

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jen Riday

[Vibrant Happy Women](#) with Jen Riday

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast. I'm Dr. Jen Riday and on this episode we'll be talking about emotional safety, nervous system regulation, codependence, and boundaries. All of that good stuff that will help you be less of a people pleaser. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey there my friends. I have a fantastic guest for you today. As a podcast host I get to talk to a lot of people about a lot of topics and sometimes I hear overlap. But once in a while I hear things that I've never quite heard in this way before and that was my experience with this interview.

My guest today is Victoria Albina. And she is a certified life coach, a family nurse practitioner and a breathwork meditation guide who helps women focus on their bodies and nervous system regulation so we can feel properly stimulated, not overstimulated which feels like anxiety if it's too high. And not under-stimulated which feels like depression. She teaches polyvagal theory which she'll explain in this interview. She also talks about codependence and boundaries, and how when we take care of ourselves it feels good. And when we feel good those around us will feel good.

So many nuggets here. My mind was blown. I will definitely be listening to this episode multiple times because there are so many things we can do to help regulate our own nervous systems. So, if you've been feeling overwhelmed, or anxious, or frazzled, or blah, or meh, this episode is for you because there are tools, practical tools she gives us. You will love this.

[Vibrant Happy Women](#) with Jen Riday

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

Now, before we dive in I have a review of the week from Megan in the US. She wrote, “Jen does such a good job covering a variety of topics. The guests offer valuable insight as well. I would recommend this podcast to anyone looking to be inspired and informed.” Megan, thank you so much and everyone of you out there listening. This is my birthday month. My team says we should call this Jenuary. Hey, why not.

So, for Jenuary do me a favor and go leave this podcast a review on iTunes or Apple Podcasts, I guess it’s called officially. You can do that by going to jenriday.com/review. I would be so, so grateful. It really helps more people to find us, helps get the word out and I would appreciate it. It will take you one minute. And if you’re the type of person that likes to share your gratitude you can do that by leaving a review today. Again, jenriday.com/review.

Okay, Victoria Albina, I kind of introduced her already and I’m going to let her introduce herself even more in this interview. She is so intelligent, so intuitive, so – I just love her and I hope you love her as much as I do. Let’s jump in.

Jen: Alright, hi, everyone, I am here with Victoria Albina. And I’m going to let you introduce yourself. I’m super excited. I saw you on social media, someone put me on to you and said, “You need to interview this woman.” So, I reached out. I’m so happy you said yes. You’re doing some great work for people who identify as women in the world. Tell us about that and how you got started with your work that you do.

Victoria: Yeah. So, my name is Victoria Albina. I use she, they pronouns and I live on occupied Munsee Lenape Territory in the Hudson Valley of

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

New York, just north of the city. My training is as a functional medicine nurse practitioner, life coach and breathwork facilitator. And my passion is to help humans socialized as women to overcome codependent perfectionist and people pleasing thinking with the goal of reclaiming our self-worth.

Jen: Okay, let's go right to the heart of this. What is codependence?

Victoria: Yeah. So, I take a slightly different view of what codependency is. And I really talk about it as a survival skill, as a pattern of thinking, not a label. So, would never, I'm not a codependent. That's not who I am. And I sure do have some codependent thinking habits, some mindset, a way of thinking that keeps me in this kind of relationship with myself, with other humans, with everything in the world. And so, I think of codependency as chronically sourcing our sense of self-worth and our validation from everything outside of us instead of from within ourselves.

So, from our career title, our social position, whether we are partnered or not, everything instead of just really knowing in our bodies that we are so worthy, so valid, so valuable, so worthy of love, and care, and kindness. And so, we live these lives where we accept crumbs and we put everyone else ahead of us because we don't think we're worthy of living any other way.

Jen: So, sourcing not only happiness but worthiness from outside of us. That's beautiful. I think in particular about moms. I have six kids and I catch myself sometimes. I've done a lot of work but when they are struggling I will replay what might I have done to contribute to this. So how do we let go of that, that codependent thinking? First of all, do most of us realize that's codependent thinking I guess? I would love to hear you share more

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

examples of in life, real life codependence for moms and then how do we start to let it go?

Victoria: Yeah. So, I think you're right, that a lot of us don't really realize that we're in this pattern. Classically the literature talks about codependent thinking or codependence as humans in relationship with someone who uses abusive substances. And I really think it's a lot broader than that because it's often what's modeled for us in childhood. So, if we grow up with a parent who exhibits that kind of behavior, who, well, frankly we can go ahead and just throw the patriarchy under the bus which I'm always out here to do.

Human socialized as women and this is a vast generalization but let's go with it, are often taught that we are not as valuable as the men folks in our lives, our time, our energy, our emotional labor, our physical labor. I mean think about what the average woman does to keep a household running, a family running, plus working, plus maybe having free time if anybody remembers what that is, or self-care time. We are taught that our time is just not really what matters, our labor, our energy, our emotional wellness.

A really simple example is dinnertime. So again generalizing, women are trained to do the meal planning, go get the groceries, cook dinner. And I don't know about you, but I remember growing up, my mom would do all of that stuff. And then my sister and I would help with the dishes. And my dad, my uncles, my boy cousins would all go do whatever they did, go watch football or go talk in the yard, go enjoy the evening. And after cooking we would all clean up. So, it's just that assumption that our labor is baked in, it's not to be accounted for or respected.

Jen: Yeah. My mom tells me this story, she married into my dad's family, my name is maiden name Johnson. And she said, "The Johnson family, it

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

was crazy until we women got in there and changed it. But when I first joined the family for holidays the men would eat first, and the women would stand and watch. Then the women would eat second.” What country is this? That blows my mind that that was within the past 100 years that something like that was happening. So yeah, you’re right, it’s crazy.

Victoria: Right. I mean women couldn’t even get their own bank accounts in the 70s. That wasn’t possible. So, I think we can very cleanly throw the patriarchy into this one, yeah.

Jen: I have to say, when we say the patriarchy I think we women have also been complicit in that whole system. And I think it will change as fast as we demand that it change and we say, “Hey, I’m worth it, I’m not going to get my happiness and worthiness from outside of myself anymore.” So do you have a step-by-step path or advice on how to take that stand and say, “Hey, I’m going to eat with the men. Maybe I’ll even eat before the men?”

Victoria: So, the framework I use is awareness, acceptance and then action. It’s very apt to be talking about this framework in January which is the time when we have this nationwide and maybe even global framework of just taking wild action without pausing, without breathing, without checking in, and that’s new year’s resolutions. It’s like December 31st, I am a human who has not moved my butt in, I don’t know, a pandemic because tomorrow, January 1st, that’s the day I will take wild action to change my life without asking some important questions like, why has it been this way?

What is going on in my nervous system that has kept me in these old patterns? What are my inner children, aka, our limbic system, what’s going on in there? Why is my amygdala in fear around making change? What was modeled for me in childhood that feels challenging to change, that sends me into fear when I think about setting a boundary for example? And

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

so that's the work that we do, we slow it down, so awareness. How is it actually? What's actually going on? Am I speaking my needs? If not, why?

Okay, for most of my clients it's because we don't know what our wants or our needs are because...

Jen: Fascinating.

Victoria: Yeah, because so often in childhood we lost touch with that realness, with our authentic self because we didn't think our authentic self was worthy enough. So, we pushed that version of us aside and instead started to play act, started to be the people we thought we were supposed to be as a survival skill. And it was brilliant, it was amazing, it was genius in childhood because it kept us alive, it kept us safe, it kept us loved.

We can pause here as well in the awareness phase and this helps us move into acceptance to say, "You know what? Little me was really smart." Because codependents get ahead, they're dying inside but they get ahead. People pleasers, come on, you keep your boss happy, you get the raise, you get the promotion, you move into the C-Suite a lot faster as a people pleaser, perfectionist, straight A's, gold star.

So, before we fully attack ourselves or to have guilt or shame for having these behaviors we get to really pause and take stock of how these things have gotten us where we may have wanted to be. And that's important. They've gotten us to what we thought was important, that external validation. We get to honor that, celebrate that, accept that we were doing these things because we thought they were right and good, and then take action.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

And that action step can be going right back to awareness to say, “And here’s how this hurt me. Here’s how this was painful in my heart, in my spirit, in my soul, in my relationship with me.” And from there accepting that pain, that grief, that guilt, that shame, that suffering. So, we can bring it in, one of the most healing things in the world which is wild self-compassion. And from that gentle self-compassion then we can start to take action.

And that action can look like asking yourself in the morning, “Baby, do you want coffee or tea? Do you want a shower? Do you want to brush your teeth first? Do you want to pee first?” And I’m really starting with stuff this small because it really is the quotidian BS of life that creates a life. And we live from habit, we live from unintentional mess. I just created a word. We’re in that unintentional mess of this is how it’s always been without realizing we can make change. But we need to get to know ourselves before we can start to really bring that change into all of our relationships.

Jen: So, starting with understanding where we are. We can’t go to a destination if we don’t know where we’re starting. So, I love that. So, a lot of people listening are probably thinking, I know they’re thinking this. That sounds great. I want a morning routine. I know I need habits, but my kids come in or my spouse needs something. So, I feel we can’t talk about codependence without talking also about boundaries. So, define boundaries for us and tell us how you’ve done that in your life and how you recommend we strengthen our boundaries or create healthier boundaries.

Victoria: Yeah. With joy, I love talking about boundaries. So, my framework for boundaries is if you do x, I will do y. And the focus there is on ourselves. So, it’s not if you do x, then I will guilt you, I will shame you, I will make you feel bad for doing whatever it is that you think is best for you, because that is super codependent. That is us believing that someone else’s thoughts, feelings, actions create the results in our lives. And they don’t. It is our own thinking, and our stories, and the actions we take in

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

response to the emotions that fuel our everything, that creates our lived experience.

So, when we say, “If you do x, I will do y”, what we’re doing is we’re starting to reclaim our side of the street. We’re starting to reclaim our own capacity to take care of ourselves and create our own reality. So, we’ve been talking a lot in Anchored, my six month program because it’s just after the holidays about how we relate to family. So, someone was bringing up that every time she goes home her mom comments on her weight. And she’s just not here for it.

So, we crafted the sentence together in coaching, if you do x comment on my weight then I will walk out of the room. I’m putting a firm stop on that. I’m not available to hear I’ve gained weight, I’ve lost weight, I need to gain weight, I need to lose weight. My body is not available for you to comment on, I’m not here for it.

And so, we’re not trying to control the other person’s behavior, we’re really saying, “This is how I will take care of me because I’m learning to value me. I’m learning that I am important enough and worthy enough that I get to say what I will do. And you can have your feelings about it.” And people are going to, let’s be real, always. But that part is not my responsibility. And so that comes back to self-trust. So, a lot of my clients worry that they’re going to be mean, that people are going to think they’re mean, that they’re not being nice.

We also talk a lot about the difference between being kind and being nice. Please don’t be nice. Nice is the BS codependent spin we put on things. Kind is taking care of yourself and thus your community. And here’s what I would say to that is that other people can have their thoughts and their feelings, the same way you can. And it’s not your job to codependently try

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

to get into their brains and manage those thoughts and feelings. You get to allow other humans to have their own experience.

Jen: It reminds me of the Wayne Dyer quote that I love so much, 'what other people think of me is none of my business'. I think that a lot in my mind, they can hate me, they can think I'm fat, it's okay because I don't think that.

Victoria: Yeah. And we can even take that and spin each of those words. So, if someone else chooses to spend their time and their energy hating us, that's their decision. That is the way they choose to spend their time. And we get to choose, or I, I'll stay on my side of the street. I get to choose to live into my capacity to be a being of love and to live in this world for my big open heart.

Jen: Absolutely. So, we have just come through a pandemic. And I see a lot of women with this glazed look in their eye of, oh. You talk a lot about adrenal fatigue, and burnout, and nervous system regulation. We've just, I guess, survived, maybe not thrived, but we'd like to start to thrive after a pandemic. How do we create that emotional safety for ourselves and the feeling of bringing the nervous system back down, slowing down that amygdala?

Victoria: Yeah. I would definitely not say we're in the after of the pandemic but hopefully getting there soon.

Jen: I like to dream.

Victoria: Yeah, I know, I love it, I love it. I just want to make sure, keep your masks on, folks. We're still in it, yeah. I feel like everyone I know in New York City has COVID or is on the tail end of it right now. So back to

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

nervous system regulation. So let me define that term for my nerds out there who are like, "What is it?" So, regulating our nervous system means being in communication with it. And supporting our nervous system, the place in our body that regulates our mood and fight or flight, our nervous system shutdown, that dissociative deer in the headlights, that's called dorsal vagus. And that happens when we're really overwhelmed.

You were talking about that glazed look of like, oh my God, wait, what just happened for two years of virtual schooling. You can go back but now you're back in my house. But I have a job and you're in my house. But now you're gone again and why are there children here? My sister keeps saying that. She's like, "I love these small people but why are there children here?" So, I have seen that glazed look in her eyes several times and she's a parenting coach. She's amazing. But wasn't expecting that.

So, regulating our nervous system means bringing ourselves back from altered states in our nervous system like freaking out or checking out and back into what's called ventral vagal. So ventral vagal is the safe and social calm and secure part of our nervous system. It's how I feel right now looking into your eyes. My nervous system, I'm seeing your beautiful smile. My nervous system's like, okay, I can be me. I can be authentic. I can speak from my heart. I can show up. I can be in conversation and in a social setting from a place of internal safety.

And that's really what it comes back to is finding that internal safety when there may be external environmental cues that don't line up with safety in our minds. And those environmental cues way back in the day used to be the roar of a lion, the sound of a fire in a tent, the river starting to flood. They used to be the pretty big bad things.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

And now our nervous systems can be activated or triggered, which is the clinical definition of a trigger is a death cue, the cue that, game over, life is actually about to end in this moment. And so, we go into that sort of freaked out panicked state, sympathetic activation, fight, or flight. So those cues these days can be your partner texting you, “Hey babe, we need to talk.”

Jen: That’s a loaded phrase, my goodness.

Victoria: Or a boss saying the same thing. And so, regulating ourselves in those moments is honoring, okay, I am feeling the zap in my belly, that flittery energy in my fingers. I feel like I’m speeding up like I just took a huge shot of espresso. But all of a sudden because it happens within milliseconds I’m speeding up, I’m getting activated. I’m going into fight or flight. I am getting adrenalized, adrenaline is flooding through my body. I know cortisol is next and these stress hormones they feel pretty lousy.

So, when we feel that starting we can use nervous system regulating skills to bring ourselves back down. And my favorite, can I share a skill?

Jen: Yes, please.

Victoria: Okay. So, two of my favorites are orienting and counting. So orienting is a skill based on the recognition that when we are not in ventral vagal, when we get activated into sympathetic, or drop down into dorsal into that freeze deer in the headlights. Our nervous system doesn’t know when and where we are. It’s going, whoosh, back in time and place to whatever that original moment when something scary happened, when we weren’t met, when we weren’t seen and to that original wounding.

And so, the nervous system thinks you’re six again, or 14 again, or 26 again. And what we get to do is remind our bodies, our minds, our inner

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

children, hey, baby, you're okay. And you're okay because you're here. You're in your own office. You're in your own living room, your own car, your wherever. And we do that by giving our limbic system cues of here and now-ness. So, we can do that by invoking our senses.

And I recommend that people choose what they're going to use to orient ahead of time versus trying to come up with it on the fly. Because if you're activated you can't think so goodly. Our cognition is downregulated, it's not available. Because should you do calculus while you're being chased by a lion, what do you think?

Jen: Yes, right, totally.

Victoria: Right, exactly.

Jen: I want to do that.

Victoria: You're so funny. So, cognition's not really a skill we have. So, you look around the room, I like to start with colors because that works for me. So, I look around the room and I say three things blue. Okay, and then I look, book is blue, pen is blue, scissors are blue. Pink, three, go. Three pink posters right there on the wall. And I can go through a series of colors and the number of things you count doesn't matter, the color, because people get really fixated on these details. Baby, it doesn't matter, just play with it till you find what calms you.

So, the senses could be what are three smells? Well, I smell my tea. Well, it smells very nice. I smell my hand lotion and I smell the lavender that I'm diffusing. Textures, textures are a great one because they're very sensory. So, I'm wearing this fuzzy wool sweater. So, I can feel the sweater. I can feel my hair. It feels soft. I just washed it. I can feel the table. I can feel the

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

grain of the wood. And those physical, those somatic connections really start to bring us back into our bodies. Any questions about that?

Jen: It's beautiful. Have you ever taught people how to do that with kids? Because it seems like it would be really powerful for kids too.

Victoria: Yeah. My sister does it, her littles are five and a half, sixish. The world's best aunt. Number one aunty, I know how old they are, five and a half, sixish and eight, somewhere like that. And she does this with them all the time. Her little is a hyper little ball of energy. And so, she often will be like, "Matteo, what do you smell right now? What do you feel right now? Is your shirt soft? Are you wearing shoes? Are they too tight?" And she'll bring him right into that.

At five and a half, sixish we don't really need to explain, "I'm orienting your nervous system to time and place." But she's teaching him the skill, if my brain is going faster than my body can handle here's what I can do. I can check-in. These jeans feel kind of stiff. I smell dinner. And really the effect is impressive. Yeah, it's really beautiful.

Jen: That's great. I really love that.

Victoria: It's so good.

Jen: I love that we could say central nervous system regulation, or we can say emotional safety. And I've really drawn to the words 'emotional safety' lately. So how would you recommend putting all this together, codependence, boundaries, and emotional safety, just to create more of that emotional safety for families at home in marriages? You talked about orienting. I think you had another tool you were going to share.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

Victoria: Yeah, counting. So, one of the things that happens again, and Matteo is such a great example, meaning my brain is such a great example. When we are in sympathetic our brains are going so much faster than our bodies because our brains are doing what they're built to do. They're scanning the environment, they're looking for danger. They're creating a safety plan. How can I get out of here? I can break that window, I can crawl out of there because the lions are coming, the marauders are coming. They're going to destroy the village. We've got to go.

Instead, it's just like, kid, your homework is due at four and I see you haven't started it. It's not actually a lion. So, when we give – the prefrontal cortex, the executive function part of the neocortex, our forebrain and our reptile brain, the limbic system, that less evolved part of our brain that only understands panic, safety. That's it. It's very black and white all up in that limbic system, in that amygdala. When we slow them down and give everybody a job then it calms the entire autonomic nervous system and helps us to shift into that parasympathetic calm place.

This can work too when we're in the part of parasympathetic called dorsal, that freeze part we were talking about earlier. So, it's this simple. So, I put my hand out and then I touch my thumb to each of my fingers while counting my fingers. Which means that pretty small kids can do this. So, I'd go one, two, three, four, first finger one, middle finger two, ring finger three, pinky four. Count back, four pinky, ring three, middle two, first one. And just going really slowly.

And the beautiful thing with kids is because their mirror neurons are really trying to monkey see monkey do because that's how they learn to survive. If you put your hand out and start doing this and counting out loud they're highly likely to follow you and to do it themselves or at least their nervous system will coregulate with yours. Meaning they'll feel the internal calm that

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

you are generating. And whether they want to or not it will start to calm their nervous system.

Jen: And right there I think you nailed the heart of why we need to do this, not the only reason. But a lot of women when they're starting out with not being codependent they'll say, "But it's so selfish, I feel guilty." Well, hey, if we're emotionally regulated our kids will be way more likely to be emotionally regulated. It's a gift. And so, we must start with ourselves like you were saying right at the beginning.

Victoria: Yeah. And to that I'll also say what's so wrong with being selfish?

Jen: Agree.

Victoria: Right. We've created this world in which all sorts of humans, but particularly those socialized as women are really taught not to be selfish. And if you're not self-ish, you're self-less. And my goodness, I like having a self. I'm a pretty big fan of myself. I want to be myself. And if taking care of me is selfish then sure, I am fantastically selfish. I've brushed my teeth today. I took a shower. I am selfish. What a gift to myself and the world as you said. Because we do regulate the nervous systems of those around us, our heartbeats regulate to people within a six foot parameter of us.

That's physics, you all. We can go as woo as we want to, and I will go to there. But we can also go as science as we want to. The physics of heartrate variability is very simple and very clear, the biology of it too. We impact each other greatly. So yeah, so I love your starting point. If you take care of yourself your family will benefit. And you can grow, and you can use that as the bridge to get you to I intend to be wildly selfish for the good of myself, and my family, and the world.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

Jen: So well said. Well, so adrenal burnout, if we have that we just engage in practices, the somatic practices like the counting or the orienting. We start to build this emotional safety. Does that mean our adrenal system will heal? What happens down the road with this kind of work?

Victoria: Yeah, so it's just part of the picture. So, I practiced functional medicine for years. We often do need help beyond mindset work. And it's a thing that happens on these internets these days where folks are like, "Mindset is everything." And I think mindset is a huge part of the work. And I know that my adrenals were a hot mess for a long time because of my mindset and the way I was treating myself. And quite frankly that rest felt scary to my limbic system. How is that for a framework?

The words that almost came out were, "I didn't let myself rest." But that's not a loving statement at all. It wasn't about permission. It was about capacity. It felt scary in my nervous system to rest because if I'm resting, once again the lions are going to get me, Jen. Those damn lions. So adrenal support comes with, in my world view, a really holistic shift. Yeah, so bringing in supplements, bringing in nutritional supports, bringing in movement that is often really gentle at first, towards building in more capacity in the nervous system along with mindset. So, it's a multilayered approach.

Jen: Well, polyvagal theory, you've been talking about dorsal vagal. What is polyvagal theory? And you've kind of teased us with some of it. But it's becoming a thing and I just recently was turned on to it and I thought, wow, I've never heard of this. So, cool, you're on the cutting edge.

Victoria: Yeah. I feel like I need to put my hair up because we're going science, put on my safety goggles and get out my lab coat. So polyvagal theory as a theory has been around since the 80s. It's the work of Dr.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

Stephen Porges' PhD. And for those who want to nerd deeper, Deb Dana is a social worker and a phenomenal writer, and she turns it into English because Porges' work is very academic. It's about heartrate variants and neonates and the neonatal ICU.

It's not really super applicable to our day-to-day lives until Deb Englished it. And I also have several episodes of my show, Feminist Wellness where I take polyvagal 101 because it's so important. So, this is at its basis, the poly part of polyvagal is understanding that the vagus nerve, the tenth cranial nerve, the longest nerve in the human body which is called the vagus which means in Latin to wander, like lost vagus, the wanderers. It wanders through most of our body, and it enervates or gives nerve function to everything that happens in the middle.

So, our thinking, our cognition, our heartrate, our respiration, the function of our diaphragm, our thyroid, our capacity to swallow and digest our food. And I worked in functional medicine gastroenterology. So, this is something I have thought an awful lot about, as well as our reproduction function. So, most of us know that stress impacts your period, stress impacts your period, that's science through polyvagal.

And so, the vagus nerve, there's three parts. So, there's sympathetic, activation, fight, or flight which we've talked about. That's run by adrenalin, norepinephrine, cortisol stress hormone from your adrenals. Next is parasympathetic which was previously called rest and digest, sort of broadly. But we now know that there's two parts to that nerve. So, there is the ventral which is the front body and that is safe and social. So, I bring up that it's the front body because it's us looking at one another, us looking into each other's eyes and finding safety there.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

It's us looking at each other's smiles. So, have you ever gotten that smile from someone that's like just their mouth? And if you're listening and not watching, I just gave a half smile. I didn't smile. The eyes are still kind of shooting a little banger at you.

Yeah, there was a woman in my building in Brooklyn who always smiled like that, and it was so disconcerting. I felt so unsafe every time she smiled. I was like, "What's going on here?" So, using the ventral vagal system we're scanning each other. Are you a safe animal for me? Are you a nice animal? Are you going to be kind to me? Or is there secretly a dagger behind your back with that half smile? I don't know.

And then the second part of that system is dorsal which is the back body. As humans our first impulse when we are in a situation of conflict, of fear, of danger is to go into ventral vagal. We are social animals, we need one another.

So, let's take the example that you are in a dark alley, and I don't know why you would be in a dark alley, but you are in one. And someone says, "Hello, I'm here to mug you." The first thing you're going to say is, "Cool, cool, cool man, totally cool. Here's my wallet. Here's my phone. Do you want my wedding ring? But please don't hurt me. We're cool, right? We're good. We're good. We're good." Let's connect. Let's be social. Let's create safety in this unsafe moment together. If that doesn't work we will very quickly go into fight or flight, sympathetic activation.

We're looking for an escape. We're sussing them up to see, I'm 5'3¾, I'm not out here trying to punch anybody but I'm small so I'm fast. So how can I run? How can I get out of here? If that fails then we go into dorsal which is the shutdown, which is the freeze. Dorsal, I think of your back is against the door of the cave. You're just trying to shut the world out. That's depression.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

That's like I just can't anymore, just there's no escape, I'm just shutting down. That's also in its more extreme form, dissociation. Just when we are actually not present in our human form.

So again, deer in the headlights, a possum freezing, and this is what animals do when they are attacked. So, if a lion chases a gazelle, the gazelle will collapse to the ground if she's caught, then she'll feign death. It's the feigned death response. And so, the lion's like look at me, I caught a gazelle. Let me go get my cubs because it's the woman lion who hunt. Let me go get the cubs, let's have a really great dinner tonight.

And she walks away, the gazelle gets up, her whole body shivers and shakes to get her out of dorsal and activated with a little sympathetic activation energy and then boom, she's off and running again. So that's polyvagal sort of in a nutshell and this is happening all day long throughout our bodies. We get a little sympathetic so we can get up out of bed and put on pants, and then we see our little kiddo we love, our partner we love. We're in safe and social. We get to work, and we get an email that feels overwhelming, we go into some dorsal.

So, we flow through these three states throughout the day. And there's more complexity to it but this is the 101 of it.

Jen: So, we flow between the states but sometimes people will get stuck.

Victoria: Yeah, for sure.

Jen: Is it getting stuck in dorsal? Where do we get stuck?

Victoria: It depends. So, anxiety, high anxiety states, the entire city of New York. We can feel sort of really jacked up or really on edge. I think most of

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

us have had those moments where it's the slightest thing and we're just boom, we're off to the races. We're super anxious or having chronic panic attacks. So that can be when our nervous system is pointing more towards sympathetic or that depressive state of dorsal. There can be either state.

So, if we think about what high activation needs, it needs warmth, it needs to be at the back of the cave, being cuddled, being snuggled. Someone's petting your hair, your safe, you're okay. It's fine. You can bring that activation energy down. And so that's the weighted blanket, a warm cup of tea, even just holding a warm cup of tea can help bring us down from anxiety, even from panic.

Using things like lavender. So, lavender works similarly to a benzodiazepine drug, which are the Xanax, the valium, those kind of sometimes very useful but not without their harms drugs. So, lavender can actually bring you down from panic. And if you're in actual panic you're going to need to lay on many of these tools, but for anxiety one or two may be enough. Running warm water on your pulse points, for folks who have fed babies, right where you would test the temperature of a bottle or food, right inside your wrist or right inside your elbow. Those are a great place to run some warm water.

And then movement can be really supportive because what happens is your body wants to fight, it wants to flight, it wants to run, punch a lion, it has all this energy that's happening inside. You're braced, you're ready, you're ready to go. And these days you're in a social setting, you're on Zoom with your boss, you're in a conflict with your partner, you can't exactly run unless you create space for that. So, I always have challenging conversations on a trail while walking because...

Jen: Good idea.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

Victoria: Yeah, it really is beautiful because we're bringing that movement in, bringing the different temperatures in, sense in, lots of places to orient. And I have had really challenging conversations in which I've said upfront, "There may be points in which I need to sprint, and I will be right back. You can trust me that I will be back within probably about two minutes." It's that or be a jerk.

Jen: That's really cool.

Victoria: That's what I need. So that's what supports my nervous system regulation, I'm here for it. But anyway, so we get that fight or flight roar kind of energy within us. So, what we can do on a Zoom call is shake our hands. So, something really brisk can help to discharge that energy. We can grab our desk and sort of push on it after the call or after the conflict.

Or in the midst of conflict, you can excuse yourself to the bathroom, put both hands on the wall and just push gently so that your muscles can feel that activation energy moving through. And just really create space for it to be released. Yeah, shaking can really be a beautiful one to help with a state change.

And so, then from dorsal, when we're frozen here we need to be exceedingly cautious because we really can sort of jump our nervous system out of dorsal and miss the mark of ventral vagal, the safe and social part and overexcite ourselves. And this is when folks managing a depression or who tend to be in a more dissociative state sometimes self-harm because there's so much activation energy all of a sudden, that hitting, or cutting, or those things seem, you know, they are helpful tools.

They're not tools that serve us but in that moment they may feel like this is something I can do to get this energy out. So, we want to go really slowly,

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

gently, deliberately with a freeze and run a little cold water over the wrist while breathing because cold is activating. Peppermint brings in some activation energy, so does citrus. Things that start to slowly gently wake-up the system. Instead of a fierce shake, maybe you just start to sort of move your hands back and forth.

Bring a little bit of movement into the palms. You maybe rub them together just a little bit and then shake them a little bit more. Do that counting with the fingers and running cold water over the inner elbow can be really nice too. And taking sort of a slower walk, that you make gently, gently, gently over a few minutes a little more brisk, a little more brisk, a little more brisk. Not to the point where you are actually running unless your body wants that, but just gently, gently activating.

Jen: That's beautiful. And once you've become familiar with how much activation you need, can you go straight to the cold shower or the heavy duty shaking to music?

Victoria: Yeah. I mean the goal would be that you're not shutting down as much once you know how to map your own nervous system and once you're doing the somatic practices, I do with my clients. So that one of the many goals of somatic practices is to really see your reactions when they are very, very small. So, on a scale of zero to ten, because nurses love a zero to ten, I know that I'm getting activated into sympathetic most of the time, I'm still a human, most of the time when it's a .1 out of ten. And it used to be when it was a 27 out of 10 and I'm freaking out.

Now it's just that smallest zap in my belly and I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to need a moment, I'll be right back." And then I can go to the loo, and I can take care of myself. And I say the loo because socially it's a place where most of us aren't bothered. I mean those with toddlers are like, "Get out of

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

here.” There’s no safe place but maybe it would work. Same thing with dorsal where I’m like, “Okay, this is, I’m feeling myself losing ground.”

When we talk about grounding, it’s really we’re talking about that dorsal experience of where are my feet? I don’t think they’re on the ground. I don’t know where I am. I don’t know when I am, is really what’s happening in the nervous system. And so, I can feel that as well when it’s like a .2 or .3. And I need to go, for me eating carbs is really, really helpful, so carbs and grains.

So, if I feel myself sort of starting to like, okay, I’m going into a little bit of an overwhelm spin, I’m going to hit pause. I’m going to make a cup of hot tea. I’m going to run cold water under my wrist and I’m going to eat a carb. I’m just going to have a piece of gluten-free bread and take a couple of breaths and recenter myself.

Jen: That’s beautiful.

Victoria: I love carb.

Jen: Yeah. And what we often do instead especially during the pandemic is numb. So, what’s happening in the nervous system when we’re numbing? Because that feels really good.

Victoria: For a minute.

Jen: Right, right.

Victoria: Right. So again, awareness, acceptance, action, let’s realize that we are attempting to do something beautiful. When we choose to turn on the Netflix, pour the wine, smoke the cigarette, smoke the whatever else,

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

overthink, overexercise. Those are the ones people don't talk about. My clients are – when I say my clients, you girls, are also raising our hand, let's be real, because I am my first client.

Overthinking is such a numbing technique. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to pick. Let me just obsess about it, make 40 pro con lists, and create all this distraction from the fact that I don't trust myself. Let's do that. So, what we're really doing is attempting to soothe our nervous system and attempting to give our limbic system the ending of the story which is what it always wants. It always wants to know, does this end in death and doom, or does this end in glory on a mountaintop?

And so, what we get to do is to get real with our thinking, get present in our bodies. We get to honor the feeling we are trying to create with that buffering action, that action of trying to push away the feelings. So, the question can be as simple as, what am I trying not to feel by pouring this glass of wine? What is it, baby, what's under there? Do you need a good cry on the bathroom floor? I mean, number one, where is better than the bathroom floor for a cry? It's so full of pathos, it's so pathetic and I love it.

When I feel sad I'm just like, bathroom floor. But you've got to pull up the fluffy, fluffy mat because it's too cozy. Just face on the tile. You know what I mean, right? Maybe an empty bathtub, it's so 1990s, it's so good. So, is there a cry needed? Is there anger? Is there sacred anger in me that I am not expressing? What is my unmet need here? How can I meet it for myself? And then what do I need from my environment, from the people I love and care about? What's not happening to support my emotions right now?

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

So really ask yourselves that question and yeah, I mean you were like, "That's a hard question." But I find it so much harder to live an unintentional life where I'm not present for me. Yeah.

Jen: Wow, being present for ourselves, emotional safety. It's big. It's big.

Victoria: Yeah. It's big, yeah, it's big work.

Jen: So, have you written a book yet?

Victoria: Yeah, I've got an agent and we, yes, I am writing the book.

Jen: Oh my gosh, your book's going to big. It's so needed.

Victoria: Thank you, yeah.

Jen: This bigger science based conversation of why do we feel crazy?

Victoria: Yeah. Because we were socialized and conditioned to act this way, because we're geniuses. It helped us so much. It just doesn't help anymore.

Jen: Right. Well, for those who want to learn more and they're like, "I need to know this stuff", where can they follow you and connect with you?

Victoria: You can follow me on Instagram @victoriaalbinawellness, I give good gram. You can head over to Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts and follow my show, Feminist Wellness which is a show for humans of all genders, and it comes out every Thursday for free. You can also head on over to victoriaalbina.com.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

There is a suite of free meditations waiting for you at the very tippity top of the page. There's an orienting exercise in there, an inner child meditation, a boundaries meditation. And it's really a treasure trove of delights. It's all for you for free.

Jen: Very, very great, I love this.

Victoria: And I should mention, sorry, my program. So, I run a six month program called Anchored: Overcoming Codependency in which we learn to do thought work, to change our mindset and our thinking, and we base that in somatic practices, body based practices and bring in breathwork. So, we address mind, body, and spirit to support you in creating that connection with your authentic self and your self-worth. And you can learn more about that at victoriaalbina.com/anchored. Sorry, Jen.

Jen: Thank you. I love that. I appreciate it. You are one smart woman.

Victoria: Why, thank you.

Jen: So, you have a background in functional medicine. How did you make that shift to doing more of the wellness work?

Victoria: Yeah. So, I really came to see particularly in gastroenterology and tummy trouble land that what was underneath so much of my patients' suffering was exactly all this, with not having that self-worth, putting themselves last. And then the day-to-day stuff of you go over to your mother-in-law's, you've told her 2,000 times that you don't eat gluten and dairy, that they really upset your tummy in this moment of healing. And she's very insistent because she was trained in codependency to be insistent.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

And her own self-worth is based in you're eating what she made because she thinks you should. And so, she's insisting you eat her lasagna and from your codependent thinking and your people pleasing thinking, you eat it anyway and then you feel crap for three days, five days, [inaudible] maybe for a week or two. So, it's all those little and enormous places where we just habitually put ourselves last to try to keep others happy. It just became so evident over years and years of doing this.

Yeah, and then if we're not healing the nervous system how are we going to heal our IBS? If we look at something like sibo small intestine bacterial overgrowth. The bacteria overgrows in the small intestine because the migrating motor complex which is the electrochemical current that moves food along through the small intestine and puts it into the large for excretion. That is based, it takes it cues from the vagus nerve. And so, if your nervous system is jacked, if you're not in ventral vagal for most of your day how do you expect that thing to run? The motor's not on.

It's not going to get the chemical signals to digest your food properly. So, we need to treat the parasite, we need to treat the bacteria, we need to look at nutrition, and sleep, and movement, and supplements. And if we're not doing this fundamental cornerstone nervous system and mindset work we can't really digest the supplements anyway. So, it's not to say why bother, but it's to say, if you want your treatment plan to be efficacious we need to really bring this piece in.

Jen: Beautiful. I love this so, so much. Well, I will have you on again someday, I know that.

Victoria: Okay, great, let's do it.

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

Jen: So, thank you for coming this first time and I will see you again in the future.

Victoria: I really can't wait. It's going to be a blast. And thank you for all you do in the world, I really appreciate it.

Jen: Thank you. This was awesome.

Is your mind as blown as mine was? I love Victoria, she's doing good things in the world. And doesn't it feel amazing that society, this area of growth and personal development is slowly, slowly but so importantly shifting to the realm of trusting the feelings in our bodies? Whether that's intuition, trusting the process of listening to whether you're or over or under-stimulated, using your body to feel better with the counting, the grounding, the orienting, the cold or warm water, the shaking, the dancing. All the good things we can do to regulate our own nervous systems.

We no longer need to feel as powerless about how we feel, about our mood, about our emotions, so many tools. And today Victoria presented some amazing ones that can help us regulate using our bodies. So, I hope you loved it as much as I did.

My friends, I just want to express my love and admiration for you. You're doing so well. I'm so proud of you. You should be so proud of yourselves. You're doing all the good things. You're learning all the tools and moving forward. And if you would like help with tools, emotional regulation, emotional safety, and growth, always you are welcome. And we would love to have you join us in the Vibrant Happy Women Club where we use all

311: Codependence, Boundaries, and Emotional Safety (with Victoria Albina)

these tools. And we hold each other accountable. And we create deep heart centered connection of support.

Okay my friends, I will see you again soon, until next week make it a vibrant, and happy life. Take care.

If you enjoy this podcast, you have to check out the Vibrant Happy Women Club. It's my monthly group coaching program where we take all this material to the next level and to get you the results that will blow your mind. Join me in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at jenriday.com/join.