



## **Wednesday Workshop: Supporting Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence**

### **Podcast Transcript Episode 7: June 3, 2020 Understanding Your Values**

Presented by Marissa, Adult Domestic Violence Advocate, and Teresa, Dual Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Counselor

**Marissa:** Hello and welcome to The Women's Center Wednesday Workshop podcast intended for survivors of domestic and sexual violence as a time to learn and grow in order to move beyond their trauma. Each session will feature instruction on a healing topic. This week, our topic is Understanding Your Values. In starting any healing journey, it is so important to find out what your foundation is, so we'll be going into that today!

We are your hosts; my name is Marissa and the Adult Domestic Violence advocate with The Women's Center.

**Teresa:** I'm Teresa I'm the Dual Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Counselor at The Women's Center. We are going to get started by talking about what value systems are in order to better understand what your values are.

Throughout the podcast we're going to break down not just what your values are, but also the value system of an abuser too, to give you an overall understanding of what these look like and how they differ. Value systems are the core of us. They are our worldview, our own sense of self and essentially or moral compass and what drives us to do certain things. Our values makeup who we are and reflect our true nature. Our value system also informs of the choices we make, the actions we choose to do, and the path that we take in life and our healing journey.

There are a lot of different things that can contribute to your value system that you developed for yourself. That can look like outside influences, such as the different cultures that we grow up in, the jokes that we hear, the books that we choose to read, and also the TV and the movies that we can watch. This also can be influenced too by the way that you were raised or your upbringing. That could look like your family's values, values that your friends hold that you spend time with, schooling that you might have

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had, if you are, you know, a firm believer in a faith or religion those systems, etcetera, can definitely have an influence on that moral our sense of self and our values. All of these influence us on what we should value and therefore how we should live ourselves, how we should be treated and how we essentially will treat other people moving throughout the world.

**Marissa:** When looking at your personal values it's important to ask yourself what's most important to me? This can be really difficult for survivors to put themselves first, to get in touch with their needs and values. When we were in that abusive relationship, we were maybe told that that stuff didn't matter or that it was selfish to think about what was important to us.

Here to bust that myth as always, you are important and you deserve to put yourself first. Going off of that, our personal values determine not just what we hold to be important but it also guides our decision-making process too.

**Teresa:** As a reminder, what we hold true about ourselves, and the world around us, how we interact with the world around us, can undoubtedly be affected by experiencing any type of abuse and trauma in our lives. Our value and belief systems may have changed because of that. Whether we are in that relationship or whether we have experienced trauma in the past, our belief system, our value system, that moral compass, might have looked different. And that's okay. You know, we talked about this and other podcasts too. We are fluid people, you know, we are not just solid, stagnant individuals. We are constantly changing, and so too will our value and beliefs systems and that's okay. To better determine where you're at now.

Marissa is going to start by walking you through an activity to help guide you through how to determine what this will look like.

**Marissa:** This activity is really again going to help determine what your core values are. It can be really difficult to know where to start to determine what those are. Especially what you hold important after experiencing abuse.

One way is through this activity, it definitely helps to narrow down things that are important and things that are not important to you. To start that conversation with yourself about who you are outside of the abuse. This first part here, we're going to be choosing some core values that resonate with you from essentially a list, or you can create your own core values if one isn't on this list. We've got a nice long list of values here. I'm not going to read all of them but we will be linking to this activity on our podcast page of our website. Some examples of some of these core values might be abundance, autonomy, balance, caring, challenge, families, having fun, honesty, humor,

motivation, risk-taking, peace, playfulness, uniqueness, well-being, wisdom. Just a vast variety of things that could or could not make up your core values list.

**Teresa:** After taking some time to kind of go through that exhaustive list and see what resonates with you right off the bat, whether that is from the list that we are linking on our podcast page, or whether that's with a list that you created yourself, the next step to take is grouping similar values together into different categories. It's really important too that you just kind of do whatever feels natural. Because there is no right or wrong way to do this. Whatever you feel fits together, is the best is the best way to go about it. The only suggested thing in this is that you create no more than five groupings, just to kind of keep it uniform and within a good set of boundaries. For example, maybe you have balance, as something that stuck out to you. Maybe also health, personal development, spirituality and well-being that fall under that similar umbrella for yourself. Another example too, could be that fun value. if that's something that stuck out to you right away maybe humor falls under that umbrella too. Or joy, or optimism, or playfulness. Taking some time to see what is that big umbrella and what words are for values fit underneath the five different categories to group them in.

**Marissa:** Once we have those groupings, we can find one word in each group that represents that label for the entire group. and with that, ta-da! You have your five core values that you ascribe by. To give a brief example of this, and again this is going to look different for everyone, but to use the example of the groupings that Teresa had mentioned. So that one with balance, personal development, spirituality. Maybe the word that summarizes all of that is that fifth value on your list, well-being. So we're going to call that the well-being value. And in that other category, with cheerfulness, fun, humor, inspiration, joy, optimism, playfulness. Maybe happiness is the word to sum it up together for you. And again, there is no right or wrong way to do this, just do whatever speaks to you and it's okay to not know. It's okay to revisit this too, always.

**Teresa:** Now that you have a basic understanding of an exercise or activity that you can do to get in touch with some of those values that you might hold, it's important too to recognize where that abusers value system is coming from. This is a question I think we get asked quite a bit and survivors are asking themselves too, “Why does an abuser abuse?” At the core, abusers believe that they should have power and control over the partner above all else.

Violence against your partner is a choice and it also is learned behavior. Because abusers believe that they should have power and control over anything, and over their partner more than anything else, they might have that sense of entitlement. “I am entitled to my partner responding in a certain way”, or “I'm entitled for my partner to do x, y and z.” Their driving factor making decisions always goes back to the need to gain one or both

of these things. This could also be a learned experience that abuse gets the abuser what they want. For example, an abusive partner might utilize a power and control tactic of using coercion, of using threats in order to keep a partner from leaving. so that could look like an abusive partner saying “I’ll hurt myself if you leave” and in turn making that other partner feel guilty for asserting a boundary or for wanting to be safe.

And lastly too, abusers have that belief that their life takes priority above anyone else’s life. We’ve been talking a lot about self-care, putting your needs first, putting yourself first, and this differs where asserting your needs, asserting your need to take care of yourself is different from an abuser’s needed to gain power and control. Because they believe that they are the most important person in the world, and that you need to respond in x, y and z ways in order for them to have power and in order for them to have control.

**Marissa:** I want a quick talk about a resource that we use all the time called the power and control wheel. If you’ve worked with us one-on-one, you probably heard us talk about this at length, if you’ve attended other workshops or maybe even heard any of the earlier podcasts, we may have referred back to the power wheel. We will link it again under this podcast on our website.

It’s important to look at that power and control through a little bit of a different lens too. At the root of an abuser’s value system, is this need to gain and maintain power and control. Not just their own power and control, but whoever else’s that they can get. Something that I talk to a lot of folks about, is that when a survivor is trying to get their power back, an abuser sees that sort of as a grand loss, they feel like they’re losing their own power. When they’re really just losing your power that they really had no right to have to begin with. They may try to use all kinds of different tactics to try to get that back, or try to make you stay within this cycle. I won’t go too deep into all the different tactics of abuse that one may use in this power and control wheel, but I will talk about the different sort of headings or overarching themes within this wheel.

So, like Teresa had mentioned, you might experience an abuser using coercion or threats to try to get their point across, to try to get that control over you. They may also be using intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation. They may minimize, deny or blame what you’re experiencing, and what your own values are. They may be talking down about those values, making you feel like you shouldn’t have them or that they’re not right. They may use whatever privileges they hold. In this case, you know if it is a male abuser, they may be using their male privilege and try to enforce strict gender roles. They may also use economic abuse or children in part of their need for this power and control along with possible physical or sexual violence too.

All of this again, comes back to that value system of power and control, and doing whatever it takes to make sure they're on top and that anyone else around them is just sort of answering to them.

**Teresa:** To continue on that abuser's value system, we know that social forces are also a significant factor in shaping an abuser's values and attitude. This is why this is a public health issue and not just a partner to partner issue or a specific community issue. Abuse does not discriminate at all. There are so many different social forces at play that can influence an abuser, and we'll be going to go into that next, but this can ultimately create an environment where that abusive behavior is rewarded and unpunished. This can really just drive that abuser if that was something that they grew up with. Or, if that is something that is reinforced in the different social forces that they're engaging in. This is going to be something then that they feel comfortable with that they feel like they need to do.

**Marissa:** To break this down even further, I think it's important to look at these different social forces and give a couple examples of what they may look like. The first one I want to talk about is that gender-role identity. We know that abuse can be perpetrated by all genders and any gender can be a survivor of abuse too. Oftentimes, we do hear when an abuser is male and the survivor is female, we sometimes see that stereotyping of genders. We see again, those strict gender roles being enforced by the abuser upon the survivor. And society upholds that for us. We have ideas of what male behavior should look like. We hear all the time that boys shouldn't cry, or that they need to be tough and they can't show emotions. and we were told even that women that were even told that women should be super receptive to emotions and that is one of the only things that they're good at essentially. We know that this isn't necessarily true. This is you know something that our society has adopted and it can certainly excuse abuser's behaviors another social force is the family. That could be growing up in a household where women and girls were taught to be submissive. We may have had that idea growing up that there has to be a man of the house, or that a man may have to be cruel or talk down to girls and women to have things go in their favor, to sort of enforce that man of the house status.

So, this messaging either overtly or covertly told regarding how one should or should not act. And again, if an abuser's also seeing abuse in their household that they grew up in, they may learn that that's how they need to get their needs met and may continue to perpetuate that generational cycle of abuse. There are examples in the media too of what abuse looks like and we see a lot of really unhealthy relationships happening in TV shows, movies, and music. So much of our music is about stalking, harassment, abuse, and we really don't know it because it's got a nice beat, it's something we sing along to and we might not even realize that you know there's some harmful messaging

underneath. We often see women portrayed as objects, the glorification of violence and non-consensual sexual activity too. That is something we as a society almost champion really shouldn't, right? We see a lot of skewed views there.

An important social force to look at too is once your group of friends circle. There can be that social pressure to conform to a specific definition of what it means to be a certain gender, what it means to be you know who you are in that group, that group identity is huge. We see a lot of social forces upholding abuse and sports too. We see athletes in places of power not being held accountable or responsible for actions. We may hear more about a performance-enhancing drug as opposed to an athlete's history of abuse, and one is going to be held to a much higher standard than the other. Something that we see too, that kind of forms all of these, and I think is especially important right now too, is that sense of impunity. Our society allows abusers to blame behavior on other outside factors and not really receiving repercussions for what they're doing.

We've unfortunately seen a huge uptick in domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic and I've also seen a lot of excusing of this behavior. Saying that there's a lot of extra stress, that everyone's just in the house more and we're all getting on each other's nerves. We may be renegotiating boundaries and sort of having those discussions, but there's no excuse for abuse happening during these times, where we're all a little bit more vulnerable or we're all in a sense of unknown.

**Teresa:** Now that we know about our own value system and also the abuser's value system, how does abuse impact our own values? It undoubtedly affects our self-esteem, our self-confidence and our self-image. I think that kind of goes without saying that these things are going to chip away at who we view ourselves to be, and things that we enjoy ourselves. We might lose those temporarily or lose sight of them for a little bit.

Abuse also forces us to kind of doubt our own view is as valid or important. And this is going back to that abuser's need to have power and control. Their needs are always the ones that need to be met, for fear of those repercussions or for fear of the abuse. In turn, we stop listening to our views as valid, our boundaries as valid or as important. And lastly, it can also affect the way that we take up space. You know, we might not feel comfortable asserting needs because of those power and control fears, but we also have a really difficult time communicating and asserting boundaries too with other people.

This is going to be different for everyone, everyone responds to abuse, responds to trauma differently. Just in general these things can really impact the way that we see ourselves, and the way that we interact with other people and assert our needs and boundaries.

**Marissa:** And on that note, despite where you're at in a relationship, if you're thinking about leaving, if you have left or if you're actively trying to stay safe in an abusive relationship. We can all recognize the impact that the different ways abusers have utilized power and control. We can recognize how that can leave us feeling overwhelmed, and we can recognize how that impacts who we are now.

It's really important to take your time with yourself. Really intentionally work on rebuilding who you want to be, what your values are, and what your beliefs are outside of the abuse. Whether you weren't allowed to hang out with friends or family, if you are told that your dreams weren't achievable, if you were questioned on the, who's, the what's, the where's, the why's or the how's that you spent your time. Thinking about all of this and thinking about how to rebuild yourself can be frightening versus freeing, especially to start.

Again, give yourself a little bit of extra time and work on having this practice, this exercise for you. It's definitely okay to be a little bit frightened or unsure, or a lot of a bit frightened or unsure, but you're doing the right thing. You're pouring back into yourself. And that is especially important in reclaiming some of that power and control back for yourself too. The things that were yours have always been yours, and will continue to be yours. You are valuable and you're allowed to think about your values for yourself.

**Teresa:** How do we start to rebuild after we've experienced abuse or we've experienced an abusive relationship? Finding out who we are outside of that abuse, outside of that relationship, like Marissa had mentioned, can be really frightening versus freeing. Our values and our beliefs systems that we once might have had, might look and feel totally different now and that might be overwhelming. Where do you kind of start with this?

First step is to look at redrawing your boundaries, both with yourself and with others. This is something we talk quite a bit about because it is so important when you are healing, and especially when you're establishing what you need, what your values are. Boundaries allow you to define your limits: where they begin, where they end, and what you determine to be the terms that you interact with others around you. Your needs matter, and you can choose who you surround yourself with. That is your decision to make for yourself. This is done through consistent communication that holds all parties involved with accountability, compassion and understanding.

Redrawing boundaries might feel really aggressive at first because again we know the way that abuse impacts our value system, impacts the way that we view ourselves, and if we're asking for help or ever asking for someone to respect a boundary. It might feel really foreign, but this can be done with compassion and understanding for all parties involved. The next step is to forgive yourself. Abuse in any shape or form was never your

fault. You never deserved what happened to you, and that shame and guilt that you might carry with you are ultimately the abuser's weight to carry.

Guilt and shame are really two common emotions that a lot of survivors struggle with. For what they've experienced, and maybe for not being able to openly talk about what they've been going through, or maybe they weren't believed when they chose to disclose to a friend or family member. This is a really common reaction, but again, this is the abuser's weight to carry. You have survived through a ton of unthinkable things.

Another step to rebuilding yourself and your values after abuse, is shifting your perspective through your support networks. This looks like trying to make sense of and process through what you have survived through. This can be really difficult. If it is finding an advocate here at The Women's Center, finding a counselor or therapist or different support groups, or even this podcast to re-create a support system that might have been previously isolated when you were in that relationship.

Or if you still are in that relationship and are feeling even more isolated due to Covid-19, this is super important. We might have been isolated during the abuse that we endured and so building our values and beliefs with people that share those similar core values in that exercise, or share similar experiences that you have, can be extremely beneficial in rebuilding our new normal after surviving. And this is just rebuilding that baseline after abuse, what you want your beliefs to look like moving forward.

Lastly, take back your story. The false narratives that abusers created around why we deserve the abuse, who you might be at your core, that you are quote on quote damaged goods, can have a long-lasting effect on how we view ourselves as people. Rebuilding your story and taking back who you are is going to be different for everyone. It's just important you recognize and release messaging around that justification of the abuse. Like Marissa had mentioned, there might be a lot of justification right now due to Covid-19 and due to being under a lot more stress at home, or while in that same environment. While yes, there are added stressors, there is never a justification for abuse that you are experiencing. Your survival is yours to speak and solely yours. This can be done in a lot of different ways and every survivor finds something that feels right for them. Whether that is talking through it with an advocate, whether that is through calling a hotline, whether that is writing in a journal, or calling a friend or family member and disclosing what it is that you are going through or had been through. Whatever feels like the safest option, that is your story and it's yours to own.

**Marissa:** I just want to say that again because I don't think it can't be said enough. Your voice definitely has power regardless of where you are at in your journey. You've survived, you have a story to tell. You are valued. You have values that make up who you are.

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are. You're an individual that can exist outside of that abuse and that's important to know.

**Teresa:** We have a couple of different resources that will be on our podcast website. The first one is going to be the values exercise that Marissa and I walked through a bit with you earlier in the podcast. This is going to have that exhaustive list of different values. If you are drawing a blank, it's a really good thing to take a look at. Then too, it will walk you through the grouping, and then naming each one of those groups.

The second resource that we are going to put on our website is a personal values card sort. Because values and belief systems are so different from person to person, depending on our upbringing, and depending on all the societal forces that we might engage with, finding out what these are is going to be an individualized experience for everybody. This is the second choice if you look at that value exercise and you're thinking you know this isn't my cup of tea. This card sort is an interactive activity that you can do by yourself to determine what are important core values for yourself, and in your life.

Essentially, it's kind of just placing them in different piles, really quickly without thinking too hard on important or not important. Check that out if you want more of an interactive activity versus the list, but both of them are just really great options to help you determine what are my values and what are my belief systems.

Thank you for joining us to learn more about Understanding Your Values. Our next session will be about Identifying Your Triggers. If you would like to talk with an advocate about your own experience, please call our 24-hour hotline at 262.542.3828. Learn more about The Women's Center at [www.twcwaukesha.org](http://www.twcwaukesha.org). Thank you and be well.