



Wednesday Workshop: Supporting Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

Podcast Transcript Season 3 Episode 1: February 3, 2021 Discovering Self-Love

Presented by Marissa, Adult Domestic Violence Advocate, and
Nouchee, Dual Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advocate

MARISSA: Hello, and welcome to The Women's Center's Wednesday Workshop, a podcast that shares helpful insight for survivors, community members, and service providers alike. The Women's Center is based out of Waukesha, WI; we welcome and serve survivors of all ages, races, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, nationalities, and immigration statuses. The mission of The Women's Center is to provide safety, shelter, and support to empower all impacted by domestic abuse, sexual violence, child abuse and trafficking. Each episode will feature instruction on a healing topic. Today, our topic is Discovering Self-Love. We're your hosts. My name is Marissa and I'm the Adult Domestic Violence Advocate with The Women's Center.

NOUCHEE: Hi, everyone. My name is Nouchee, I use the pronouns she/her/hers and I'm the new Dual Domestic Abuse Sexual Violence Advocate. I've been here around five months. My role is to provide crisis advocacy, which includes crisis intervention and emotional support to victim/survivors. I also help refer clients to community resources if needed.

MARISSA: I must say that I am so excited to be continuing this podcast series with you. And hopefully too, we will continue to hear voices from the rest of our organization as well during this time. We would like to take some time to acknowledge February as Black History Month. The Women's Center feels it is important, this month and every single day, to honor the work of Black advocates and change-makers that have created and strengthened the anti-violence movement. To Black advocates, clients, and supporters: we see you, we value you, and we respect you. As stated by End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, our state coalition, "we will continue to ensure [Black] voices are lifted up, as we challenge our own history and [biases] and collaborate to co-create a world free of violence that centers those most impacted by it." We want to continue this

conversation. Follow along on our social media this month as we highlight those important Black advocates and changemakers that have shaped the world through their leadership.

NOUCHEE: February is also home to Valentine's Day, which can bring about different emotions and/or triggers for survivors of abuse. Valentine's Day is a holiday that often only celebrates couples and love. We know that this could be a difficult time for some, so we wanted to put out a podcast with new ways you can celebrate this time of year. Often, victim survivors may have heard “reasons” to be unlovable by an abuser and it could be hard to feel a sense of self-worth after experiencing a toxic or abusive relationship. This Valentine's Day, we want to challenge you to spend this holiday refocusing on the relationship that you have with yourself and nurturing/caring for yourself.

MARISSA: Absolutely, Valentine's Day it's such a complex holiday and it can bring about so many different feelings. And like Nouchée mentioned as well, an abuser may have told you “reasons” to be unlovable or unwanted. Those are power and control dynamics or in other words, tools that abusers utilize to make their partner believe these falsehoods to be true and isolate them from other supports. And again, it absolutely bears repeating- the negative things that your abuser said about your worth are not true. They're absolutely not true. And that said, once we've heard a lot of that stuff it can be really hard to reconnect with our emotions and actually, you know, feel a sense of worth about ourselves.

Those emotions are normal, even those bad ones that we might be feeling. There is no one way to heal and healing comes with many different emotions that may feel confusing or even conflicting at times. We're going to have that joy, anger, sadness, fear, pretty much any character from inside out, is a normal reaction to have.

Take that time to process and acknowledge all of the feelings that come up for you. Some find it helpful to write out their emotional journey independently or walk through those feelings with a support. All of this is in the interest of self-love.

NOUCHEE: Self-love is extremely important in order to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself. You deserve to be happy and you deserve to be treated with respect. Self-love is important to practice in order to care for ourselves when we are feeling down. It is important to continue filling our own cup with self-love and self-care so that we can pour into other things in our lives that may need our attention. With this in mind, we wanted to share some strategies to help build your sense of self love. The strategies that we will be talking about today are: writing a survivor love letter, redefining Valentine's Day, redefining healthy relationships and taking yourself on a date.

MARISSA: Let's get started with that survivor love letter. And I want to say first, this doesn't have to be Valentine's Day specific either. There is not a bad time to practice self-love. There's not a bad time to write yourself an endearing letter, there's not a bad time to take yourself out on a date. This can be encompassing to any time of year. We just know that some of these feelings might be a little bit more present during this specific time of year.

Survivor love letters, what are they? They're actually part of a movement. This movement began similar to other movements you might have heard of like "Me Too" or "Why I Stayed" popular hashtags.

Artist, Tani Ikeda, was inspired to start the viral campaign in 2012. After reflecting on the healing process of her own assaults, the anniversary of which is on Valentine's Day, she considered writing herself this letter as an act of radical self-love and a way to encourage allies to honor the survivors in their lives.

So, survivor love letters can be addressed to your current self as a survivor, your past self- either prior to or in the relationship, or your future self too. So, something like here's where I'm at now, I can't wait to see who I will be, things like this.

This is a good opportunity to utilize one of my personal favorite self-love tools: speaking to ourselves in a way that we would talk to a close friend or family member that we love and respect dearly. It asks the question- we wouldn't want to put down our loved ones, so why should we put ourselves down? From here, you have the power to choose what you want to do with this letter. Do you want to read it to a support? Do you want to keep it in a safe/hidden place just for you? Is it a note on your phone or do you speak it to yourself? Is this something you want to share with a broader network of people. There is no wrong way to write a survivor love letter just like there's no wrong way to be a survivor. Do be aware of any triggers that may come up in this reflection and if you need immediate support, reach out to us or your local hotlines.

We are going to include a link to the survivor love letter webpage for the movement and their social medias included within their webpage. They've got Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, and they all contain examples of love letters that have been showcased by this movement.

NOUCHEE: This year, consider redefining what Valentine's Day means and looks like to you. Make plans to have a "Gal-entine's" or "Pal-entine's" day with some of your closest friends to celebrate the friendships that you've built. This can look like a virtual zoom party, following an online recipe together, or you can download apps that allow you to play games like uno, karaoke, or watch movies together. Whatever you and your friends do to make this day fun, we strongly encourage it. If you are a parent, consider making this day a special day with your kids with arts and crafts or fun activities. Valentine's

Day themed slime or building a fort out of pillows and couch cushions inside the house can be a really fun idea. Try going with the flow of whatever your kids might want to do. This could be a great opportunity to have a family day or you can also just treat this like a normal day. If it is unsafe to do any of these things, spend the day practicing self-care and taking the day to relax. Whatever makes you feel like you have power over your day, we encourage it.

MARISSA: On that note, you might also be considering what a healthy relationship even looks like for you. Even if you're not looking to enter another romantic relationship, it's important to reflect on what you deem to be a healthy relationship whether that be romantic, friends, family, etc.

It might sound weird to consider this in the name of self-love at first, but when we take the time to think about what we want and need, we are more likely to have fulfilling relationships that help us feel energized and healthy. We're surrounded by people who fill us up rather than drain us.

The things that make a relationship healthy for one person may be different than what makes a relationship healthy for another. That said, there is a core set of behaviors that need to be present for an equitable and healthy partnership which is what I'm going to be discussing in a little bit here. We will include a tool on our website to help you conceptualize your image of what you want and need in a relationship and if you're a teen, we will be talking about this in our next podcast as well.

In a healthy relationship, equality is at the core. Treating each partner with respect and understanding. There's going to be open communication, so the ability to talk openly and listen to each other. A healthy relationship is going to be about making mutual choices, so one partner isn't always dominating in the decision making. Boundaries are going to be respected. There is that time to be together as well as apart. There is that space to be an individual and the partner. And these boundaries are understood, respected, and encouraged by each partner as well. You also trust each other. You feel like you can be honest around your partner and you feel like they can be honest around you as well. These things are all crucial to healthy relationships.

NOUCHEE: And finally, the last strategy that we would like to talk about today is considering taking yourself out on a date. After being in a relationship that may have caused harm, it's normal to feel lost and confused. We encourage you to take time to get to know yourself again. Take yourself on a date, get your favorite foods and think or write down some things about yourself. What are some of your hobbies? What are some things that you liked to do before the relationship that you want to reconnect with? And what are some goals or future plans that you have?

MARISSA: Yeah, so similar to how we might get to know another person on a date, let's take that time to get to know ourselves a bit better too. That can be a really great way to bolster that self-love once we know a little bit more about ourselves and what we like and what our values are.

Some final takeaways here, some things I want to leave you all out with, it sounds cheesy, I'm a person of cheese, it happens- the most important relationship we have is the one with ourselves. It truly, truly is. It's also important to recognize that healing isn't linear. Let yourself feel those peaks and valleys. Feel what this day might be like for you. It may be good, it might still be tough, even with some of these things in place. That's normal. And these things aren't one size fits all. If these strategies don't work for you, you're not broken. There might be some other things that we didn't mention that might really work for you and support is available too if you are really struggling. If you need to reach out to somebody, I strongly encourage you to reach out to a friend or family member, advocates, possibly a therapist, you know, whoever you have in your corner who is there for you. I encourage you to reach out to them if you need that support.

NOUCHEE: Thank you for joining us to learn more about discovering self-love. Our next session will be about "Starting the Convo on Healthy Teen Relationships". The Women's Center centers our work in partnering with clients to overcome barriers and to gain a life free from violence. Our work is grounded in equity, upheld by inclusion, accountability, self-reflection, and continual growth.

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, and find the resources mentioned on this episode by clicking Media & Events, then Podcasts on our website.

Thank you and be well.