

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

B a Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

[Feminist Wellness](#) with B a Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, somatics and nervous system nerd, and life coach B ea 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. My darling, let's talk about something that does not get nearly enough airtime. The quiet ongoing work of consciously, intentionally, thoughtfully evaluating our relationships. Not just the relationships we have with other people, though that's important, but also with our jobs, our titles, our tidiness, our home, our role in the family, our role at work, the stories we tell about ourselves, the identities we've clung to for so long we barely notice how tightly we're holding on, our relationship to our stuff. I mean, I could go on and on.

This practice really matters because as people with emotional outsourcing habits, codependent perfectionists, and people-pleasing ways of being, those sneaky thought patterns that convince us our worth lies in what we do for others, and it's so easy to slip into relationships that don't actually serve us and to get stuck in them. So many of us saw this stuckness at home. The patterns we saw modeled for us at home and took on as part of our familial legacy can make it so wicked, very much even harder to evaluate our adult relationships with clarity because we're living from unintentionality, from habit, from default, instead of from choosing the lives we're creating.

And if you're new to the show, welcome, hello, I love you. And the thing I'm most interested in is supporting you to step into agency and choicefulness. So whether it's an overranged boss, a friendship that feels one-sided, or even the title of helper, fixer, martyr, savior, saint, that you've been wearing like armor, we get so caught up in meeting other people's needs that we forget to pause and to ask, is this actually working for me? Do I want to keep doing this thing? Do I want to keep being this thing, wearing this thing, owning this thing. What's with this thing?"

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

And here's the thing, and before I say this, I recognize that this might sound like super duh when you hear it, but I know when I was way in the depths of my own emotional outsourcing, it would have been a bit of a like, I would have hit the brakes a bit. It's okay that what served you before doesn't serve you now. It's okay. Like nothing's gone wrong. Like you're not wrong. You're not bad. You didn't like F up. What served you before might not serve you now and that's normal. It's okay to change.

I mean, so many of us heard growing up that it wasn't, right? That we're supposed to be the person that our family insisted we be and it was not okay to change, to grow. But it turns out it is. It's vital, in fact. And as we grow, as we heal, as we pick up new tools for living authentically, our capacity to evaluate what truly aligns with us deepens.

It's like upgrading your GPS system. It's going to give you new routes, clearer directions, and a better understanding of where you're actually trying to go. But to use that upgrade, you have to be willing to stop and reassess where you are and what's actually around you.

And to be clear, as always, this isn't about blaming yourself for the relationships you've stayed in or the roles you've played in the past. Those choices were born of the tools you had at the time you made those choices, and they served you in some way, even if just to get through.

Maybe you stayed in that job because it paid the bills when you desperately needed stability. Or maybe you clung to that friendship because it was a lifeline during a difficult chapter. Or maybe you were with that partner because you were too scared to stand on your own two feet because growing up you were taught you couldn't or like no one modeled that for you.

Those choices made sense then, but now with your growing awareness and self-regard it's time to lovingly and intentionally ask, does this

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

connection still serve me? This kind of periodic check-in is a powerful way to keep yourself aligned with the life you want to create.

Because the truth is, when we stay in relationships that drain us, where we don't feel honored, where we can't be fully honest, where we can't bring our whole selves, when we cling to titles or roles that no longer fit, we're holding onto the past instead of stepping fully into the present. We're not living our values, we're living values of the past.

And you, my darling, tender ravioli, you deserve a present that feels alive, expansive, and deeply aligned with who you're becoming. So let's dive into this process together and explore how to assess whether the relationships in your life truly serve you because you deserve nothing less.

One, observe the relationship's impact on your nervous system. And again, relationship here means the way you're relating to that person, place, or thing. So, my beauty, what am I always talking about? Your body holds so much wisdom about what serves you. When you build the capacity to tune in, you can hear it. And as we explored in episode 158, Polyvagal Theory, the secret to understanding yourself, your nervous system can offer powerful clues about whether a relationship feels safe or threatening. And so, smarty pantalones that we are, we begin by noticing how this relationship affects our nervous system. What does your body have to say about it?

So one, do you feel expansive or contracted? When you're around this person at this job, holding on to that title, thinking about this identity, holding that vase, does your body feel open, light, easeful? Or do you feel tight, heavy, or on edge? Expansion often signals alignment with your authentic self. It feels more better. While contraction might indicate misalignment or a sense of threat.

Imagine walking into a room with a close friend who truly gets you. You feel your breath deepen and your shoulders soften. Now contrast that with the

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

tension you feel walking into a meeting with a boss who undermines you. These sensations matter. As always, they're not the end-all be-all, right? When we feel contracted, we get curious, we do thought work, we ask questions, because just because the nervous system is signaling threat doesn't mean it's real threat, and it's a little flag on the play that's like, hey babe, pay attention.

Two, are you in sympathetic overdrive or dorsal shutdown? Does thinking about or engaging with this relationship leave you feeling anxious, restless, agitated? That's sympathetic, fight or flight. Or do you find yourself withdrawing, numbing out, feeling hopeless, keeping things to yourself, like actively checking out of your own feelings because you don't feel safe sharing them? I felt that way pretty recently. Well, not that recently, in the last year with a friend that I no longer felt safe to share my deepest deeps with. And it was dorsal all over the place, right? It was like this checked out, hiding myself feeling, right?

I was like getting my true self to the back of the cave and just sort of chit-chatting to like keep the connection when the connection actually didn't serve us. It doesn't serve me. It's interesting my brain just served us.

1A, do you feel expansive or contracted? Okay, now I'm going to move on.

1B, are you in sympathetic or dorsal? So does thinking about or engaging in this relationship leave you feeling anxious, restless, agitated, fight or flighty, sympathetic? Or do you find yourself withdrawing, numbing out, putting your true self at the back of the cave, right, so that you won't be judged or critiqued or misheard or negated, more of a dorsal state? Chronic dysregulation in the presence of this relationship is a sign your body is waving another little red flag, something here isn't working.

And 1C, do you feel safe to be fully you? So again, safety isn't just about the absence of harm, it's about the presence of care and attunement. So

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

ask yourself, do you feel emotionally, physically, psychologically safe to express your needs, boundaries, and joys in this relationship?

Or are you constantly minimizing, masking, twisting yourself into shapes that aren't truly you? Are you hiding your true self, hiding what you're going through, keeping it away because you know from experience it won't be received the way you need it to be? Maybe you find yourself laughing at jokes that don't land, biting your tongue, or staying silent when you want to speak. These small betrayals of self add up, and I want to invite you to pay attention to them.

Two, examine the stories you're telling yourself. The stories we tell ourselves about why we stay in a relationship with a person, job, role, thing can reveal a lot about whether it's actually serving us or whether we are serving it. This reminds me of episode 96, The Self-Abandonment Cycle, where we talked about how these stories often reflect patterns of putting others ahead of ourselves in a way that really sucks for us and our relationships.

So first question to ask yourself, are you motivated by obligation or authenticity? That is, are you holding on to this relationship because you feel you should? Because you've been taught to please perfect or endure? Or are you genuinely choosing it because it aligns with your deepest values and desires? For example, are you staying in that job because you really love the work? Or because you're afraid of disappointing your family if you leave.

Next question, what meaning are you making about letting go? So if the idea of stepping away feels intolerable, explore what story you're telling yourself about why you can't or shouldn't let go. Maybe you're telling yourself that ending a friendship means you're ungrateful or that leaving a job you've outgrown means you're a failure or leaving a community you've been a part of means you're unloved or unlovable.

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

My beauty, my beauty, I hear you. And these stories are so often rooted in really old programming. The kind that taught us our worth is tied to what we endure and what other people think about us.

Finally, are you outsourcing your emotional well-being? Do you rely on this relationship to feel worthy, validated, safe, whole? Emotional outsourcing, giving others the responsibility for your emotional state, keeps you tethered to connections that harm rather than heal. Maybe you find yourself thinking, if I leave, they'll fall apart and I can't live with that guilt. Not realizing that it's, I mean, that's codependent thinking, emotional outsourcing, a number one, right? Like 101's intro level. But it's also seminar level, right? Because it's like so deep inside us, we don't even realize how it's messing us up.

Three, map the costs and contributions. All relationships require energy, all of them, but not all give back equally. And we don't look to all relationships to give back in an equal tit-for-tat way. That's what capitalism teaches us to think, right? The baby does not give back the way you give to them. That's not a baby's job, right? Nor are our children, as children or adults, their job is not to take care of us the way we took care of them when they were children, right? The grown-up's the grown-up, the kid is the kid. I mean, it's like your hamster is not going to take care of you the way you take care of them, right? And so, I just want to be really careful when I say equally. I don't mean one-to-one ratio. I mean reciprocity and mutuality. What Billy calls mutuosity. Come on, how cute is that?

Mutuosity. Meaning to the best of our capacity and ability, right? So what we get to do, knowing that we're coming from emotional outsourcing, we're likely to be over giving and under getting, over functioning, over responsible, over caring, over doing and under receiving. Or we're the flip side of it, where we're super demanding, you must take care of me, I'm really insecure, push, push, push. We could be that too.

We get to take a step back. I like to do this like every year, every six months at regular intervals. Take a step back and assess the balance. So

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

first, what does this relationship give you? Does it bring joy, support, growth, connection, cuteness, opportunities to thrive? Does it feel good to be in this relationship? Be specific about what feels nourishing.

Maybe it's a job where your creativity is celebrated or a friendship where you feel held, or maybe it's coming home and seeing that cute little snout and those tiny paws every day and really feeling in your body, I love this connection. I am giving so much on the physical plane, but what I'm getting energetically is just, wow.

Next, what does it take from you? Does it demand your time, energy, emotional labor, closing yourself off, stepping into a therapist role? Does it demand your self-worth in ways that leave you depleted. What does it take from you to be in this connection? Maybe that friendship requires constant pep talks and emotional triage, leaving you exhausted. Maybe it's never the other way around. Maybe you're never getting the support because you're going on year 473 of this other person living in a pig pen from the peanuts.

I used to have this friend who it seemed like how he had just like a cloud of dirt around him. She had like an emotional spinning, whirling dervish of like emotional hot mess catastrophe around her. I was constantly stepping in when her husband cheated, when he left, when this, with that, constant. I wasn't getting support. I wasn't being truly seen. And I honor that she didn't have the capacity. And at some point, we need to really evaluate what the balance is. Yeah?

So this could also be that job that demands late nights and weekend work at the cost of time with your family, especially when it's without appropriate compensation for that additional time and energy. Again, this could be a whole table full of tchotchkes where you're like, I look at these things and I resent that my mother bought these for me when I told her I didn't want them but she kept buying them for me and now I feel like I have to have them out and I have to dust them and they like are such a mess or like whatever it is. But what does it take from you?

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

And finally, are you holding it out of fear of the unknown? Often we stay in relationships because they feel familiar, even if they're painful, right? Your nervous system might whisper, better the devil you know than the devil you don't. But staying in something that takes more than it gives is an expensive form of comfort, my darling.

Four, feel into your inner knowing. Deep within, your body often holds the answer to whether a relationship serves you. Man, It just takes some attunement to hear. Episode 200, How to Trust and Reclaim Your Intuition, explores how listening to inter-knowing can guide you towards decisions that feel right for you. We also do a whole module all about intuition and really feeling into our intuition, reconnecting with it, and anchor it, it's absolutely vital.

So my beauty, I'll invite you to sit quietly or pace, if that's more your speed what's up ADHD, don't try to sit. Pace, breathe deeply, feel your feet hitting the floor or feel the ground lifting you up and take a moment to imagine yourself stepping away from the relationship. Thanking this person, this role, this identity, this job, this career, this tchotchke, blessing and releasing it.

And notice what happens in your body. Do you feel a sense of relief, freedom, or calm? Do you feel dread, grief, or panic? Ask yourself if those feelings are yours or someone else's. Because you might feel relief in releasing the career, the husband, the tchotchkes, but then you feel your mother's panic about it. So take a moment to really feel into it and to ask, is this my sensation? Is this my feeling? Is this me? And get clear on what's you.

And if you're like, girl, I don't know how to do that. I know it's an advanced skill. We work on it a lot in Anchored and I'm just putting it out here so you can start to feel it. Okay? So then next, imagine yourself staying. Same, same. What sensations arise?

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

Do you feel grounded, empowered, peaceful, relieved? Do you feel stuck, small, tense? Your inner knowing isn't a neon sign, it's more like a candle in the dark. If this exercise doesn't automatically feed you exactly the data you wanted, that's okay beauty. No one on this side of the microphone expected it to. You gotta give it time to flicker and to focus, okay?

Five, align your actions with your values. Ultimately, the question of whether a relationship serves you boils down to this. Does it align with your values and the life you want to create and live? To go all hospice nurse on it, former hospice nurse, but once a hospice nurse, always a hospice nurse, am I right? What's up folks, hospice and palliative care? Oh, that stays in your heart. At the end of your days, how will you think back on having stayed in this relationship? Right? The hours, the energy, will it be a net gain or not in your life?

Episode 213, embracing your values, dives deep into how staying true to what matters most to you is key to stepping out of codependent thinking and into authenticity. So, our three questions. Does this relationship support your growth? Healthy relationships challenge us to grow while providing the safety to stumble along the way. They encourage us to expand, to show up as our full selves, flaws, and all.

Imagine a partner who listens without judgment when you tell them you've messed up, offering support instead of criticism. That's the kind of relationship that fosters growth and mutuality. Now contrast that with a colleague who belittles your ideas during meetings. Feel into it in your body. Feel into each connection. Which one helps you bloom?

Two, does it honor your boundaries? A relationship that serves you respects your yes and your no. It doesn't ask you to shrink, overgive, or compromise your values to keep the peace. Think of a friend who invites you to dinner but doesn't guilt you if you say, oh sweet pea I need a quiet night at home. Well, that's respect and action when they say, I totally hear you, I hope you can come over soon when it's right for you.

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

If you're constantly bending over backward to avoid conflict, to appease someone's expectations or to avoid someone's ire, someone's judgment, someone's negation, it's time to ask, am I being true to myself here? Am I living in my values? Am I building the life I want to live?

Finally, does it fit into the life you're building? So as you envision your future, does this relationship feel like it belongs in the future you want for yourself? Or does it feel like something you've outgrown? And it's not mean to say that, my beauty. It's how life works. When we don't hold, I've outgrown this with judgment in our heart, it's not judgmental. It's just what it is. Right?

Because maybe that once thrilling career now feels like a cage, or perhaps a friendship that thrived in your 20s, or when you were drinking heavily, or when you were just in a different place no longer aligns with the person you've become. It's not about judgment. It's about recognizing when something no longer fits, Right?

Like that metaphor I use all the time, taller toddlers, baby sweaters. We had these adorable baby sweaters when we weighed nine pounds and they were perfect and delightful and they simply do not fit us now. There's nothing wrong with those sweaters, they're beautiful sweaters. Do not disparage, but don't try to put them on. You know what I'm saying? You don't fit in a baby sweater.

Six, compassionately release what no longer serves. Letting go of a relationship with a person, a job, a title, a role, an object may not be easy, especially if you've been conditioned to prioritize others and society's stories over yourself. As I shared in episode 115, how to let go of what doesn't serve you. Releasing something with compassion creates space for what you truly need. Releasing what no longer serves you is an act of profound self-care. You are not abandoning anyone, you are returning to yourself.

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

So often we stay because we fear hurting someone else or letting them down. But the truth is, you can care about someone and still choose to walk away. Prioritizing your well-being doesn't make you selfish. It makes you realistic, honest, integritous. Two, you're not failing. You're choosing alignment. Letting go isn't giving up, it's saying yes to something greater. It's saying yes to your authenticity, your growth, your self-worth. It's allowing yourself to grow beyond what's familiar, what's habitual, what's your default.

Three, you're not being selfish. You're honoring your own needs and values. Imagine a wee little teeny tiny bird clinging to a branch in the middle of a storm, afraid to let go, even though the branch is breaking. Letting go, once again, is not selfish. So often, it's survival. It's choosing the open sky over what's crumbling beneath you.

Let yourself grieve, my love. Releasing something that once mattered to you, even if it no longer serves, is tender work. Create space to feel all the feels that come up. Sadness, anger, grief. Honor what was, then step forward with intention.

And finally, number seven, build towards the relationships you, yes, you deserve. As you assess what serves you, use this clarity to nurture relationships that support your nervous system, honor your values, and align with your vision for your life. Because it's your life, not anybody else's.

In episode 86, Interdependence, we explored how cultivating reciprocal relationships allows not just you and not just me, but the collective, the we to feel supported and safe while growing together. Seek out expansiveness. Look for connections that make you feel alive, seen, celebrated. People, places, things where you can be honest, real, open yourself.

For example, a workplace where your creativity thrives. A friendship where you can ugly cry one day and belly laugh the next. Where you can tell

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

them, I've been feeling so lonely and they don't negate your feelings. They say, oh my love, I see you in your pain. A partnership where you can be your truest self without fear, where you can trust that they think you're sexy, but you can also let yourself fart.

Two, start with yourself. The most important relationship you'll ever have is the one you have with you. When you tend to that connection, honoring your needs, respecting your boundaries, showing yourself love, it ripples out into every other relationship you have. All of that, honoring your needs, respecting your boundaries, showing yourself love, is resentment prevention, and it is one of the most beautiful things we can do to honor every relationship in our lives.

Three, trust that you are worthy. You are worthy of relationships that lift you up. You are worthy of leaving what weighs you down. And you are worthy of creating a life filled with love, alignment, and connection starting today.

So in closing, assessing whether a relationship serves you is an act of deep self-respect and care. It's about taking the time to honor your nervous system's wisdom, challenge old stories, and align your actions with the life you truly want to live. It doesn't mean cutting ties impulsively or rejecting anything imperfect. No, don't be a silly goose. It means being willing to look honestly at what nurtures your growth and what holds you back.

Let this process be one of curiosity and compassion, not judgment. If you feel exhausted every time you get off the phone with them, doesn't mean they're a bad person. It maybe just means that the connection's just not working.

My beauty, you're not measuring your worth or success by what you keep or let go of. You're simply tuning into your needs and making choices that honor your wholeness. Remember, relationships aren't static and they're not meant to be. They ebb and flow and evolve and so do you. The most

Ep #376: How to Assess if Your Relationships Truly Serve You

powerful thing you can do is to stay attuned to what feels right for you now, knowing that as you grow, what serves you is likely to shift, and that's okay.

Every decision you make to prioritize your well-being and authenticity strengthens your capacity to build the life and relationships you deserve and to step into that beautiful mutuality with the people who are lucky enough to be in your life.

Thanks for listening, my love. What an absolute pleasure to share this with you. If you've been enjoying the show, I'd be so grateful if you could head over to wherever you get your podcasts, leave a five-star rating and review. It really helps get the show in more ears.

All right, my beauty, 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.