

Black and White Episode 4: We Need You Here

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

LINDSAY KOLSCH [over music]: That's really powerful. And I think this phrase hopefully captures that. Hopefully that it captures when you wear a t-shirt or when you hold that phrase on your phone and you look at it or you share it, that it, that it is a reminder that one, we are connected. And that means that's why we need you here. We're connected. We're all a part of this bigger story. And without that, we don't know where this story's going to go. So stay.

[music playing]

LINDSAY: You're listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast, a show about mental health and things that make us human. We'll be sharing stories and conversations about topics we tend not to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. And with so much gray area in the world today, we feel it's important to draw a line in the sand when it comes to a few of the things we believe about people and mental health. Last May, during Mental Health Month, we highlighted four statements that have guided TWLOHA's mission since day one. And this year, we're focusing on four more statements:

I Am Worthy of Hope
It Is OK to Ask for Help
Your Story Is Important

And finally,

We Need You Here.

[music playing]

LINDSAY: At TWLOHA, we believe these four statements are non-negotiable. To us, these statements are Black and White. So in honor of Mental Health Month, we've created a special miniseries featuring four episodes to highlight each statement. We're going to be sharing a bit more about what those words mean to us and this movement. We'll be highlighting a few action steps you can take that are also inspired by these words. And to learn more about what TWLOHA is doing this month, you can read the 'Black and White' blog post and check out our merch collection at twloha.com.

Today I'm gonna be joined by Chad Moses, a member of our team. We hope this conversation is encouraging, and we're excited to share it with you.

[music playing]

LINDSAY: Hey guys, this is Lindsay, I'm back again with our team member, Chad Moses. He's the Director of Outreach here at To Write Love on Her Arms. We are talking this month about four phrases. These are statements that we believe are black and white. They are statements we 100% stand behind and we believe there's not really an argument against these phrases that we're talking about. Of course one could try, but we're going to stand firm and say these are things we believe in and these are things we believe for you and for the people around us. The phrase that we're going to talk about today is: We Need You Here. This is an especially important phrase for us, and I'm very honored to have Chad with us to talk about kind of what this phrase means and to unpack some of this statement. So Chad, thank you. Thank you for being with us.

CHAD MOSES: Great to be back.

LINDSAY: All the phrases have had a lot to talk about them behind them, what they mean, what they mean for our stories, what they mean for our lives, for our experience with mental health. This one strikes me, this phrase, as kind of the essential one, the, the anchor, of what we believe at To Write Love on Her Arms. And I'm curious if you could kind of start to peel back some of the layers behind that phrase.

CHAD: Yeah. I think one thing that I find to be most impactful about this phrase of We Need You Here is the we part of it. So we discussed, It's OK to Ask for help. There's no directive there. This could be said to anyone at any time. Uh, we've said, I Am Worthy Of Hope. We're inviting you to, to own that I, to say this is something true for me. We've said Your Story Is Important. This is a you-centric obviously. And I think with all of these it leaves a little bit of wiggle room for people to push back in some way. I don't think that you have that option for We Need You Here because you don't occupy my heart. You don't occupy my brain. You can't see *you* through my lens. So by putting the perspective as a speaker outside of you, you cannot negate how someone else feels about you.

CHAD: So when I think about the times that I was navigating heartache or, or depression or any number of these issues that we deal with on a daily basis, I often reflect on the fact that I was loved in ways that didn't depend on me. Uh, I was loved despite all the reasons I was giving people not to love me, that I had some agency over how I would react to pain. But one thing I can never control was who loved me and how they loved me, who cared for me and how they cared for me. And at times, yeah, that was frustrating. At times, that was heartbreaking. But man, the other times, what a grace. What a blessing. What an amazing gift that I could not, despite all my attempts, push someone away who was intimately invested in my health, intimately invested in my story and wanted to be a piece of the equation moving forward.

LINDSAY: Yeah, and I think this statement, if you are someone hearing that and say, '*well that doesn't really sound like my story.*' I think it's safe for us to say that we are beyond honored and privileged to play parts of that for, for people when we talk about To Write Love on Her Arms as a movement, as a collection of people and voices were saying, this is a community. We're

saying that this group of people will hold this true for you. We'll hold onto that, that desire to see you keep going and maybe we, we don't know you as well as maybe the people in your life or whatever the circumstances may be. I do think it's a picture of our collective voices saying we 100% absolutely, without a doubt, nothing will change this: We need you here. We don't know, maybe the specifics of what that will look like in the day to day.

LINDSAY: But what that means is that you get more chances to keep going, you get the opportunity to see tomorrow, you get the opportunity to become the mom or the or the dad or the husband or the wife or the aunt or the uncle. You know, there's so much more for people and we believe that we need you. We don't even, it's not that we just *want* you here. We *need* you, this collective voice, this To Write Love movement needs you and we need your story. So don't leave, don't go. We need you. So I think that's from a To Write Love on Her Arms perspective, people who have really made this movement, I think we can all collectively agree, we do need, we need everyone. We need every person to hear that. We need you here.

CHAD: Yeah. And I think that that sense of collectivism and that sense of community that determined the trajectory of the To Write Love on Her Arms story from day one through day 5,000 plus. That this was never about one person's triumph. This was never about one person's journey. But this was about how we emerged from a sense of isolation. This is how community came from, from a void, really. And that's so true today when I get to go on the road and introduced To Write Love on Her Arms to so many people, uh, I get to say that, you know, people say, *'oh, are you the founder?'* And I'm like, *'no. And in fact, uh, I'm here not of you know, of my own successes or my own mission, but I'm here on behalf of 18 other people that believe that we need you here.'*

CHAD: This has never been about cheering on one person through one chapter of their life. But this has always been about finding the space that we share. And the stories that we share and the lessons that we are still learning from one another. So many people that we meet online and at events, they didn't hear about To Write Love on Her Arms through a staff member or through an intern. Uh, they learned about To Write Love on Her Arms through you, the listener, through someone at your school or at your workplace or at your community of faith. Just talking honestly about this movement that's inspired you in some way.

LINDSAY: Wearing the shirts.

CHAD: Yeah, wearing the shirts, starting conversation in unpredictable ways, but this included people being in places that we, as a staff, could not be.

LINDSAY: Yeah. 100%.

CHAD: So every success this organization has had, has been because we exist. That's me and Lindsay talking. That's you listening. That's your college roommate. That's your boss or your teacher or your students. This has only ever been possible because of, of a collective sense of

us and you know, to get To Write Love of the limelight for a second, I think that that's often the, the path of mental health conversations.

LINDSAY: Yeah.

CHAD: That we've discussed it before, that sometimes talking about clinical diagnoses that instantly excludes people from conversation. But when we talk about life, when we talk about fears and dreams and things that motivate us, things we're running towards, when we talk about horizons and pitfalls, when we talk about, just aspects of life, those are things that become instantly relatable.

LINDSAY: Yeah.

CHAD: Uh, and when we talk about things being relatable, we're talking about a *we* experience.

LINDSAY: Yeah. And I'm, I'm struck by the one, I mean it's kind of the combination the *we* need, *we* need you, I think that need piece is a bit of an antidote to some of the lies that mental illness, depression, self-injury, substance use disorder, there are these lies of isolation that whatever you bring to this world is actually not enough. That's a lie. Your feeling is not valid, that's a lie. Like, whatever you could contribute, it's not needed here. And I think this statement for me is the, is the antidote to that isolation. Again, it's, it's a group saying, *'no, we need you and we need whatever gifts you were given, whatever passions, whatever things that bring you joy, whatever makes your heart filled with motivation to change the world. What you see wrong with the world.'*

LINDSAY: Like all of these things, you make the *we* better, you make the, the collective better. Um, and so to me that, that lie is, is very dangerous. The lie that you're not needed here. And in fact, you know, if you look at research, um, again, where my brain goes and where I kind of think about these things, some of the leading, um, Dr. Thomas Joiner, he's one of the leading suicidology researchers, and he talks about that people who die by suicide do so often among many factors, obviously, but one of them being that they feel like a burden. So they're saying, *'I'm not, I, I'm not needed because I'm a burden to the collective voice or to the collective people in my life. This is harder for them.'* And this is a chance for us to say, *'no, we, we need you. We need you, please don't go, please keep fighting.'*

CHAD: Yeah. And I think even beyond that, it's not, we don't need you because you have something to, to offer necessarily. We need you because you are already offering it.

LINDSAY: Yeah.

CHAD: We, we need you because your breath has nourished the trees that are currently blooming in springtime, uh, that if you were not there exchanging oxygen for CO2, that tree would be in some rights starved. We need you because you humming your favorite song could

break an awkward silence for people around you, that you sharing just even some microscopic bit of joy that you are sprinting to, to keep in view... That is something that someone else needed to see today. That the sunrise, it's expecting to see you tomorrow. That it's, it's dreaming of your waking. I think that's something beautiful. Uh, just like you like to go to the clinical side of things, I like to go to the cosmic.

LINDSAY: Yeah.

CHAD: That for every year you're alive in our solar system, three new solar masses, basically three new stars are born every year. You have already outlived constellations and I need you to be around to name those for me, you know? So it's, it's small, but it's big. And at the end of the day, there's nothing you can say to convince me away from this. You can't, you can't talk me away out of being just thrilled that, that you're on this planet with me.

LINDSAY: Yeah, no, that's, that's really powerful. And I think this phrase hopefully captures that. Hopefully that it captures when you wear a t-shirt or when you hold that phrase on your phone and you look at it or you share it, that it, that it is a reminder that we are connected. And that means that's why we need you here. We're connected. We're all a part of this bigger story. And without that, we don't know where this story's going to go. So stay. I wonder in your life, Chad, if you could share, if you've had any experiences where you felt like you needed to hear this.

CHAD: Trying to think of times where I don't need to hear this...

LINDSAY: Yeah, that's a better question.

CHAD: I don't, I don't think that I've ever made it to such a spot of self importance that, that I didn't need to be reminded that my life impacts other people. Um, I've had too many instances and months and years of my life dedicated to me trying to convince people of what they should believe to be true about me. And every single time I fall flat that, you know, people are going to assess me on their own schedule and according to their own social and interpersonal needs. And again, that sounds just so wordy, but what I really mean to say is the friends that I have in my life are friends who, who value bits of me that I haven't even fully discovered yet. Uh, these are people that, that take joy in my idiosyncrasies that I am just totally blind to. And there's times that they'll text and they'll say, *'hey, remember when you said like this silly thing or that or wore that stupid thing, or did this, you know, absurd action? Man that, that really brought me joy.'* And I'm like, wow, I was just kind of living life.

LINDSAY: Yeah.

CHAD: Man, uh, let's stop talking about me. I want to talk about seeing two complete strangers, meeting each other in a moment. I was just coming back from a music festival. I was in the Atlanta airport and if you've ever done air travel through the east coast, you probably routed through there and it is an absolute zoo of humanity. And I had enough time to grab a coffee and

a bagel and I see a gentleman out of the right side of my field division wearing a To Write Love on Her Arms hoodie. And I always get jazzed when, when I see people that I've never met wear, wear our stuff and—

LINDSAY: TWLOHA in the wild. We call it TWLOHA in the wild.

CHAD: In the wild. I love it. And, and I'm like, man, that's really cool. I take another sip of coffee, and I looked to my left and I see this young woman who's clearly not having a great day and it's written all over her posture.

CHAD: She's looking right down at her feet, not even focused on her phone; she's just trying to skate through this place without being noticed. Well, as the Atlanta airport does, it normally forces people towards the middle of an aisleway. So they start walking, they're walking in, uh, on a colliding path. And I see her look up, I see her notice his hoodie, and I see her smile, and they both keep walking. And maybe he never even saw the effect that this had on this young woman. But she stands a little bit straighter and she looks up and you see that, you see that smirk. They don't know each other. Perhaps they'll never meet again. And they never really fully met the first time. But in that moment she knew that someone on this planet, in this city and at the airport, in that terminal was on her team.

LINDSAY: Yeah.

CHAD: She felt needed. And I don't think that he fully knows how much he was needed in that moment.

[music playing before break]

LINDSAY [over music]: During Mental Health Month, we're inviting you and supporters everywhere to take this conversation into your community. The Black and White collection of t-shirts and merch is available for a limited time in the TWLOHA Online Store. You can purchase any of the four designs or purchase the collection as a whole. Every order comes with a print and info cards that you can use to start conversations and make an impact in your community. And because we love our podcast listeners, we're offering you 15% off your purchase, to be used at any time throughout the month of May. Enter May15—that's M-A-Y-1-5—at checkout. Thank you so much for your support.

[music playing leading back into interview]

LINDSAY: So it's all about finding ways to remind people that this statement is true every second, every minute, every hour in unexpected ways.

CHAD: Just by showing up. That dude was probably just going to work and

who knows if he even likes his job, but him showing up gave that young woman a smile on a tough, tough day.

LINDSAY: I think we can't overlook some of that mystery piece. You know, like there's a mystery there and some people struggle to figure out what they're needed for. But I think it goes without saying...no, it doesn't go without saying. We will say it and we will say it over and over again. We need you here. We need you for those moments. We need you part of this conversation. There's people in your life that needs you. Every one of us plays role, like different roles at different seasons. And I'm going to be a little nerdy in my analogy, but I'm a, I'm a beekeeper. And what's really amazing about honeybees, among all the many things, is that there's many roles in a hive. There's many jobs to do: taking care of young bees, guarding the hive, collecting nectar to make honey, fanning the honey, taking care of the queen.

LINDSAY: But all of those different jobs happen depending on how old the bee is. So from day one, they might do one job and as they age, and they only live about 40 days. So their whole existence takes place in this very short amount of time. But they've so many different roles in the hive, in this community, in this collection, and they're all so needed. So what if that one bee doesn't make it to that season or to that number of days, 30 days out and they never become a guard bee or they never become the, the forager? Like there are so many different ways that as her stories keep going, our roles change and what we're needed for and what we're continued to, what we can contribute, what we can give back and the relationships that grow in the communities that are formed are changed infinitely if we're not there, if we're not, if we're not still fighting to stay. Anyway, that's kind of an aside. But I just, I just imagine the needing of somebody, it may look different, but it never goes away. You know, like it will change, it shifts. There's people in our lives that come and go, relationships that weaken, some strengthen, you know, but there is still such a need for all of that to exist. That we believe that this has to be said. It has to be said again and again. You're needed here.

CHAD: Yeah.

LINDSAY: We need you.

CHAD: And, you know, I think, again, its kind of goes back to, to this idea, and we've said it in a number of different ways during a number of different campaigns, ideas like No One Else Can Play Your Part. And, uh, we've said that Tomorrow Needs You. Um, we've invited you to believe that You Belong Here, and it's certainly playing on a theme, but we could say it, you know, in another dozen or so ways, but it's not going to negate the truth. And I think that's what it comes down to the, the black and white of this. There is no gray in this statement.

LINDSAY: Yeah.

CHAD: Uh, so as often as we say that to someone, say, *'Hey, we need you, that person says, look, you don't know me. You, you can't prove that.'* You can easily flip that around and say,

'well, you don't know how much I need you.' And I've seen, yeah, I'll tell this story. Um, I, this was a number of years ago. I was, I'm really struggling with, with my recovery, uh, with in this case it was painkillers and I was in a spot where I had been in recovery for, for number of months and I had just hit rough patch after rough patch and I was ready to, I was ready to use. Uh, I had made a plan, I knew how I could get away with it and, you know, have almost no one know and pretend like, you know, it was just a momentary slip up, whatever. But I had had this plan in place to undo a lot of, a lot of progress, and I was just about to enact that plan when my phone rang.

CHAD: And on the other line was another friend who was also in recovery who had just relapsed.

LINDSAY: Yeah.

CHAD: And said, *'Chad, I'm scared I could really use you right now.'* And it was in that moment that like my world just shrank so much that, at that point, it brought everything into clarity that I felt so heartbroken for my friend and said, *'look, I am not going to put myself in a position where my friend needs me and I won't be there.'* Um, I'm not going to say I'm thankful for the heartache that my friend experienced that day, but I'm thankful for the wake up call and that had we been off by just even a matter of minutes how much differently and more heartbreaking this story would have been. My friend needed me and I really needed my friend's honesty in that moment, which kept me safe and kept me in the right frame of mind to help my friend as we navigated the next days and weeks.

LINDSAY: I mean I think that's an amazing story. I think that captures the heart of what we're trying to communicate with this. And I wonder, or I can only really imagine that story happens on many different levels, hundreds of thousands of times a day, without us knowing. And so waking up to this phrase, looking at it, really sitting with it, letting it become part of our, our internal dialogue. You know, how many more moments and stories will keep moving forward? Because we're in it together.

CHAD: And who knows how many more can happen. But I'm committed to not limiting that number in any way, shape, or form.

LINDSAY: Yeah, exactly. So again, I think we land in this place where we're saying this, hopefully very clearly: We need you here. I wonder for the person who does hear that and thinks perhaps they're not sure what that can actually look like. What would we advise them to kind of look for or think about in connection to this phrase?

CHAD: I think if you're at a point in your life where you find it hard to get behind the idea that someone else needs you, that's a great opportunity and a great reason to reach out to someone. And you can even, you can even borrow these words. Call a dear friend, call a

mentor, call a counselor, text 741741 to get connected to the Crisis Text Line. And you can ask that question: *'Am I needed?'*

CHAD: Ten times out of ten, a hundred times out of 100 million times out a million, that response is going to say, *'yes, I cannot and I will not imagine this world without you here.'* Uh, and yeah, it's OK for you not to agree with their reasons. Um, but I think you do owe it to the people around you to listen to their reasons.

LINDSAY: Yeah.

CHAD: And rest with those reasons. Sit with them, chew on them. Wake up tomorrow. And if you still have questions, toss it back at them. This deserves some, some more conversation. So I encourage you to stick around.

LINDSAY: Yeah. And I think the, I think the hard part of this conversation, we need you here and some of where it can naturally evolve when you, you don't feel needed are those thoughts of well, the world would be better off without me. You know, the hopelessness and despair that often leads to people making plans to die by suicide or reckless behavior that will also lead to dangerous situations. And I don't think we can ignore that piece and asking, begging, reminding, please reach out. Please reach out to move from those hot moments to moments where you can start to maybe see this, this phrase and this belief start to take root and to start to grow new life in you.

CHAD: So often when people bring up this line of thinking that, the world would be better without me, I instantly say, *'how can you prove that? With what data are you using it to back that up.'* And I'm instantly reminded of my friend Carlos Navarro. He he travels the world selling merchandise for probably some of your favorite bands. But a number of years ago he did this project called the Suicide Sign where he had band members pose with a sign that said, *'suicide does not end the chances of life getting worse. Suicide eliminates the possibility of it ever getting better.'* So again, we've never experienced this world without you.

CHAD: So we don't know what this place looks like without you. So stay, we need you. We, if we need you, then we can help figure out what the next step is going to be.

LINDSAY: Yeah. Exactly.

CHAD: It's not all on you, but it does revolve around you. And to the extent that, uh, I somehow already miss you without ever having met you. Uh, that I don't think my job of working in outreach for To Write Love on Her Arms will be complete without meeting you. Give me that opportunity if nothing else.

LINDSAY: I think this is, um, a fitting phrase for us to end the conversation with this. Kind of encapsulates everything we're trying to accomplish with this movement.

CHAD: I think that there's, there's beauty in the brevity and there's so much space to fill with your own life.

LINDSAY: Chad, thank you so much for joining us again to talk about, uh, our Black and White collection. We're really excited to keep these conversations moving throughout this month and the months following.

CHAD: Thank you very much.

[music playing]

LINDSAY: Thank you so much for listening to this special miniseries of the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast in honor of Mental Health Month. Thank you to Chad Moses for lending your voice and your heart to this conversation. We would really encourage you to read the full [Black and White blog](#) and check out our merch collection on twloha.com.

LINDSAY: We hope each episode is a reminder that your story is important, you matter, and you're not alone. We understand that so many of you listening might be struggling or know someone who is struggling with the issues we've been talking about. We believe that help exists. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources at our website: twloha.com. Click the FIND HELP at the top of the page. Or, if you need to talk to someone right now, you can always connect with our friends at Crisis Text Line. You simply text the word TWLOHA—that's T-W-L-O-H-A—to 741741 and you'll be connected to a trained crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

LINDSAY: If you enjoyed this episode and you want to hear more, we hope you'll subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. And, if you can do us a favor, we'd really love for you to write us a review. It will help more people find this podcast and the mission of TWLOHA. If you have any feedback or questions, please send us an email to podcast@twloha.com.

LINDSAY: A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. This episode was produced by Mark Codgen, with editorial support by Claire Biggs of Lore de Force and Becky Ebert. And music assistance provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor. I'm Lindsay Kolsch. Thank you so much for listening.

To Write Love on Her Arms is a nonprofit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. TWLOHA exists to encourage, inform, inspire, and also to invest directly into treatment and recovery. You can find more information about TWLOHA at twloha.com.