuing to propose here is thoughtful, intentional uses of skills like humor. Hey, Cousin Mark, sounds like you've been bingeing the cable news.

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Should I get you a Netflix subscription for Christmas? Speaking of Christmas, what does everyone hope is in their stocking? Lump of coal for you, cousin Mark, huh? Hey, Uncle Kevin, I think your debate podium's in the other room. We all know you were a master debater in high school, but let's give it a rest for today, huh? All right? Oh boy, here comes the holiday hot takes again. Who wants pie instead?

One of my favorites from Mrs. Frazzled on the Instagram, I am of an age where I watch TikTok on Instagram, anyway, she says, uh-oh, that was an inside thought and I love it. That's so good. Humor lets you make your point without diving into the muck and sometimes that's exactly what we need.

Three, back to number one, name your limits. When the conversation crosses a line, it's time for a clear, concise limit. Again, not about controlling others, about taking care of yourself. Hey, I'm not comfortable discussing politics at family gatherings. Let's focus on enjoying each other's company and let's leave politics out of it. We agreed not to talk about this during the holiday, so let's stick to that agreement and keep the peace today. Hey, I hear that this is important to you. I'm not engaging right now. Oh, I love that one. I'm not available. I'm not engaging.

Finally, I won't spend my time and energy fighting with people who don't believe in human dignity and treating all human beings fairly and justly or whatever fits the moment. So the options are to move on or move on. And I've said that before, right? Like that's the option. I won't get into it with you because I've tried and you won't listen. And I believe in human rights and human dignity and kindness. And we disagree in that matter. And so I won't fight with someone who doesn't believe in my right to exist.

If the limit isn't respected, remember, you can escalate to a boundary. What comes with action? Disengage, walk away, change the subject. Your

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boundary holds firm whether or not they respect it because boundaries are only ever about you.

Option four, engage thoughtfully if you feel physically safe. When you're regulated and sense there's room for dialogue, thoughtful engagement can be a powerful tool and it's the one I tend to take at this point in life.

Approach with curiosity and invite the other person to reflect.

I'd like to understand more about your opinion or your stance or your thoughts. Can you tell me more about why you feel that way? You're opening up a dialogue if you have room for that. Hey, I'd love to share my perspective too. Are you open to hearing it? Three, it seems like we disagree. And I'd like to understand your viewpoint as I have a lot of respect for you. Can we explore this together? Are you available to have a respectful back and forth? And so again, are you available? And then be explicit as to what you are offering, right? Get their consent, but share what you're consenting for. Are you available for a respectful back and forth?

Part of what that also does is it sets you up to later if things start to escalate, say, hey, you know, I was really available for a respectful back and forth. That's what we agreed to, and it feels like this is getting heated and I feel like this is leaving the space of respect. So let's pause and revisit this later when everyone can be civil and respectful.

Option five, call out harmful comments directly. And this is definitely what I've been doing the most at this point in life. Really just naming what is, right? So when someone makes a racist, sexist, xenophobic, homophobic, transphobic, et cetera remark, silence isn't an option in my world at this point for myself. And I'm just talking about me. You're where you are. You do you. But me, I'm going to name the thing. I'm going to name what they're doing so they can see that their bigotry isn't just going to go unnoticed.

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These moments call for courage and clarity. So a longstanding fave is, that's an interesting thing to say out loud, which is great followed up with, What's your goal in saying that? What did you expect to happen when you said something so racist, unkind, derogatory, just plain mean? And then I just stare. I just look them right in the eye and say, yeah, what you just said was really unkind. What was your goal in saying such a mean thing?

I just speak to what is, right? Hey, Aunt Lisa, I'm not the right target audience for hate. And you just get quiet and you just let it reverberate, just let it hang in the air, just let it be there. That can also go with, what did you expect me to say in response to something so hateful? Did you expect me to be equally hateful with you? Is that what you wanted? Did you want me to chime in and talk about other human beings in such a negative way because of where they were born, the color of their skin, the amount of money they have, their legal status, who they love? Did you expect me to be hateful with you?

Or another one, wow, you just said something really hateful with a lot of confidence. I'm just naming it. I'm not being passive aggressive. I'm just literally naming it. I am just in a moment of wow, of awe. You just were so confidently hateful.

So that's sort of one flavor. Another flavor of this is really to just name it and end it. Uncle Kevin, that racism is not okay. Please stop. That comment is harmful. And here's why. But know if you say here's why, you're gonna get in a back and forth, so be prepared. Either for the back and forth or to leave the room, or to call a car and leave the party. Like, be prepared, right?

Or, hey, I don't agree with what you just said. You're not actually citing real facts. What you're citing is definitively fake news that was fabricated to make us hate each other. I think we need to talk about why it's problematic. If they dismiss you, this isn't up for debate. I'm asking you to stop making

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racist comments, sexist comments, whatever. I'm not justifying why what you said is wrong. Let's move on. What you said is wrong. It is not factual. It is not kind, etc. Let's move on.

Remember, calling someone out doesn't mean shouting them down. It's about naming harm and holding the line with integrity. It's about making sure that they know that you noticed, the table noticed, right? They're not just going to get away with being another voice saying horrifying things in this moment, that you are speaking truth to their fake news.

Option six. This is a shift from the last one. Use validation and gentle challenge. Sometimes inflammatory comments come from a place of feeling unheard or unseen. Acknowledging the emotion behind their words while gently challenging the content can create an opening for reflection. I hear that you're upset about issue. It sounds really frustrating to you based on your views. Have you thought about how this impacts group of people?

It seems like this is a big concern for you. I wonder if there's another way to look at it that may be a little kinder. You can also talk about how the issue impacts you or the people you love or care about, humanizing others who are so often dehumanized by right-wing media. And sometimes when we go in with gentleness, with a really regulated nervous system and an open heart, it can really go a long way to help someone see that maybe their views aren't grounded.

A friend of mine was telling me that she went home to a rural place in the middle of the U.S. where she's from, and one of her genuinely really loving, kind sisters said something that was really problematic. Oh, that's what it was. They were talking about Columbus Day. Like she started talking about their Italian-Americans. She was like, oh, the woke mob is trying to take away our culture.

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And my friend was like, hold on a second. Let me just tell you the actual facts and like explained why there's Indigenous Peoples Day instead of Columbus Day and what Columbus was really about and that he was funded by the Spanish. It's not even actually Italian-American culture, but like, she very gently, kindly explained the truth with a grounded, regulated heart.

This is definitely a Buddhist friend, but anyway, she grounded herself. And she said, Maggie, can I explain what's real here? And like in explaining it, her sister like got it and it opened up this door where her sister had just been like spouting stuff she'd been hearing from Fox News over and over and over again. And she was able to come in with this gentleness to say like, oh, sweet pea, no. That's not it. Like, that's just not the truth.

So, this approach calls for a little more regulation because it invites dialogue rather than defensiveness, especially when paired with a calm and grounded tone. This can be really challenging and will go all kinds of pear-shaped if you are dysregulated.

So attune, orient, ground first. And finally, let it go. Strategically. Not every comment needs a response. Sometimes the most powerful move is to save your energy for a more impactful moment. The internal mantra here to practice again and again and again and again is not my circus, not my monkeys.

So you can, when they say something racist or whatever, like in your direction, you can just look at them, smile and say, oh, I'm not going to engage with that and pivot. I have literally physically turned away from people or just energetically pivot.

Letting go isn't about giving up. It's about choosing your battles wisely and recognizing that some people sadly really do put their money above

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humanity, do put profits above people and the earth, and it's a hard reality to be with, and I'm not claiming to have any answers other than should you choose to engage? Remember that it's less about winning debates and more about preserving your peace while standing in your truth.

Whether you choose to redirect, set a boundary, engage the cues to ground yourself first so that whatever you choose to do to be a voice for those so maligned on this planet in this moment, you are doing it from the most grounded, regulated nervous system that allows you to choose your responses thoughtfully.

Not just to protect your peace, but to create the capacity within you to advocate for justice and equity in a way that's sustainable for you. So you can fight not just today's good fight, but tomorrow's and the one after and the one after. Your voice matters. The issues of human rights matter, and so does your energy, because it's not just the one battle over the holiday meal.

So, in conclusion, navigating challenging family dynamics, especially when emotional outsourcing is the family hobby, can feel like a full contact sport. You've got some tools now, you've got some scripts, you've got examples. Most importantly, you've got the understanding that step one, two, three, 12, and 47 is regulating your nervous system. When you're grounded, present, and in your body, you're showing up as the capital S self who can handle just about anything with grace, humor, even a little swagger. Come on, right? Like let it move. And on the days when all that feels too much, that's okay.

These are practices and there's no, like, more perfect way to do it. Remember, setting a limit or a boundary doesn't mean being mean, managing your expectations isn't about giving up, and having a prepared

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response for political conversations isn't about shutting people down. It's about preserving your peace so you can stay connected to yourself.

As you head into those gatherings, hold this close. You are not responsible for managing other people's feelings or reactions. You are not the family sponge soaking up everyone else's emotional mess to keep the peace. Your job is to honor your self, your nervous system, your boundaries, and your beautiful tender heart as you do the work to move the needle towards ever more justice in a grounded way.

If this episode resonated, don't forget to revisit those foundational episodes I mentioned earlier, 14 on regulating your nervous system, 236 on co-regulation, 301 on creating embodied safety. Those will help you lay the groundwork to show up as your strongest, most grounded self in any situation.

And if you loved this, or it sparked some questions or aha moments, make sure to join me in The Somatic Studio. Head on over to victoriaalbina.com/somaticstudio. This is your last moment to join us for now, and I'd love to have you with me.

All right, my love, go forth, set those boundaries, navigate those political landmines with finesse, and remember that your worth is not tied to how much you give, please or appease. You are the cake, everything else, just icing.

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 beauty. I'll talk to you soon. Ciao.

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