

**Ep #386: Wants and Needs:
How to Know What Matters Most to You**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, somatics and nervous system nerd, and life coach B  a 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 over the next few weeks, I'm sharing a series called, "If you feel stuck, you're in the right place, start here." I might shorten that. It's kind of a lot. But anyway, what I'm sharing are some of the foundational conversations I wish more people understood earlier. Frankly, I wish I understood these things earlier, but what are you going to do? Here we are. We're doing the best we can with what we got, right?

And I wish we understood these things earlier, especially if you feel disconnected from yourself, if you feel stuck in the same patterns or unsure why change still feels like so freaking hard. Sometimes people don't actually know what they want. Or, and the more I do this work, the more I think it's this, we just don't trust ourselves enough to name it. Right? To name it, to believe it's possible, to go for it, to do the work or to know what the work is, or to just trust ourselves to be able to have it and hold it and not eff it up and just, yeah. We know what we want. We don't trust both ourselves and the environment we're in enough to name it.

And so instead of asking for what we need, we adjust, we accommodate, we fawn, we collapse, we stay quiet, we change the subject. And then, if you're anything like me, you wonder why you feel disconnected, you feel resentful, you feel checked out, you feel unsatisfied. So if you've ever felt like your needs don't quite matter, or you're not even sure what they are, this is where we start. All right? Let's begin.

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On today's show, we are talking about feelings, not about needs in terms of literal survival, and how we give many of our wants the weight of survival

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needs in our minds because we use the story of our wants being needs as a way to feel safe in the world, to justify our desires, because from our codependent habits, we don't believe we are worthy of getting what we want unless we label it as a big ol' undeniable need.

We'll be poking some holes in those want-need stories so we can begin to live with more freedom and more agency in our own lives. To be a nerd and to state my thesis right up front, let me say, the emotion is the need. How you get it met is the want. How's that for foreshadowing, eh? So let's look at some examples of times we commonly confuse wants and needs.

A client told me the other day that she just needs to have something sweet at the end of a meal. A friend told me that she needs her boss to respect her time. A colleague told me that they need their mom to understand their point of view. A client told me that she needs her partner to make her feel better when she's upset. And another client told me that she needs her family to be happy and that that is so much more important than her own joy.

These statements are misunderstanding the definition of want and need, which is something really important to get clear on because language is how we make meaning of our lives. And meaning-making matters, deeply. So it's worth investigating, getting curious about.

When we conflate wants and needs, we believe that our feelings and our bodies, our somatic, felt experience of being alive are tied to whether we get a thing from others, ourselves.

Thus, we set ourselves up for chronic disappointment when things don't go our way. We give our power away to others and we continue to take action in the think-feel-act cycle that leads us to feel like crap in our lives, that keeps us feeling disempowered. And we keep telling the story that it's only okay to ask for or give ourselves something if it meets some perfectionist criterion for need, which is usually something that was defined for us, that

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we were taught or picked up in our family milieu, from our family of origin, or from the society and cultures that we grew up in, from our religious upbringing or whatever other forces led to our conditioning and our socialization.

Today, we'll be looking at this important linguistic distinction. So let's dive in and make some sense of all of this, my love. Let's start by really looking at why this conversation matters for us specifically from our habitual thoughts as folks with codependent and thus people-pleasing and perfectionist thinking.

Generally speaking, we have treated other people's wants as needs that we have to meet in order to prove our love and lovability, to feel safe. Lessons again that we learned from our socialization, conditioning, and family blueprints. I think immediately of an ex of mine's mom. We'd all be at the holiday table and her son would say, "It'd be nice to have some mustard with this." But like super casually, not actually asking for anything at all, just making an observation. And this literally happened, she jumped up and ran to the kitchen, spent 15, 20 minutes rummaging around looking for the most right and amazing mustard. And when she didn't find any, she didn't say anything to us. She literally grabbed her purse and got in the car and drove 15, 20 minutes into town and back to go buy him mustard. Because in her own mind, she turned his random want into a need she had to fill.

A loving, gentle question for you, my most perfect tender ravioli, where do you do this? Where do you turn other people's wants into needs you believe you must meet regardless of your own want to relax or need to eat? Take a moment, pause, and ask yourself that, without shame or judgment. Where do you do this? Where do you take it on that it's yours to fix other people's wants or needs?

For us as people-pleasers, we need to learn how to please ourselves, which is often a wildly new concept for us. We need to feel grounded in knowing our own wants and needs and being able to speak them internally

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and externally. And because we learned and were taught to downplay our desires, we believe that it's safer not to have wants because we may be mocked for them, told they're silly, have them denied. All of that would be painful.

So many of us have lost connection with our own wants and needs from that experience. Raise your paw, my darling, if you don't drink water or go pee or eat when you have to because you're doing something for someone else, whether they asked you to or not. Cooking, cleaning, finishing that spreadsheet, hanging the next IV or responding to a call light in a patient room. I've absolutely done it. And there's usually both people-pleasing and perfectionism beneath those choices to keep putting me and my body last. You and your body way after everyone else.

And because we don't tend to think our wants are justified, valid, or worthy, we think that we need to label them as needs for them to matter, that just wanting something isn't enough. It's imperative that we keep it all kinds of dramatic, right? And call it a need.

The distinction between wants and needs matters because we tend to deny ourselves the things we want, especially if they get in the way of meeting other people's wants. We say things like, "I could do that for me, but I should think about the family and their needs." AKA, it's okay to keep putting me last.

We feel an inordinate amount of guilt, even shame for having wants and needs, fear around them not being valid enough, as though anyone else got to decide that for us. So we deny them, negate them, belittle them, push them aside, and through that process strengthen the neural groove in our own minds that says, "I don't matter as much as everyone else. This body, this life, this being, I don't matter."

And if I put myself first, there's a psychological toll to pay in the form of guilt, of social shame, of other people's judgment. And that currently makes

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me feel unsafe in my body, makes me feel bad about myself. So I'm going to keep ignoring my wants and needs.

The thing to remember is that a belief is a thought you have thought over and over and over and over until it becomes part of your self-concept, your story about you and the world. And the longer you deny yourself your wants and your needs, mislabel them from a place of false protection, the more you believe that taking care of yourself is frivolous and to be avoided.

And the more you then make it someone else's job to meet your unmet needs for you. Biologically speaking, when our needs go unmet, as animals, we decompensate, we deteriorate, we lose our capacity to sustain life. When we don't get what we want, we often have a slew of challenging emotions, the ones so commonly called negative, like disappointment, anger, frustration, annoyance, irritation, sadness. But we continue to take breath. Our mitochondria continue to be the powerhouse of our magnificent cells. And remember, my nerds, the mito is my very favorite organelle.

We continue to live because wants are just that, a thing we desire, not a biologically vital thing. And yet, they are so valid and worth both asking for and giving yourself. And when you properly define it as a want versus a need, you get to create so much space for yourself around getting it or not. You get to choose what you will feel, whether the thing you were wanting comes into your life or doesn't.

That is, for me, when I think of something as a need, my Gremlin voice comes out, right? Need. Well, my beauty, I feel graspy. I feel like I have to have it because, well, that's the definition of need, right? And when I feel that way, I give it so much weight in my mind-body. And when I think of something as a want, I'm able to loosen my grip on it. I'm much more easily able to do thought work to remember that my story about getting that thing or not is completely optional. That is, I get to choose the thought I want to continue to think about that want. And that's why this topic is so important

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because we forget that we can choose to have a different thought about getting the thing we want or not.

And if you remember back to all the many episodes about the thought work protocol, and that's episodes 35, 36, 37, 69, and 107. So, if we think about thought work, what we know about thought work, what we know for sure is that our thoughts create our feelings when we're using this top-down cognitive framework. What you're thinking creates an emotional response in your body, which means that you have a lot of say in how you feel.

And the more you tell the story, "I never get what I want," or, "my needs aren't being met," without pausing to ask yourself if you're actually talking about a want or a need, the more suffering you're creating for you. You're shooting that second arrow right into your own tender heart.

I will invite you to pause before you let your brain tell you that getting the thing you want will make you feel a certain way. The emotion is the need. How you get it met is the want. For example, you need safety as a mammal. Our nervous systems must feel safe for us to thrive. It's a core human need. And the how is the story you're telling about what will get you to there. The how is based in your particular version of the "I will feel safe when" narrative that often runs in our subconscious. We just see the top line, the, "I want the thing" story, and not the subscript, "because I believe it will make me feel safe."

So, our brain says, "I want a million dollars, I want a house, I want a relationship with a person with XYZ characteristics. I want a particular position at a particular job. I want my dad to respect me, my mom to understand me, my partner to behave in a particular way, usually without having to tell them." That is what you believe will get you to the feeling. And the feeling in this example, needing safety, is valid. And the how is optional.

That is, you get to get honest and real about the underlying story that says, "I source my felt safety externally. And so I want these specific situations to

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be true, people to behave how I want them to, so I can then decide I'm safe because of that external thing." And that, at its core, is so disempowering because we believe that everyone and everything else needs to be just so we can feel safe.

And our habitual mental pathways to safety may well have been genius in childhood, but don't always serve us as adults. For example, to our inner children and protector parts, perfectionist and people-pleasing thinking can be a way to source what feels like safety. The story goes, "If I do everything perfectly and keep them all happy, no one will tell me that I'm wrong or bad, and I'll be safe then." Which may have been quite true in your childhood or in your past, in the literal sense, right? Like, if people aren't mad at you, you are safer.

But is it true in your adult life? Do you want to stay in situations where it is true if you have another option? Do you want to strengthen that story within yourself? I know I don't, my darling kitten.

Let's say you're telling the story that you need to be in a romantic relationship with someone. Why? Well, maybe because you think that then you will feel happy, complete, safe, peaceful, which are all valid things for a mammal to desire. And the issue is how. How will you create the feeling of being safe and complete, peaceful, and happy? Thinking that someone else, a romantic partner, will create that for you, that's the optional part. That's just a habitual thought. And totally one that, come on, all the Princess Cinderella movies, all the rom-coms, we're all socialized to believe that, right? Finally be happy when you get your magical Prince Charming.

But that how is optional, my beauty. You don't actually need to date someone to feel those things. You can create them for yourself with your thoughts. You truly can, which is so fantastic. And from believing that you can fill your needs for yourself, you can swipe right from the place of knowing you don't need to. And you get to if you want to, because love can

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be glorious, sex can be fantastic, and there is nothing like a romantic relationship to push all of our growth buttons, am I right?

But seriously, these I need X to feel Y stories are the lies we tell ourselves without even knowing it. And listen, I'm not saying we aren't safer when we live indoors and have enough food. That's obviously not what I'm saying. What I am saying is that when you source your safety externally, you're giving up your agency. You're deciding that situations dictate how you feel versus finding that felt safety within and getting anchored in ventral vagal, the safe and social part of your nervous system, and co-regulating, connecting with others from there and not from that graspingness.

And when you think about it, lots of people are married and don't feel emotionally safe inside themselves or with themselves. Same with millionaires, people with dream homes and a boat, dream jobs. It's an inside job to feel safe.

So you get to bring your awareness to all the places where you're conflating the thing you need, safety, with the how, achieving external markers. So you can lovingly question that story, should you want to.

So my love, you get to ask yourself, "What need do I think having the thing I want will meet? What will you allow yourself to think and feel if you get that thing? Why aren't you allowing that now? What story will you tell about you if you don't get the thing you've been previously saying you need?"

What wants are you denying yourself because you don't think you deserve them or aren't worthy of having them? What needs are you denying yourself because you are putting other people first? Needs like peeing or eating or sleeping or relaxing or moving your body or feeling safe within yourself without external validation or approval.

It starts with recognizing your emotional need. I find for me in the past and my clients now, this first step can often be the most challenging because

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we're so unused to having internal awareness because we've been so focused externally on how we can meet everyone else's needs. We are so primed to not get our needs met or our wants met either that part of our brain sort of almost shuts down, like, "Why even have awareness of my needs?" And we may feel like everyone is failing to meet our needs without ever even having clarity about what those needs are.

So I want to invite you to bring your awareness to that feeling in your body that arises, the felt experience of having a desire, having a want, having a need. Pay attention to what comes up in your body and listen to your own monologue. This is your homework, my darling. Listen for those times when you hear yourself saying, "I need."

I will invite you lovingly and gently to pause and to ask yourself with no judgment. We're just doing awareness, my beauties. If this thing is a want or a need, just get real for a moment. Is this a want? Is this a need? And then ask yourself, we're going to get meta with our thinking here, beauties. Get real with yourself about what you mean beneath what you're saying.

This is when I would invite you to get out pen and paper or the notes section of your phone or whatever and to ask yourself what you're feeling in that moment or what you want to feel. What's the unmet need here? Is it connection, comfort, safety, calories? And see how you can give that to yourself instead of projecting it externally, instead of making it someone else's job, instead of justifying it, instead of calling a want, a desire, a need to give it some kind of gravitas that you don't ever need to put on your own desires. You simply get to honor them and to call them by their right name.

My beauty, once you start to see your wants and needs more clearly, the next thing that shows up is what gets in the way of actually honoring them. And for a lot of people, that's not a lack of awareness, it's the pressure to get it right. And our brains telling us that getting it right is like some kind of

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real, factual, objective, truthful thing, which spoiler alert is absolutely untrue. And it's really worth spending some quality time digging into. So that's what we're getting into next week. Make sure you're following the show, subscribed to the show. And hey, if you haven't given it a five-star rating and review, a little written review, I'd be super grateful if you did. It really helps get the show into more ears, which is what I'm here for, right? This free resource, I want it spread far and wide.

So, my beauty, thank you for joining me. Thanks for listening. Thanks for sharing this episode and *Feminist Wellness* with all of your friends. If you haven't picked up the book, *End Emotional Outsourcing*, check it out. Pretty rad. I'm a pretty big fan. She says having spent like years of her life writing and editing and marketing it. Yeah, it's cool, whatever. NBD. What a goose. All right, my goose, go have a beautiful week. But first, 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, ciao.