

Episode 506: “The Importance of Rest & Why We’re Taking a Mid-Season Break”

Please note: This transcript has been lightly edited to remove filler words or sounds.

CHAD MOSES: We often identify rest as the opposite of work that is almost like a light switch. It's either on or it's off, you are either awake and working, or you are asleep and rest. And I think the reality is that there's so much beauty in the dimmer switch of life.

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CHAD MOSES: You're listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. I'm your host, Chad Moses, and in each episode, we'll be talking about the things that can often feel hard to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. We'll be sharing stories and exploring big themes like hope, healing, and recovery. If any of the topics we discuss or the stories we share feel too heavy for you, know that it's OK to pause, restart, or stop altogether. As we discover new stories, we hope to remind you that your story is important.

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For the last five years, we've celebrated May being Mental Health Month through a campaign known as Black & White, where we highlight a handful of statements that we believe to be non-negotiable. Statements that we have declared truthful for you and for us. This year, we're shining the spotlight once again on three phrases from previous campaigns that deserve to be revisited in a new and updated manner.

Those three statements are:

It's okay to ask for help.

Hope is defiant.

And... We need you here.

That last one is going to play a more pertinent role in today's episode as we dive into the topic of rest. Rest in the form of actual sleep, rest from our jobs, from school, from social interactions, and rest, even from the work that our healing and recovery requires of us.

In a heavily digitized world, we are often expected and asked to be engaged—or at least available—at all times. But as human beings who get tired and drained, being “always on” and “always accessible” is an expectation we can't and shouldn't meet. It's honestly something we need to protect ourselves from if we want to lead healthy and balanced lives. And because To Write Love aims to inspire and lead by example, this episode also marks a mid-season break for the podcast so that Becky, our editor and producer, can go on a month-long sabbatical.

When we say that “we need you here”, we also mean to say that we need you to take care of yourself so that you can be here. We need you to advocate for your well-being, to prioritize things like rest so that you don't get burnt out to the point that being a “story still going” feels next to impossible.

So to Becky, thank you for your service, and thank you for your REST. We'll see you on the other side of some well-deserved space. To you all watching and listening, we will be back in just a minute to answer some of your questions regarding and related to rest.

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BECKY EBERT: Hi, it's Becky Ebert, TWLOHA's editor and producer. I want to talk to you for a moment about something specific: T-shirts. To Write Love on Her Arms has always sold t-shirts as a way to help fund our mission—the mission of hope and help. But the products we sell in our store do so much more than help us financially. Each piece of merchandise is a conversation starter. It spreads the TWLOHA message to someone who may not have found out about us otherwise. So whether you wear our shirts, hats, hoodies, or rain jackets, we want to thank you for bringing a message of hope and help wherever you go. To see our latest designs, head to store.twloha.com now and use the promo code `PODCAST20` to receive 20% off your entire order.

[music playing]

CHAD: We just went over our mental health month conversations, we talked a little bit about the value of rest for our mental health. And we know and we recognize how easy it is to talk about something like rest, but it can be hard to actually carve out the time and space for intentional rest. So with those concerns and hurdles in mind, and with the assistance of our very own Community Care Coordinator, Bianca Mujica, we're going to respond to some listener comments and questions in the hopes that you feel a bit more supported. And I hope that you feel a little bit less alone as you navigate the intersection of your inner world's needs and the requests of an outer world. So to start off, Bianca, thank you so much for taking the time to be back here with us. We sent out a message to social media and to our community text line for your questions asking what are some of your curiosities? What are some of the specifics of your life that you'd like to investigate as it turns to rest? So, Bianca? I guess we'll start with you and any wise words, you have to open up and then we can get to our first questions.

BIANCA: Oh, goodness, wise words. Um, I think the first thing I would just tell people is that you deserve rest. Regardless of where you're at, in your journey, what you're struggling with, what you have on your to-do list, you deserve rest, you deserve to take time for yourself. You deserve to not feel like your worth is tied to your productivity. And just know that it's okay. To just be and to not be doing something in every single moment.

CHAD: Yeah, I'll take that as wisdom for sure. For sure. So yeah, let's get to our first question. What do you have first on the plate?

BIANCA: So our first question comes from Rain from community. They asked, what happens to be your advice for college students who feel that college work is more important to get done than resting and taking time for themselves?

CHAD: Rain, way to kick us off with a super easy question. I'd say that for many of us, we definitely if we're pursuing higher education, we have this desire to impress, impress our guardians, our parents, people that are helping us achieve this goal, need to impress our peers, our classmates, there's kind of a sense of competition. Impress our professors and people teaching us. We want their approval after all, we're picking their class in the hopes of making them proud and how they have taught us. But I think it's important to realize that in the midst of trying to impress other people, you've already done something incredibly impressive just by waking up, just by showing up, just by putting forth your best effort, you know, the times that maybe didn't get the exact grade, but you're still proud of your work like that is enough. And there is this paradox that getting rest is actually super conducive to studying, they tell you not to cram for 24 hours straight because you hit a limit, your brain hits a limit, your body hits a limit,

we've all kind of found ourselves at the point where we read the same sentence on a page over and over again, just because we're too tired to absorb in that information. So I'd say it's important to take some time to, to interview yourself, maybe interview your peers, maybe even interview your professors and, and just be honest about what is on your plate. But I'd say in terms of study and work, that rest is important because your body needs to reset. And in terms of expectation, that this is a period of life that you know, we're really just trying to do what we think is normal, that may or may not actually be a normal type of schedule of life, and how to absorb information and how to relay that information. So this is supposed to be a shorter podcast, but I do want to give an anecdote that there was a period of my college life where there was a class that that it took a lot for me to go to in the midst of my own depression, and in the midst of my own substance use and then in the midst of being an RA and trying to care for some crises that were happening with some of my residents that I just didn't make it to class for, like three weeks and, and my professor reached out to me and said, "Hey, I'd love to have a meeting" and I go into that meeting ready to just be totally deferential and to beg for my academic life. And my professor just said, "Look, I don't want to talk about grades. I don't want to talk about work, I want to talk about you, are you okay?" And that was an incredibly humanizing experience that I could be upfront with, you know, I didn't divulge everything I didn't, you know, divulge the specific stories of the students under my care. But I told her that that life was heavy, and I just needed some time to work on a paper. And I needed some space to work on this exam. And I'm sorry for the amount of work that I had missed, and we came to an agreement that there was a way to catch up. But that would necessitate some honesty along the way. So Rain sorry for the long-winded answer but I think a good question warrants some nuance and its response.

BIANCA: It's weird to say that I was in college three years ago, but, um, some tips from when I was in college and struggled with my mental health things that really helped me where my school had a disability accommodation office. And I went in I just talked to them when it was like Hey, I have depression and anxiety and these are things and really affect my ability to function as a person, they have affected my ability to be a student. So I'm just trying to come here and see what I can do. And so they basically gave me a letter that I could give to my professors that talked about, like the different accommodations that might help me. And so inevitably, when I got to a point in this semester, where I struggled a lot, I could show them the letter and talk to them. And a lot of them having seen that letter would be like, Okay, this isn't just like, you had a, like, you missed a couple assignments and you're trying to come in, make it up. They, they understood that this was something that was more serious. And ideally, you wouldn't need a letter to take mental health seriously. But once I was able to talk to them about being registered with the Disability Office, they were usually a lot more understanding with helping me figure out a point going forward in my classes, so that I would think that most schools have that available.

BIANCA: Okay, so the next one comes from Jennifer, and they write, rest is the key to most everything. I totally agree with this. My issue is anxiety, trying really hard to lay down the things that I worry about. So I think the question here is just how do you move past or maybe just function as these really heavy, anxious thoughts are overtaking your mind?

CHAD: I think you bring up a really important point in that, that we often identify rest as the opposite of work that is almost like a light switch. It's either on or it's off, you are either awake and working, or you are asleep and rest. And I think the reality is that there's so much beauty in the dimmer switch of life. And in that dimmer switch is going to be the opportunity to practice rest, that we're not going to be professionals at this, especially not in this world, that we're constantly connected to everyone and everything at all times. My wife and I, as we're trying to incorporate a better sense of rest in our lives, she's done a really great job of intentionally just putting down the phone for a while to give her eyes a break before bed. And to not worry about the next news item that comes up or the next meme on TikTok, or what have you, just

a way not only just to give your eyes a rest from that blue light that's constantly flooding us, but also a rest of just kind of what all is the information bouncing around my skull? And do I need any more information right before I lay down? Some of this information can be anxiety-inducing. And that's not even to speak of the anxiety that we live with, without a reason connected directly to it. So don't beat yourself up. If rest is difficult, seeking rest can feel like work. But in time, with practice, we can slowly ramp down into these moments of rest.

BIANCA: I would also say to Jennifer that it's okay, if your rest starts in increments, it's okay, if you do like five minutes of rest one day and work up to 10 minutes the next day 20, 30, and then get up to maybe doing like an hour. If taking time to rest makes you more anxious, then focus on the things that you can do. So if that's just taking a really quick, five minute break to meditate or do some breathing exercises or something like if that's what you're able to do in that moment, that is totally fine. Rest is a habit that takes a lot of practice to build. The next question is from Chris. And it's more of a logistical concern, which is, how do we get employers to buy interest?

CHAD: Yeah, I think, you know, maybe one of the silver linings, we mentioned this in recent episodes, and over the past year, but one of the silver linings of the pandemic was that it really brought mental health conversations to the forefront. It's no longer weird to ask, how are you doing? No, really? How are you doing? And I think at the same time, there was the sense of freedom that a lot of people felt, as a lot of workplaces went remotes of great like, I can do my job from home now, like, with my dog, and you know, lunch breaks can be a bit more nebulous. Now, like this sounds pretty, pretty cool, right? But I think along with that was this loss of structure, that may be working from home, didn't offer the rest that that we thought it did, all of a sudden, my kitchen table is not just a place I find nourishment, but also the place that I'm responding to emails all the time. We have tools now that keep us more plugged in than ever. I remember growing up, my dad was fortunate enough to have a home office. And I remember the first fax machine he got. And I thought that's wild that people across the country can talk to you using this and you can see their handwriting, like what an age to live in. Now, granted, I was like in second grade at the time. But now, like, we carry this with us at all times, if not a tablet then a phone, we're constantly able to be accessed. And we have this idea, this, this consistent sense of urgency. And I think at some point, it takes a brave group of people just to throw their hands up and say timeout. We need to set better boundaries, we need to care for each other more simply because that's how I experience care if people give me a little bit more grace, or a little bit more heads up, or if everything doesn't have to be right now, but until people kind of identify within their own workplaces, that it's problematic, then things will continue on, as scheduled, as planned. We're starting to see and again, especially with this age of the pandemic, that we've all experienced, more and more companies setting up these employee interest groups. They carry different names from you know, different areas of geography, but you know, it's whatever degree you have a number of people on your staff that you've talked to about mental health concerns, about burnout culture, forming a little informal, affinity group and just say what are ways that we can start just caring for me each other a bit better. And this is a way to develop what I've kind of dubbed as a micro culture that if you don't feel equipped to change the entirety of the organization, the entirety of the business, we can change how we decide to interact with one another. So I wish I could pass you an employee bill of rights on how we can effectively change mental health culture in the workplace. But I think it has to happen in a way that's authentic to, to you and your relationships and your team. And this is all across the spectrum. This isn't just for, you know, for people at the leadership levels or at just the you know, get it done levels. But this has to be consistent across all levels of an organization. I think from there, just you know, when there's a groundswell of people, when there's a desire to make a change.

BIANCA: I just like I said to Jennifer, as well, like, you could start with baby steps, you can start by maybe putting a pamphlet for resources on your company's bulletin board, or maybe sending an email to all of

your co-workers with something. And if you feel like your employer won't be responsive to directly approaching them, and maybe doing something that kind of includes them and plant that seed in their mind, could be a way to show them that like people are receptive and they want and they need this. So I would definitely encourage ways to, like Chad was saying, build that community with your co-workers in ways that can show your employer that this is something that would help the people working there.

CHAD: As a PS, I'd also say, for any employers out there that gets a list of perks associated with your job, read through them, be aware of what your rest policy is, and take advantage of it. If you are given X amount of hours or days of paid time off, take those days, those are yours, especially if they don't roll over.

BIANCA: And use your days off to actually rest. I am guilty of using my days off to run all my errands and get all the things done that I need to get done. And it ends up being a day off from work, but not a day off from life. And I know that's so difficult to do when you have only a limited number of days off. But if you actually take the time to rest, even if it's just for one day, you are way more likely to feel motivated and rejuvenated, to continue working the next couple of days and to get the things done outside of work that you need to get done. So take the time for yourself, even when it's hard because you deserve it. And you can't just keep running like a machine. So next question in the same realm, Molly wants to know, how do you rest when you're the boss? Or if you're a worker in a position in which the place wouldn't keep running without you there?

CHAD: I'd like to kick this question to Becky. Becky, Becky, you there? Oh, Becky is on sabbatical. So I say that playfully just to paint that it is important in all of our roles, but especially in leadership roles to model the rest that you would like to see your employees take. So Becky is such an important member of this team. She makes this podcast happen, she makes our blog happen. She is often kind of the central hub of so many of the words that go out to the masses. And we applaud Becky for taking the time off. Now that is a piece of our corporate culture that we do enable moments of intentional rest and time away. And, Molly, to your question about you know what, if you were the only person that does this job that won't get done without you? I'd say that one thing that we found as an organization as it relates to sabbatical, as part of our culture, is that this gives us as a team a chance to learn more about Becky's job, which gives us more compassion for her job when she comes back. But it's on us to help pick up the slack. And what a joy to help carry our friend in a unique way through this as she's absorbing some well deserved rest. So I'd say for those in leadership positions, or those that are convinced that the job's not gonna get done without you with a little bit of planning ahead, because Becky did not just show up yesterday and say that she's taking sabbatical. But this is something that she said, "You know, I would like to do this, how can we make sure that we do this, and that the To Write Love ship stays afloat." So with time, we're able to schedule out what jobs need to be done, we can prioritize what, who, who can take care of jobs, X, Y, or Z. And so I'd say, just having this dream of rest, much like with what you were saying earlier, Bianca doing this incrementally, that we can plan for rest, it doesn't just have to be something that we do, but we can take some tiny steps in that direction before it is time to just shut down the computer for a little bit. So model that rest, take advantage of the rest and invite people into this and celebrate it when it happens. don't begrudge yourself or your team for for having the opportunity to learn more about about the task at hand, because we are convinced that that when Becky comes back, she's going to be an inspiration for us to rest and to work and to plan around our own opportunities to work and rest in a balanced way.

BIANCA: Yeah, and something thankfully that I've never had to experience but something that my partner has experienced at a lot of workplaces is that when you take time to rest or you establish boundaries, you're guilted for it by coworkers and superiors and if that's something that you're experiencing, and that's

part of why you're not able to rest and that's part of why the place can't run without you, know that it's not your responsibility to ease the burdens of other people. If you're a worker and you taking time means that everybody else has to pick up your slack, that is management's problem, that means that they need to do their job better. And that's not on you to have to worry about everybody else, because you're not the one in charge of running the place. And if you are management, and you taking time to rest would affect everybody else, then think about maybe hiring more people to help ease your load, or maybe delegate some of your responsibilities to other people. You don't have to carry everything by yourself. The last question comes from Bree, who asks, how can we address the guilt that often comes from taking time for ourselves?

CHAD: Yeah, Bianca, you're just kind of hinting towards that. Right? Unintentional, but that is part of the experience, that is part of the tension. So Bree, I hope you hear and that that you're not alone in feeling that guilt. That doesn't mean that that guilt should be normalized. Just because it's a common feeling doesn't mean that it's the goal, feeling of rest. Again, I think it's important just to be aware that not every year of human existence has looked like the 2000s and the 2010s, and the 2020s, that we have more access to more information than than our ancestors could have ever dreamt possible. I wonder if, if they felt the same amount of guilt for not getting something done? And even then just defining what is that something? And what is done? Is it responding to making sure my email count is down to zero? Is that really a marker of productivity? Maybe for some people, but maybe not so much for others? And, and in all that, like, can I imagine what rest would feel like for the other party in this email thread? I don't love getting emails at 9pm. I wonder if the person on the other end wants an email from me at 9pm? Or can this wait? Or can dinnertime just be dinner time and not a time to? To organize my next day? Can my coffee time, just be my coffee time and not an excuse to to hype myself up for the next meeting, for the next thing? Can I just take these moments as they come? But to whatever degree you feel the need to be constantly on, that is an unhealthy environment, that the most capable people out there in every genre of work, need some rest. So to limit a sense of guilt, and quotes on that front, let's take the time to choose rest on our own terms. So that rest isn't forced upon us. It's kind of math, right? Your body is not built to work 24/7. So let's listen to your body. Listen to your mind, listen to wise voices in your life that can point out when rest can be warranted, and perhaps even needed.

BIANCA: Yeah, I would also say that this question really speaks to me as a person of color. Because in a lot of communities of color, especially from my experience, the Hispanic community, rest is foreign rest is taboo. And it's even looked down upon in a lot of ways. Sometimes, when you talk about experiencing things like anxiety, or depression, it is chalked up to not having enough things to do. And it's responded with things like, 'go wash the dishes,' 'do the chores', 'keep your hands busy, be productive, get something done. And that will help you feel better.' Because for a lot of older generations, it was all about what you could do when you are already so marginalized, you're very limited in the things you can offer. And so taking time off meant you weren't going to be able to feed your family or you weren't going to be able to send your kids to school. And so rest is not something that is talked about at all in communities of color because it's not something that our parents or our grandparents knew how to do. And for people who are from the younger generations, and get a lot of that message, and are feeling burned out by it, I see you. And I just want you to know that you don't have to carry that generational trauma with you, you don't have to hold on to the burden of having to work all the time to be able to feed your family. And if that's the situation that you're in, you still deserve rest, you still deserve to take time for yourself. And it can be extremely hard to do when there are things coming at you from all sides. But the world is different now. And the reasons that our parents and grandparents couldn't rest may not and don't have to be the reasons why we can't rest. So know that it's okay to rest. It's okay to take time for yourself. It's okay to not be hustling and not prove to the world that you're more than what they see you as, I know that a lot of times we hear the saying you have to work twice as hard to get half as far twice as hard to get half as far

and as true as that may be for a lot of us and as heavy as that may feel, it doesn't mean that you are never allowed to take a break.

CHAD: We have some people that we admire on the internet, they're called the Nap Ministry, and these are people who have made the culture of rest as something super invitational, they live it out. They are all about kind of redefining rest as a form of work as a form of inner work. So definitely check them out, be encouraged by them, follow them. I think to that end, just know that your desires for rest are certainly echoed amongst other people. And this is something that's becoming way more part of our vernacular, that rest is something to be valued, something to be pursued and, and something to be enjoyed when the opportunity presents itself, even when it doesn't present itself, something to stand on the desk and say rest is needed.

[music playing]

CHAD: While the podcast will be taking a mid-season breather until June 12th so that our producer can take an extended break, we want to assure you that we will be active on social media in honor of Mental Health Month. So be sure to check in on Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram to follow along with live conversations, recommendations and resources for caring for your own mental well-being, in-depth and honest storytelling, and as always, encouragement and safe spaces for you to share your journey.

We hope you'll join us in whatever ways feel helpful to you by going to twloha.com or visiting the link in our show notes to learn more about the Black and White campaign. And before we enter into this break, we ask that you remember: we need your presence, not your perfection. Thanks for listening and we'll see you real soon. And even as we rest, we're glad you're here.

CHAD: We hope this episode has been a reminder that your story is important, you matter, and you're not alone.

If you're struggling right now, know that it is OK to reach out and that there are people who want to help. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources on our website twloha.com. That's T-W-L-O-H-A.com. And Click FIND HELP at the top of the page.

If you need to talk to someone right now, you can always text our friends at Crisis Text Line. Simply text the word TWLOHA—that's T W L O H A—to 741741. You'll be connected to a crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

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A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. The To Write Love on Her Arms podcast is produced by Rebecca Ebert. Music assistance was provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor. And again, I'm Chad Moses, thank you so much for listening. We're glad you're here.