

Ep #399: If He Wants To, He'd Google: Stop Doing His Emotional Work For Him



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 Béa 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, my loves. I hope this finds you doing so well. I hope things are just spectacular in your life. I hope the sun is shining, and you got good snacks, and maybe a sweet animal friend around. I hope things are really wonderful for you. The world is a challenging place, and I hope that you are finding the wee glimmers where you can because I think they're really important. And it's just so not our topic for today at all.

Our topic for today is something quite different. Ahem. So, I got the email this morning. I get this email a lot. And I mean kind of a lot a lot. And so I want to talk about it today. The email comes from women: partners, moms, and it asks some version of, "Do you have resources for men? For my husband, my boyfriend, my son? Do you have a podcast episode I could send him, a book I could recommend, a program he could do? Do you have a course for him?"

And here's the thing, my perfect panda pants. Homeboy has a phone. And that phone has a browser. And that browser has a search bar that is connected to the entire recorded history of human knowledge, including this very podcast, which cost free.99 and has existed since 2019. And it's frankly not very hard to find.

So the resources exist. They have always existed. The question of whether he can actually access them has never been the question. So, what I'm curious about when I get this email, and I really get this email in this DM a kind of a lot. And so what I'm curious about, and when I want to invite you to also be curious about, my little Cheshire cat, is this: if dude cannot perform the single lowest effort act in the entire self-development industrial complex, which is typing words into a search bar, what exactly is the theory about how the inner work is going to go?

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Because last time I checked, personal development requires at the barest of minimums, a person who has decided they want to develop. I mean, that's the whole variable. That's also the only one that matters. And yet here you are, sweet, well-meaning, loving wife, partner, parent, whomever. Here you are deciding for him, doing the labor for him. I'm going to guess it's fair to say doing the labor for him again.

Right, because this is that like decades-long, bone-deep, so well-worn you stop noticing it, pattern of a woman doing the emotional and logistical labor of someone else's development. His development, the very development that, if it happened, might make him a different kind of partner, the kind you actually want him to be. And that's what I'm talking about.

This means you're doing the labor that might get you the relationship you actually want while he continues to not do that labor, while you continue doing it for him. That's what we're talking about. You want him to want to do this labor. Of course you do. And he's telling you so clearly, "Nope, I'm not doing it." And so you do it for him and then wonder why he's not becoming the kind of guy you want him to be, who is the guy who does the labor around the thing to do the developing, to make the changes that he doesn't actually want to do. So you keep doing them for him. Do you see the quandary?

The email that says, "Do you have resources for my partner?" is also saying, in the place where the real communication lives, "I have been here before. I have found the therapist. I bought the book and put it on his nightstand with a Post-it that said, 'just this part, page 47, start with page 49.' I sent the article. I made the appointment and then canceled it when he seemed resistant, but then I made it again because I really want him to want to go."

"I've had the conversation about having the conversation, and I've had it more than once in different tones, at different times of day, having carefully assessed his mood first. I've put in an amount of effort that, were it directed

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towards literally anything else, would have produced extraordinary results. And here I am, asking you for one more thing I can try, because I'm at my wit's end." And that's the heart of this email.

So let's get into the why and the what you're actually doing when you do this thing. Since you're still listening, I'm guessing it's likely that your nervous system learned at some point before you were old enough to have a say in the matter that your safety in relationships depended on the emotional states of the people around you. So, what with being no fool, you got exceptionally good at managing those states. You learned to read a room before you walked into it, to notice the particular quality of silence that meant somebody was about to be upset, or sad, or angry, or whatever, and to head it off before it arrived, to anticipate needs and meet them before they were even voiced.

Which, when you pause and look at it, it is an astonishing feat of relational acrobatics that gets you exactly zero credit for having saved the day. And, and, and, has truly been costing you for years. My beauty, those skills were adaptive, magically so. They kept you safe, kept the peace, kept you from the specific flavor of dread that lives in a house where someone is dysregulated and you do not know how to make it stop. They worked. And that is the thing about the strategies we develop in survival: they work, which is why they stick around long past the conditions that created them.

Meaning you kept the habits though you grew up. You left that house, that religion, that school, that whatever. They kept on running in the background like an app you forgot to close, draining your battery while you wonder why you're so tired. What I am describing is what I call emotional outsourcing, the habitual pattern of sourcing your safety, belonging, and worth from external sources rather than from within, which shows up as codependent patterns, people pleasing, and perfectionist habits. These are not pathologies, but rather strategies that worked once and are now devouring your life from the inside out.

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Finding resources for your partner is one of the places this shows up. The surface answer for why is, "I love him, and I want him to get help." And that's probably true, and it's lovely. And under that answer is a belief that tends to be running without our awareness, something like, "If I can find the right thing, the exact right doorway, and hand it to him at the exact right moment, then he will walk through it, and then it will all be okay, and then we will be okay. And if we are okay, then I will be okay. And then I can finally stop holding my breath."

The resource search is an anxiety management strategy, a buffer, if you will, which we talk all about way back, way back in episode 14, 2019 territory. This quest is a way of feeling like you're doing something in a situation where you feel helpless, of keeping your attention trained on him so you do not have to sit inside the full weight of what's actually true for you right now. So my darling, what is actually true for you right now? When you're running the project of his growth, you don't really have to answer that question.

And that, in fact, is the whole point of running it. The project is a rather elegant solution to not having to feel what is actually true for you right now. So if you're busy researching somatic modalities for a person who did not ask you to do that and has shown zero interest and has in fact made it clear that they're not going to change, well, if you're busy doing that, then you don't have to feel what it means that you're still here, still doing this, still hoping the next resource is the one that finally gets through to him.

The response I hear most often when I get into this territory is, "But I have done the work. I've been in therapy for years. I've read every book on your list and several you have not mentioned. I've been doing this work, and he has done nothing. And I need him to do something. I need him to do something." And I hear that. But doing your own work and simultaneously managing someone else's relationship to the work are not the same activity, and they do not cancel each other out.

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My darling, you can be in therapy every Tuesday. You can have a fantastic coach like myself. You can be doing real work, making real movement, and still spend the other six days running the project of him, tracking whether he seems more open, timing the conversation for when he's in the right mood, Googling, "How to get your partner into therapy" at 11:45 on a Wednesday night, which, for the record, that's interesting, right? It's interesting.

When women pull that bandwidth back and give it to themselves, and I've watched this happen with real frequency, two things tend to happen, and neither of them is just a neutral occurrence. The first is that the relationship moves, because when you stop overfunctioning, which we first talked about in episode 243, then the dynamic that allowed him to underfunction, it loses its scaffolding, right? There's nothing holding it. And sometimes that creates enough of a gap that he actually steps into it. Sometimes that is the beginning of something different and better between you. How amazing is that?

Or the second thing that happens is that it becomes very clear, fast, and with a clarity that removes all ambiguity that he was never going to do it. And oh my God, that is so painful. That is so very painful. I get it. I get it. I get it. I get it. Oh my God. I went through this. So much of this comes from my own lived experience and being with a partner who didn't want to make change, didn't want to listen to, didn't want to do any of the work, and didn't want to participate in a healthy marriage, in a healthy relationship, who was very clear that they were dedicated to staying in their own ways. I know how painful it is.

It's also information that you and me both have spent years and considerable energy trying not to receive. The resource you send him is not going to determine which of those two things is true, because his readiness is not a variable that you have access to. You cannot want it for him hard enough or research it for him with enough precision. The decision to do inner work lives entirely inside him and has nothing to do with you. And

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yeah, I get that too is wicked painful, and it's a painful truth it would do us all so much good to practice accepting.

Because my tender, sweet cannoli, the pattern runs much deeper than finding him a therapist. It's there when you wake up knowing his mood before he even says a word, having already adjusted your plans for the day around it. It's there in the conversation you rehearsed last night, his lines, and your lines, and the three most likely ways it goes sideways, and what you will then do in each scenario. Before you even opened your mouth, you know what you're going to do.

It's there when you rewrite a text to him four times, looking for the version that will land without making him feel bad or criticized or called out, which means you're editing yourself into someone who's not communicating so much as managing. When you cancel the thing you wanted to do because his energy is off, when you apologize for needing something before you've even finished asking for it, when you measure how much space you are allowed to take up in the relationship by reading his face. All of it, it's the same pattern as the email. You are expending labor on an outcome you cannot control, in a direction that guarantees your own absence from your own life. Oof.

Running that process for years does not look like what it is from the outside. You look capable, caring, attuned, like someone who has it together. And listen, you are all of those things. You develop those capacities to an extraordinary degree. What they cost you is the habit of turning that same quality of attention towards yourself. Your own internal experience has become something you have to excavate rather than something you walk right into.

"What do I actually want right now?" That's the question to start asking. Not what does he need, not what would keep the peace, but what do I want? The question can feel like a language you used to speak and have not used in so long that the words come out slow and uncertain and unstable.

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And that right there, that halting reach inward is the work. Not one more article, not one more carefully timed conversation, not one more Post-it on page 47.

When you imagine actually stopping, stopping overfunctioning for him, not like as a tactic or a test or like a, "Let's see if he notices" experiment, but as a real reorientation of where your energy goes, pay attention to what your body does. A tightening maybe, or a quick flash of relief followed immediately by something that feels indistinguishable from danger? All of that's your nervous system doing exactly what it was trained to do, which is to treat your own inward turn as a threat to the relationship.

The wiring that produces it, oh, it's very old. And it's not fixed. It is, in fact, exactly what is available to change. The discomfort tends to present as guilt, but it's closer to fear. Specifically, the fear that if you stop, something bad happens. He does not get help. The relationship deteriorates. You have given up on him. And giving up on people, that's not who you are.

That fear is organizing enormous amounts of your energy towards an outcome you cannot control. What stopping actually is, not the story about it, but what it actually is, is returning the responsibility for his development to the only person who can do anything with it, which is him. Beauty, you were never supposed to carry his readiness. Putting it down is a much more honest form of love than attempting to carry it indefinitely, the kind that treats him as a person capable of choosing rather than a project requiring management.

The pattern does not change simply through understanding it. Because you can understand every single thing I've said today and still send the email tomorrow, still research the therapist, still lie awake at 11:45 trying to figure out how to get through to him. Because you've been understanding your patterns for years, and you're still sending the email. Insight is necessary. It has a quality of healing to it, but it's not sufficient.

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The pattern lives in the part of you that learned in a nervous system that was still forming that your safety required managing the emotional states of the people around you. And that part, it doesn't need more information. It needs a different experience, a felt, embodied, repeated experience of what it is to be oriented towards yourself instead of organized around someone else.

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Learn more at BeatrizAlbina.com/courses. Because my beauty, you already did the seeking, which led to the finding. So go get the thing that's actually for you. Can't wait to see you there.

Thank you for joining me. 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.