



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

### **Podcast Transcript Season 2 Episode 10: December 9, 2020 Wintertime Self-Care**

Presented by Marissa, Adult Domestic Violence Advocate, and  
Jessi, Director of Shelter and Transitional Living

MARISSA: Hello, and welcome to The Women's Center's 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 Wintertime Self-Care. We are your hosts: my name is Marissa, and I am the Adult Domestic Violence Advocate here at The Women's Center.

JESSI: And I'm Jessi, I'm the director of Shelter and Transitional Living for The Women's Center. I've been here at The Women's Center for six years now, and I've been loving and doing this work for over 15 years.

MARISSA: Excellent. So, you might be wondering why we're focusing on winter; well, 'tis the season, right? Puns aside, it is incredibly common to feel quite a bit more rundown in the winter months than usual. There is limited sunshine—at least where we are in Wisconsin—which can throw off our circadian rhythm, and this is what helps your body fall asleep and wake up when it's supposed to. Your body also makes the less serotonin, your “feel-good” neurotransmitter, and more melatonin, which is associated with sleep.

You may feel more groggy, irritable or sad during this time as well. If you're living in a colder climate like us, you may also feel the effects of isolation, making you feel lonely or unable to connect with loved ones during this time. This combined with your other current stressors, for example, abuse (whether present or past abuse), the stress of the holidays, COVID-related stress, and so on. This makes it all necessary to start to think about taking care of yourself in this time.

JESSI: To begin this conversation, it's helpful to start by reflecting on self-care. Do you have a regular self-care plan? Have you tried practicing self-care in the past? Have you found things that just help you feel better? Now's a good time to pause here and take a moment to reflect on this, or come back to these questions later. We do post transcripts of each episode on our website in the podcast section, and so we encourage you to take as much time and put a pause in whenever needed.

So, if you have incorporated regular self-care plan in the past, what's worked for you? What didn't? Have you heard of anything new that you really want to try? And if you're new to this idea of self-care, let's think about some things that you really enjoy. What fills you up? What makes your heart or your soul happy? And what can we add into our daily routine to take care of ourselves? And it's okay if you don't know where to start, you are not alone. Keep listening for discussion on some possible tools for you to practice self-care.

Some of these tools may be a fit for you, and some may not. Certainly, if you are experiencing any sort of mental health needs such as significant depression or anxiety, we encourage you to talk to your own medical professionals. But again, these are just some different ways to try and care for you at this time. It's normal to not have everything work: we all have different things that work for us, and try what feels comfortable for you. Be gentle with yourself as you think about this topic, and as a reminder, if you'd like more support, you can absolutely talk with a friend or family member or one of our advocates. They're available 24 hours on our hotline.

MARISSA: Absolutely. And on that point, I want to talk about staying connected. Again, winter can make people feel very isolated, and if you have experienced isolation within abuse, either in the present or the past, this can absolutely be a trigger. Try reaching out to the supports you have in your life and take the time to connect or reconnect with them. We have a previous podcast entitled "Re-engaging with Supports" if you're if you're feeling like you're at the beginning of this and would like some further guidance on this topic. Of course, taking that time to connect and reconnect might very likely look different now, put your safety first. Phone calls, Zoom chats, outdoor-distanced interactions (keeping in mind the weather) are all options that have become more popular lately as we all continue to adapt to this newer way of life.

If you are feeling distanced from previous supports, there are warm lines, hotlines, or text or chat lines that can offer emotional support to in the moment, the National Domestic Violence Hotline has a live chat function. You can find that at [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org) and you can click on the live chat function right on their homepage. The Crisis Text Line is also an incredible resource. If you're looking for support in our range of topics, you can just text the word HOME to 741741, and a support person will contact you right back via text. Another great resource is the NAMI helpline. And NAMI, of course, is the National Alliance on Mental Illness, they are mental health support, and their helpline is 1.800.950.NAMI. So those are just a couple of resources. Again, like

we've mentioned and will continue to mention, we do run a 24-hour hotline is well here at The Women's Center. If you're looking for support from us, particularly in the Greater Milwaukee area, we can be an excellent resource too if you're feeling a little bit isolated, and you want to learn about some resources or tools.

JESSI: Absolutely, and that connection piece is so important to our wellbeing. It's also important that we take time to reflect and take steps to take care of our body. One thing that we know is very important during the winter months is getting some sunshine, we know that getting enough sunshine can really positively impact our mood. So early morning walks—not too early because here in Wisconsin, it's dark out if it's too early in the morning—but getting outside during those daylight hours, whenever possible can give us all a boost. And remember that sunscreen, even in winter! Some individuals really say that they benefit from light boxes, or vitamin D supplements; if the sound interesting to you, definitely consult your doctor or your mental health professional to see what works for you.

When we think about taking care of our body, we also think about movement, little stretches. You may be feeling tense from being in the cold or just tense from, you know, the stressors of everyday life. Getting in those stretches where you can; if you're looking for connection, maybe trying a yoga or fitness class with the household member, they're available in-person, or there's lots of Zoom options. Right now, there's lots of cool ways to get connected. There's a lot of free options out there as well, including online services. Stretching a cold, cold muscle, as we know while here in our very frigid climate may cause some injury. So, it's important that you complete a warm-up activity such as walking or arm movements to get that blood flowing before you're stretching. And as always, anytime you're thinking about starting something new that impacts your body, make sure you're checking in with a doctor to make sure you're being safe.

We've got to make sure we're getting that water, and staying hydrated is so, so important. The heat may not be making you as thirsty, but continuing to drink enough water is important. And I know some of you are big tea folks, and this is the season for that warm cozy tea depending on which climate you're in. That tea can provide a nice calming effect, there can be a nice ritual and relaxation surrounded around preparing that tea. Try spending some time moisturizing with your lotion, your lip balm, or any other skin products that are going to combat that dryness and leave you feeling refreshed. The nice thing about all of these options is that they can be things that help ground you through your senses, right? Taking that time to breathe in the scent of the tea, tasting the water, smelling the lotion that you have or stretching out your fingers, feeling your skin soften, listening to the sounds that are accompanied with the tea kettle or however you're preparing that. Those are all ways to keep yourself present and grounded in that moment.

Many individuals find a lot of joy in baking or engaging in some form of culinary activities or self-care in the winter. Taking some time to go through your recipes: do you

have a favorite soup recipe that warms you from the inside out, or is there a meal that reminds you of a loved one or of a special memory or specific time in your life? Is there a special mug that just makes you smile every time you see it, and maybe a delicious tea that fills that mug? Ways to fuel your body in a healthy and enjoyable way is another way to take care of yourself.

MARISSA: Very, very true. And just as important as taking care of the body is taking care of the mind. One of my favorite things to do is listening to music. Music has—[Jessi affirms.] Oh yeah. Music has a healing quality, and it seems to speak to us as people in a way that is especially profound. We can learn about ourselves through music, we can express emotions, or just plain have fun and feel free within ourselves. It can truly be a beautiful thing. You can absolutely connect body and mind by singing or dancing to your favorite songs. No need to be an expert! This isn't about choreographed moves or trained vocals, you are a star in your own right, and if you want to sing to your favorite song, go for it. I feel like that's something we both enjoy doing quite a bit: sing to our favorite songs.

JESSI: Absolutely. [Marissa affirms.] It's always the right time for a good song.

MARISSA: Totally. And we know that many people might enjoy holiday music this time of year, and if that's your jam, definitely lean into it. If not so much, you're more than welcome to seek out music that does speak to you or makes you feel full or energized. For this episode, we have curated another playlist of empowering songs that will be featured on our website alongside this podcast.

Journaling is also an important way to take care of the mind too. You may be staying in a bit more than other seasons and possibly spending more time with yourself, so taking that time to look inward and having a space to organize your thoughts can help you feel more connected with yourself. You may choose to keep a physical journal, jot down notes on your phone, make art or anything in between. Again, this is your space to create however you see fit. You can of course write whatever you want in your journaling, too. But we will share three tools as possible prompts: affirmations, gratitude journaling, and a tool called the Survivor Tree that I find quite interesting. In addition to those positive-leaning tools, meaning they invite you to think of positive times in your life, it may also feel helpful for you to process difficult feelings or thoughts in a journal, either separately or all in one space. And again, there is no wrong way to take up journaling, and there's no wrong way to take up any of these self-care tools. It's what makes sense for you. It's what fills you up and brings you your own personal joy or healing.

JESSI: So that first idea of affirmations: affirmations are just thoughts or phrases about ourselves that are positive in nature, and we use them to counter negative self-talk. And it's okay if they don't feel natural or feel a little funny at first, keep trying, you'll find ones that resonate with you and that help improve that positive internal dialogue that you're having to yourself.

So, some ways to get started thinking about affirmations is just starting by asking yourself, what is your favorite thing about yourself? What are some kind things that others have said about you? If it's feeling hard for you to think about it all on your own, think about what are some kind things that other people have said about you. And again, it's okay if you don't know where to start. When you're feeling down or sad or anxious or worried, it can sometimes feel really hard to recall positive traits that you embody. Following abuse, it may also feel difficult to think of affirmations if you've dealt with someone who's consistently and constantly been telling you the opposite. We have some examples of affirmations and we'll include more on our website or you may choose to think of your own original affirmations.

Like Marissa said, you can write them down, you can use them in art, you can repeat them to yourself, you can say them to the mirror. My personal favorite is to make up a song about it, as we touched on, Marissa and I love a good song. But some of the examples that we have are...

I'm proud of myself. I deserve to be happy. I am free to make my own choices. I deserve to be loved. I can make a difference. Anything that really resonates with you, that affirms who you are, is a great place to start.

MARISSA: Absolutely true. And I might add, as well, my favorite way to practice affirmations. I like to write them on my mirror with dry-erase marker and then repeat them. I think that's a powerful way. But you know, any way that feels powerful for you, go for it, whether it's singing, making art, writing them on paper, however they resonate with you.

JESSI: I love that you have that verbal and visual reminder for yourself and that representation to come back and look at as you need it. That's a great idea.

MARISSA: Oh, yeah, it absolutely helps. And similar to affirmations, gratitude journaling is a specific type of journaling that prompts you to think of positives in your life. Specifically, what you may be grateful or thankful for. So, you may have been asked what you are thankful for already during the holidays, or you might have done some recent reflection on your own too. Gratitude journaling can feel challenging at times, but it can help stretch our ability to process and positively reframe thoughts. They don't have to be grandiose things; you can feel grateful for getting up in the morning, for

doing one thing to take care of yourself, or for acknowledging a tough emotion too. It doesn't have to be big, sweeping things, like any form of self-care. It can be, you know, reconnecting with your mind or your body or something that might feel small, but it is incredibly important.

JESSI: So, another way to think about journaling or another option for a journaling activity that Marissa had mentioned is the idea of the Survivor Tree. Survivor Trees are, they're tools used to really celebrate, examine, and foster resilience. They can be as simple as you want them to be or as complex, depending on how you want to create it. The idea is that they can be drawn out to explore areas of growth, so the branch can be areas of growth. And then when you add your leaves and your buds, those can represent hopes and aspirations. The coping skills that you've already learned in order to help you stay grounded are the trunks and the roots. And even the struggles that you've worked through can be incorporated into this depiction, those would be the fallen leaves be beneath the tree and on the surrounding pieces.

Building from the ground up, again, the trunk and the roots are the coping skills that you already have in your toolbox, that they help you stay grounded. And then as you're thinking about areas that you want to grow in, you're adding in different branches, different areas of exploration. And then off of those branches, you're drawing in different leaves and buds. Those are your future hopes and your aspirations, and maybe looking at it as goals depending on how you frame those ideas. And then things that you've overcome, right or struggles that you've worked through, those can be the beautiful leaves that are falling through the sky, or have made their way to the ground.

As this tree grows and expands, you can think of how trees kind of survive multiple seasons every year, right? They're not always these big blooming beautiful events, some seasons leave the branches pretty empty, and sometimes they look a little tired, and that's okay, right? The tree survives, it takes that time to rest, and then it continues to bloom, even after that cold or barren season

So, this tool can help reflect on how your resilience has allowed you to overcome previous challenges or barren seasons, as it promotes resilience during future difficult seasons. Some folks actually draw multiple trees to represent different phases of their own healing and their own processing, some folks continue to add on to one tree and notice that certain areas of it get fuller and more robust because that's an area that they're really seeing a lot of growth and focus in, while other areas maybe stay a little bit more barren for a little bit longer.

When you're taking the example of the tree eventually blooming, despite any adversity or winter or cold, it gives you a chance to explore how you can move forward in life and really bloom into the beautiful human that you are, no matter what you're facing or what you're experiencing. So, for folks who are very visual and enjoy writing things out and

having different ways to reflect on both their future as well as their past, this can be a really helpful tool.

MARISSA: Yeah, I particularly while the explanation of the survivor tree and the concept of it as a whole, I think that message of resiliency and continuing to bloom despite adversity, so beautiful statement, it really is. [Jessi affirms.]

And again, you know, I want to remind you all that these are not going to be any cure-all solutions for any mental health concerns; if you are struggling, we do encourage you to reach out to professionals or seek out support within your system and be gentle to yourself, especially in this more difficult time, and we hope that some of these tools may have been helpful for you.

Thank you so much for joining us to learn more about Wintertime Self-Care. Our next episode, the final episode of the season, will be about Healing at the Holidays, a bonus episode with our Volunteer Coordinator, Maria.

The Women's Center welcomes and serves survivors of all ages, races, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, nationalities, and immigration status, recognizing that their unique experience informs the perspective of each person.

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.