

Episode 301: "Counselor Aaron Moore: Coping With Anxiety and Isolation in a Pandemic"

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

**AARON MOORE:** For some of us, we can really kind of grow a lot in this. You know, because it's like going man like I kind of deal with discomfort by just filling my life up with busyness and noise. And now we are in a time period where that is actually really hard to do. So, for some people I know that has looked like 'okay, I'm going to watch as much Netflix as I can', 'I'm going to start that new podcast that I've always dreamed of', 'I'm going to get in the best shape of my life'. So, we try to fill it up. We try to do the same old technique just in this period. When this period might offer us, like what you described. Man, what if we want to cope differently. What if we want to take this time and go man, the hardest thing for me might actually be to slow down. And this time period kind of gives me an opportunity – if I am paying attention, to try and cope in a much different way than I do with life.

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**LINDSAY KOLSCH:** You're listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms Podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. 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.

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**CHAD MOSES:** Hey everybody, this is Chad Moses. I'm TWLOHA's director of outreach and experience. Over the next few weeks you're going to be hearing a bit more from me. Usually my job takes me across state lines, traveling across international borders to music festivals, to events, to communities where I get to introduce people to TWLOHA. Really kind of going with the message that it's okay to talk about mental health and in the hopes of connecting people to local mental health resources right from our own tent. But due to the ever-changing state of the world, like so many of you, I'm finding myself spending way more time at home than usual.

**CHAD:** Nevertheless, conversations about hard things, about hopeful things, and about the things that make us human will not be canceled. We hope you'll tune in as we release new special episodes during this time. And today, uh, we have a special guest. His name is Aaron Moore. Aaron has been a friend of TWLOHA since before there was even an organization, since before this was a movement. He's a licensed mental health counselor practicing in Orlando, Florida. And I consider him a friend. Aaron good to hear from you man. How are you doing? How's the family doing right now?

**AARON:** I consider you a good friend as well, my friend. No man, we are doing okay. We're doing all right. I mean I'm sitting here in Orlando and we have been working, you know. Many of you all know my wife Michelle as well. Like Chad said, we've been working with To Write Love on Her Arms since really, really since the beginning. And this crew has been dear friends of ours, but we've been working, we've been able to still see clients thanks to the wonders of technology. So, Michelle is a counselor as

well. So, we've been working pretty much full-time and doing that and figuring out how to teach second grade to our twin second graders who are home now every day, all day, all day.

**CHAD:** Two second graders at the same time.

**AARON:** Two second graders at the same time, man. So that's like, it's like a thing. But thankfully we've been able to kind of balance schedules and trade off, you know, who's doing video counseling sessions and balance all that. And so it's been working.

**AARON:** So we're making it, Orlando is hanging in there and we're doing all right.

**CHAD:** Right on man. Well, any other week we would have found a great time to find each other, to grab some coffee. But, my wife Miranda was just talking about, you know, thank goodness we live in age where we can hop on a shared website and have a conversation that's recorded for the masses. So, I'll just let that magic kind of wash over this entire conversation. But yeah, so I mean, it's really the elephant in the room that, what we're experiencing now is so much different than what we thought we were going to experience two weeks ago, four weeks ago, two months ago, you know. On January 1st when we brought in the new year, like we had so many hopes and dreams, not just personally, but for the organization. And, you know, a lot of that has, has changed. It feels like it's changing every night overnight. So I mean, I think obviously people aren't always wired to deal with change super gracefully. That's gonna come with different hurdles. So, I guess let's start pretty broad. How are you seeing people's mental health impacted by this pandemic?

**AARON:** Yeah. Yeah, man. I mean, that is, it is really broad. I mean, it really is a wild time, right? And I mean, there's a million things we could say. I mean, a couple of thoughts to kind of get us going here. I think, you know, most of us by this point - I mean, we're recording this, I think today's the 14<sup>th</sup>. So, we're a few weeks into this at this point, you know, and I think because we're a few weeks into it, we're a few weeks into the new cycle of it and we're also a few weeks into kind of the processing of it. And then because of that, people have been processing it, they've also been, you know, kind of sharing those thoughts. And so, I think many of us now have probably seen the mainstream media stories about, is the quarantine and coronavirus contributing to negative mental health. Is it contributing to anxiety?

**AARON:** Is it contributing to depression? And I think obviously, I mean, most of us would say, well, yes, of course. You know, I think the thing is we don't take something, that is this kind of upending to our normal life. You know, it flips kind of our normal everyday upside down in many ways. We don't walk through this and have it not create some significant disruption kinda in our life. And for some of us, if we've struggled with kind of anxiety or depression, things like that in the past, you'd go through a period like this and there's going to be a good possibility that some of those things might resurface or they might get stronger. Some of those struggles, you know, we spent a lot of time talking about this has been something that's been really heavy for the addiction community.

**AARON:** Especially the recovery community. One of the pillars of the current recovery community is actually face-to-face time with other people in recovery. And we've all just been put into a period, but we were told not to really be face-to-face with anybody, you know. So really, a way to think of it is the things in which, you know, we kind of build our days around, and for some people that might be going to AA meetings. For some of us it's just going to the office. For some of us it's just going to class. For most of us it's just hanging out with friends. Those are the things that have been kind of like the main steady, you know, pieces of our day and of our life. And those have been stripped away. Those have been the things that have actually been kind of taken from us. And I was actually on a call earlier today and a friend of mine, he said, man, the thing is it's not even that we can't really connect with people. It's that we're actually being told to keep distance, you know?

**CHAD:** I was just thinking as you were kind of going through that, just kind of what does therapy look like in the everyday days? You know, what does therapy look like in the mundane? and just realizing how much a simple act of saying good morning to someone that you expect to see daily that is therapy in and of itself. That's something that keeps you grounded. That's something that kind of wakes you up from slumber, whether that's, literally waking up and starting your day or whether that's just kind of getting out of a cycle of numbness for some people. I remember, kind of walking through my own depressive episodes. Sometimes a good morning was the thing that, you know, the hope of hearing a good morning was the thing that got me out of bed that day, I was just hoping to be noticed. So yeah, man, like it sounds so simple, but that is so profound.

**AARON:** Well, those are the things that, those little pieces are the pieces that kind of order our days, you know? And I think we're doing a pretty good job, I think in society as we process this. There are some wonderful articles or resources. You guys have done a great job of putting stuff out there. There's some wonderful stuff that just speaks to, 'Hey, this is, this is really disruptive.' You know, and especially when we're talking about emotions that surround the coronavirus like we talked about, just the fear of it. And for some of us, that fear is more present than it is for others. For any of our friends that live in New York City, that fear became very visceral and present for them much faster than it did for many of us.

**CHAD:** Right.

**AARON:** You know? I know some people personally that have coronavirus, but I saw on a call earlier today with a friend who said, I still don't know anyone who has it. It still doesn't feel real. I'm just in my house all the time, you know? And I think that's one thing that's just really confusing in some ways about all of this, because as we kind of process through it, nobody's living necessarily the same experience as somebody else.

**CHAD:** Yeah.

**AARON:** And so, one of the phrases that you've heard, kind of talked about this time is that, our friend Nico that works with us, she used the phrase the other day, we think of it as 'collective trauma,' right? That we're going through a societal, collected trauma, meaning that we're all going through something

that is extremely disruptive to the normal flow of our life. And it activates our entire self, our nervous system, our emotional self, our cognitive self. And it flips a lot of stuff upside down. And one of the things that - I mean this is a big topic and we're barely touching the surface - but, one of the things about trauma is when we walk through trauma, we naturally, or, well, not naturally one of the ways in which we find healing is through connecting with other people. And we're walking through this very strange time of collective trauma where we are actually really struggling to connect to people.

**CHAD:** So, let's lean into that for a second. So, like you said, this is unique in that the sense of isolation is virtually mandated. So, what are some of the unique challenges or dangers that you think we all kind of face collectively or maybe mean that individually as we attempt to cope with this super unique combination of anxiety and isolation? Some things that come into mind are checking out or finding ways to numb yourself, self-medicating. Maybe it's sinking into the newsfeed. I guess from your perspective, what are some of the red flags that we should be aware of? What are those challenges?

**AARON:** I actually feel like the majority of people I've talked to have actually underestimated the emotional toll that this is taking on them. Some people are not, some people are very aware, but I think for most of us, I think we're actually kind of unaware of how, and maybe just to the degree to which we are being affected here emotionally. Because you know, you go through something and whether you want to call it a trauma or not, right? You go through something that's extremely disruptive and extremely painful, right? When you go through it, you're naturally affected. I go see something that is traumatic, if I get, for lack of a better term, if I get chased by a tiger, cause everybody talks about tigers now.

**AARON:** I mean, we're in the age of—

**CHAD:** [laughs] Yeah, no, that's uh...

**AARON:** You're totally not even gonna go there. But it is very, very topical. But if I get chased by a tiger, right? My whole nervous system is going kick in and my fight or flight response is going to kick in. I'm going to get amped up. All these things are going to happen and I am not going to be under any confusion as to why I feel the way I feel. You know, nobody who's just been chased by a tiger goes, 'Oh my gosh, why is my heart beating so fast?' Nobody has just been chased by a tiger goes, 'Oh my gosh, why am I sweating? I don't understand'. My point is, visible, present threats are much clearer than what we're experiencing right now.

**AARON:** And so, one of the things that I keep finding coming up in my conversations with people is just this realization of like, man, this is so disruptive to everything about us. People are kind of saying, man, I don't know why I feel nervous all the time. Well, maybe I'm nervous all the time because I'm watching news, and I'm reading social media all day long and I'm taking in information that tells me that I'm in danger and I have no way to actually work out any of that energy or work out any of that stress or work out any of that tension. And it kind of messes with our head. Because when you look

around and you're like, I don't know why I'm tired all I did was watch Netflix all day. But as people we're not built to just watch Netflix all day.

**AARON:** And especially when we're going through something that strikes fear in us. We have to actually work that energy out. We have to talk about it with people, we have to process it. And I think for most people, we're not seeing the degree to which this stuff has kind of built up and is taking an emotional toll. And when we're not, you gave some great examples, man, when we're not aware of how we're being affected, we're much more likely to just fall into some negative coping. You know, when I don't realize that this really is striking some fear in me or I don't realize that, Hey, without going to school or without going to work, without seeing people, I kind of feel a little lost. I feel aimless, I feel ineffective. If I don't realize those things, I'm way more likely to just kind of stumble into ways to self-medicate that discomfort.

**AARON:** You know? And maybe that's with drinking, maybe that is with Netflix all day. I know some people that I've talked to, their biggest self-medicating piece has been, 'okay, you know what I'm going to do this quarantine, I'm going to work out twice a day and I'm going to come out of the quarantine, you know, 30 pounds less or 20 pounds more muscle than I was when it started'. And that can actually be an unhealthy way of coping. So, I think if we're not clear and if we're not getting in touch with emotionally what's going on in me as I'm going through all this, then I'm going to find myself just kind of grasping and kind of just accepting and stumbling into some possibly really unhealthy coping.

**CHAD:** Yeah. I mean, I think that that's so much of the term of self-medicating. The problem is that you are only allowing one voice into the conversation, right? You are doing this by yourself where a proper treatment plan is going to be conducted under a kind of the review of a professional of people trying to be an objective eye to the situation.

**CHAD:** So, you listed a bunch of ways that it can manifest, whether that's through exercise or maybe that's through, food consumption, maybe that's through media consumption, you name it. What do you recommend to people avoiding the self-medicating part of it? What are ways that we can kind of be our sibling's keepers through this?

**AARON:** Sure. Well, a couple of thoughts. One, is I do think, you keep using the word connection and community and I think in this we need to continuously seek that out. I think we have to continuously seek that out and we might have to seek it out in some ways that are not necessarily the first ones coming to mind. I mean it's totally trendy right now to do Zoom meetups and Hangouts and Zoom happy hours and all that stuff. And it's really, really, really good. Right? Because there's some connection there, you know what I mean? Thankfully man, I mean without technology we'd be missing out on a lot of what we're able to kind of lean on right now.

**AARON:** I think it is important for us to check in and go, 'okay, how connected am I feeling in that? Am I feeling kind of seen and heard and understood?' Because sometimes I think part of the problem with technology stuff is it gives us kind of this, the shallow reflection of connection without a lot of

depth. I read some stuff earlier this week just cause I was having a ton of conversations with people who were like, I don't know why I'm so tired. And as we were talking about it, they're doing like seven hours of like Zoom meetings a day. And I've heard this from therapists too, who are like, why is doing like video sessions - Like, why does it feel like it takes a different energy out of me?

**AARON:** It's weird. Like, we're in shorts and flip flops and I'm like, pretty chill, but I'm still feeling this energy and it's different. I read some interesting thoughts on it earlier this week where they're talking about that, we get a little bit of connection like through the screen, but a lot of the things that happen even in our body neurologically and chemically, the things that happen when we're in the presence of another person, and all those things that happen physiologically and intangibly. Those things don't necessarily happen through a screen. So that to say, I think we got to kind of go, man, 'Hey, this is good and it might be better than nothing.' But after that Zoom call, do I need to like, do I need to call my sister and get on the phone with my sister and have a conversation with somebody who I can tell by the sound of their voice gets me? Are there people that I need to reach out to that get me more than others?

**AARON:** So, I think we need to check in and, and draw ourselves back and go, okay man, how do I need to connect? Because we all need that at some level. And so, we need to kind of go, man, I might need that. Am I getting that? And if we've gone man, I'm not, then we might go, wow, okay. How have I been medicating that? Have I just been kind of just checking out, like that phrase you used earlier? 'Have I just been numbing myself out with food, or sex, or alcohol, or Netflix, or whatever. And what am I doing to kind of just dull that ache,' Sometimes when we kind of look at it and go, man, I've been working out more than I was, and it feels like I'm kind of either chasing something or running from something. I think it's always a helpful thing to go, man, 'The, the coping mechanisms that I'm employing, are they helping me be more present or are they helping me escape?'

**CHAD:** Yeah, I mean that's kind of the everyday struggle, right? To connect the why we're doing something and the how we're doing something, you know? Or the why and the what—you definitely want to make sure that that's a dialogue, that it's not just going one direction now.

[music playing]

**AARON:** It's hard sometimes to go, 'okay, what's the feeling underneath this?' That might be difficult for us. We can go, 'Hey, am I struggling to feel grounded and present? Am I just checking out? Am I using these things to kind of check out from what I'm feeling or when I do these things, do they actually help me be more present?' Like, if I go on a long run, am I a better husband and dad and friend and roommate when I get back? or when I get back, am I still checked out and moving onto the next thing?

**AARON:** And so, I think those are some of the questions that we can kind of ask. And honestly, the other piece is if we're kind of connecting with people and we have some good relationships with some people, especially if you are quarantining with someone, they might have a pretty good radar on if you're checked out or if you're pretty present, you know? So sometimes those connecting

conversations can be helpful because they ended up helping us go, yeah, I think I might be more lonely or be more fearful. This might be stressing me out more than I thought.

**CHAD:** Well, I think that that's actually a pretty good segue into the opposite side of the coin. We've been talking so far about what we're missing as far as interpersonal connection, but is there a different side of that coin? Are there ways that you perceive that this isolation can help people, you know, people that require solitude, people that really have been aching for some space or just the desire to slow down for a bit?

**AARON:** It has been really cool to just be kind of home cooking dinner with my wife and kids every night. I think especially, I realized those first couple of weeks, I was like, man, we're just sitting in the front yard a lot in the evening. It helped that it was like beautiful weather outside, Florida was freaking kicking ass this time of year. So, I mean that really made it easy, but I was like, man, this is really nice. We're really kind of soaking up some time and it was really cool. I think the catch is everything in it can bring some good stuff and it can also bring some difficulty. I think the more present we can be with ourselves, the more we can recognize the things that this like time period kind of can show us.

**AARON:** I mean this might be taking this question a little sideways, but it's been on my mind like one thing, this phrase that I kept seeing the past few weeks, everybody's like, 'Oh man, these are unprecedented times. These are unprecedented times. Nobody's ever been through anything like this before'. And I'm like, yes, completely. I get it. I've never been quarantined with the rest of the world before. Although, this is my favorite Orlando traffic season ever. I was like, man, Orlando is not bad. But we're in it. Right? But here's the thing, I really feel like as much as these times are unprecedented, the ways that we're coping with it are not, like what you do is what you do, like how you cope with the pain of life and the difficulty of being you is what you do.

**AARON:** Just, now, we have been put in a time period where there are no buffers. So, what we do to cope for most of us has now kind of like been put on blast. Like you know if the only tool in your tool belt before was a hammer and so you like to hammer kind of every problem—now you're hammering the shit out of everything. Does that make sense? I mean, I feel like that's a big thing.

**CHAD:** Yeah, absolutely.

**AARON:** Because, I don't know. I don't know what's going on with me. Well, for many of us, what we're doing with this is just an extreme version of what we've done with problems at difficult seasons in the past. So, a cool thing this time period can do is it kind of highlights a little bit of our stuff and it highlights a little bit of how we deal with pain and how we deal with discomfort.

**AARON:** And so, I just think it does kind of offer like you know, you're kind of asking about what are the good things that can come out of this. For some of us, we can really kind of grow a lot in this. You know, because if it's like going man, I kind of deal with discomfort by just filling my life up with busy-ness and noise and now we're in a time period where that's actually really hard to do. So, for some people I know that that has looked like, 'okay, I'm going to watch as much Netflix as I can'. 'I'm

going to start that new podcast that I've always dreamed of'. 'I'm going to get in the best shape of my life.' So we try and fill it up and we try and do the same kind of old technique just in this period when this period might offer us, like what you described, man, what if we want to cope differently? What if we want to take this time and go, man, you know what the hardest thing for me might actually be to slow down, you know? And this time period kind of gives me an opportunity if I'm paying attention to try and cope in a much different way than I typically do with life.

**CHAD:** Yeah. Yeah. Well let's continue riding that train a little bit further, those were some really incredible perspectives. As we begin this journey, if we lean into this isolation as a gift, if that's possible to kind of self-analyze a little bit to kind of keep track of our patterns and see what our norms are. Then what are some ways that we can understand, I guess, what's an appropriate response to anxiety or to change, versus potentially long-term problems that that could just be taking root or maybe they've always been there, and this is now just kind of the opportunity where there's, like you said, 'less of a buffer.' So I guess the question is, for people that are experiencing anxiety, what are some ways that we can set up some proper guardrails to make sure that the ways we're coping are healthy and that they don't turn into potentially long-term risk factors?

**CHAD:** One way we can put it, if we want to start very microscopic is, we have been told by cartoons and by talking heads to wash your hands. These are memes, we have celebrities telling us different methods to wash our hands, washing your hands and personal hygiene. Those are good things, but if we allow that to go unchecked, if we allow that anxiety to become the driver of the behavior, we could wind up with something akin to a hypochondria, right? Like, I guess what are ways that we can self-analyze and appropriate ways to make sure that we emerge from this as healthier people?

**AARON:** I mean, I'd say there's a sense where we want to check in, you know? We want to check in with ourselves. We want to check in and be able to kind of go, man, are the things that I'm doing creating more disruption in my life? And there's a big difference. Probably a better word would be, are the things that I'm doing to cope with this time period are they creating more dysfunction? And inconvenience is different than dysfunction. An example is, personally, oh my gosh, I'm so sick of being told to wash my hands. I am washing my hands, everyone, just so we're clear. I have hand sanitizer on my desk right now. But man, I mean on the way to record this, because I'm allowed to come to my office. Nobody's here.

**AARON:** I was driving like the three blocks to my office and the radio is on. And Billie Eilish was actually really telling me very, very passionately, she was very excited telling me that I had to wash my hands, and I was like, 'dang. Okay'. But I think there's those good things that we're doing, but when they start to become more of the focus than the problem itself, our coping is coping, when our coping becomes more of a focus than the thing that we're trying to cope with. That's kind of a telltale sign. I think we have to kind of ask ourselves, man, if I'm exercising to the point that I'm like literally hurting my body, is this a good thing? If I've stayed in bed and I've literally just Netflixed for 10 hours two days in a row, then at what point am I kind of going, man, I'm might be using what's a fine thing to cope with –



**AARON:** Cause everything we've listed are actually fine things to cope with, or fine things to take part in, I should say. But when we're using them to mask to dull emotions that we are carrying, then most likely they're going to become more dysfunctional down the road. So I think it's helpful for us to think in terms of what level of kind of their own disruption are the coping mechanisms causing. And, for some of us, some of you all that are listening to that go, 'man, I'm just watching Netflix, it's not costing me anything' and I'm going to go, 'man, Oh well it probably is'. Cause if we're overdoing that, there are other needs that we have that are not being met. If all my coping is being done in complete isolation, alone with no connection, even via phone or Zoom or whatever, if all of my coping is being done in that, then there's no connection needs that are being met, right? So we have to kind of go, okay, well they don't seem like the worst things in the world, but there's still a cost because there's other emotional needs that we have that are not being cared for and not being met.

**CHAD:** I kind of want to explore a little bit about inside versus outside dynamics. You know, what's happening under my roof versus what's happening under someone else's roof. So we've got a couple of questions over some of our previous Instagram Lives that we've been doing that we think could really use a good professional's point of view. So last week someone asked, 'How do I navigate feelings of despair and anxiety when I know I should be thankful because so many others have it worse than I do?' And what initially struck me about this question is that I've become familiar with this question when there hasn't been a pandemic. You know, is my depression really worth it? When someone else has it way worse, you know? So, I think this is interesting that this conversation is an old conversation just kind of with a new gloss on it, but, have at it, man.

**AARON:** Yeah, I mean, I'm right there with you. I mean, all the events and stuff we've done over the years, that is one of the most common questions I think we've heard through all of the stuff we've done with To Write Love over the years. And it's that idea of, okay, why can't I kind of be grateful? You know, when I look at everything I have, but yet I feel despair. You know, I feel sadness. I feel that weight. And I would say there's a lot of people feeling despair right now. One of the reasons why it is, a lot has been lost. You know, for many of us, the despair that you're carrying, if you're listening to this and you're carrying some of that right now, if you're feeling some of that, I would really want to validate that despair because I think that despair is probably really connected to a lot of grief, and grief is painful.

**AARON:** You know, in my opinion, grieving is like the human process for it takes us from one reality to a new reality and usually one that we didn't choose. And so grief doesn't really - obviously some things are heavier than others - but grief doesn't really care. Grief kind of shows up because something that matters to us has changed, is lost. So, I think there's a large part where the despair that many of us are feeling right now is the loss of some of the things that we love. Some of the things that are the normal pieces of our lives. Some of the things that help me feel at home in my own skin and in my home, right? So, I think we got to validate those emotions.

**AARON:** You know, often I think many of us, and I was kind of exposed to this growing up too, this idea that we really need to kind of be thankful. There's a starving child somewhere. So be thankful for what's on your plate and eat it all, right? That whole thing. And I think for some of us that was a real

effort that maybe teachers or you know, mentors or parents, whoever kind of made to teach us gratitude, but we didn't learn gratitude actually. What we learned was to be dismissive. Real gratitude doesn't dismiss what we have or what we're going through. And I think often we're going, 'Oh man, I should just feel thankful because somebody has it worse'. And that is like saying, if I fall and break my arm, I should just be thankful that I didn't break both arms. Well, my arm is still broken.

**CHAD:** Yeah.

**AARON:** So yeah, of course I'm thankful that I didn't break both arms, but damn, this arm really hurts and that's really relevant and that's a big deal. I think we have to find the freedom to validate. Yeah, this junk is really hard. The junk is really hard. And I say that as a 40-year-old white guy, who I'm aware, I have a lot of privilege in this. I have a lot of privilege in this, and I'm going to soapbox for 10 seconds, so just let me do it. There's the thing where the whole phrase is one of the articles that's making its way around now. It's just calls this time "the great pause," you know, and I'm like, dang it dude.

**AARON:** Like I know a lot of people that this is not a pause. They are working their butts off right now. And if they're not working, it is super stressful because they're not working. So, don't buy into that because you got some privilege going your way, because you've got some good things happening, that does not save you from grief, that does not save you from despair. That just might mean there might be a little bit more in a bank account, whatever. But we can be thankful and grieving and in despair at the exact same time. Despair does not mean we're not thankful, it does not mean we're not showing gratitude. We can show gratitude and have a ton of thankfulness for the things that we have and the things we've been given, and still give ourselves the freedom and the self-compassion to honor the pain that we're in. They don't go against each other.

**CHAD:** Dude, I love that so much. Just kind of taking the time to acknowledge like feelings aren't good or bad, right?

**AARON:** Dude, totally.

**CHAD:** The feeling is what it is, and it's worth acknowledging what it is, how severe it is, and when it's happening. Otherwise, like you said, it turns into this being dismissive of it. No one likes to be ignored. And I'd say that probably our own emotions are the same way. No one, no emotion deserves to be ignored.

**AARON:** And I think like you've got a great point, man, and just the language that you're using of compassion, right? That there's a sense where, I think one of the things that's coming out of this time for many of us is a lot of like hyper judgmentalism on ourselves. And for many of us, like that's kind of a thing that may be something that you just tend to struggle with or tend to do, to be hard on yourself or kind of judgmental of yourself. And so, in this time, I think that kind of gets put on blast a little bit. We do it even more. It's like, man, I shouldn't be feeling this. I shouldn't be doing this. I should be, you know, whatever, whatever. And that kinda judgment about a feeling, that kind of judgment about an

emotion that we experience is the opposite of helpful. And it is also, it's the opposite of compassionate. We can choose how we respond to emotions when they come up. You know, I can't make grief not hurt, but I can choose to share that grief with people around me. I can choose to honor it. I can choose to respect it. I can choose to give myself the freedom to feel and then choose to deal with that in healthy ways. So we have some say in that, but when we're meeting these feelings and things we're going through with that amount of judgment and self-critique, it really is just really hurtful to ourselves. And it doesn't get us to any kind of a healthier place to be able to find healthy ways to cope. It ends up us kind of shaming ourselves.

**CHAD:** You mentioned earlier that grief is a response to something that we didn't choose, and I'd say for depression and anxiety that kind of works on similar loops. You can't always put a finger on where that anxiety or the depression came from, these are our sensations that you did not choose. What are some things that we can choose? What are some practical tools or things that we can do right now? If I'm listening to this podcast and I'm feeling overwhelmed or I'm feeling over grieved or where I'm feeling overanxious, what are some practical things we can do to walk through those sensations and feelings?

**AARON:** Well we said earlier, when we think in terms of connection and community, I think finding some people that can hear what we're experiencing, whether that's friends, or its family, whether that is an online recovery meeting, or whatever. Finding some people that want to hear what our experience is at this time, right? Regardless of the medium that you find them in. If you've got to find them on fricking Xbox, do it. Find some people that you can be curious about their experience and they can be curious about yours. Because we need to feel seen and heard in this, even if it's not as seen and as heard as we would really long for, we need something.

**AARON:** So I think, that that's a big piece because, you know, that kind of piece of community especially when we think in terms of trauma and collective trauma, we heal in community. Because community helps me actually identify my sense of self, helps me actually, it reflects back to me, my experience so that I can understand it better and I can understand the place in the story and the narrative that I'm living. And so, I think we offer that we need to offer that to some others, and we can actually ask them to offer that to us. Beyond that I go into like a more personal place. I do think asking questions of like, how are you physically taking care of yourself while you walk through this? That's important. That is really important.

**AARON:** And right now there are some people who are going to be listening to this who are just like, 'Oh dude, kicking ass at that. Taking care of myself really well. Worked out three hours today' and I'm like, okay, cool. I get it. And Chad, I know you have been running probably more than you typically run. You don't know this yet, but I'm a runner now. For some of us, if I've struggled with using exercise as an unhealthy coping mechanism, some of us might be overdoing it right now, if you struggle with an eating disorder that may be showing up.

**AARON:** If you struggle with body image and food restriction stuff that maybe show it up, you know? So, when we think about how am I caring for myself? Well, we need to go, okay, is this helping me?

Could I be overdoing it? Could I be underdoing it? What does that look like for me? What was my tendency before all this started happening and what am I doing right now? You know? I think for some of us, we've channeled this energy into, 'Okay, I'm going to walk out of the quarantine, you know, way more fit', and that, so that can be good, but we need to go, man, am I loving myself and the body that I'm in, or am I punishing it? Am I trying to punish discomfort out of myself? Am I trying to almost kind of squash that anxiety as hard as I can?

**AARON:** Or am I trying to love my body well? And so I'm a big fan of, I'm a big fan of breathwork. If you've never gotten into breath work, now is a wonderful time to get into breathwork. If you've never gotten into mindfulness or meditation now is a phenomenal time to get into mindfulness and meditation, and if you've never gotten into yoga, please let me invite you. Now is the time to get into yoga. We, in the past three weeks, we have been ushered into the golden age of online content. I mean the availability of even just straight up free—all of my friends who are like yoga instructors, they're like 'don't say free'—but their availability of wonderful resources online is just, Oh man. There's so much stuff. So, my encouragement is, you think through connection wise with people, but you think through connection wise in myself, how do I love my physical body?

**AARON:** How do I learn some breathwork skills? How do I learn some mindfulness and some meditation skills. I mean you guys have some great resources connected with the website. How do I connect with possibly some yoga, some things that are going to care for my body well? Both those threads, those are going to be really helpful things that help keep us grounded and centered. Cause what anxiety and fear and trauma do, is they make it very difficult to stay grounded and centered in the present, in reality, right? Because I go, man, but what's going to happen in the future? But I should've, I should've sold this stocks in January. What am I going to do in November? If I still don't have a job, what are we going to do? And then we start doing all that like 'what if' scenario stuff, which is totally anxiety at work like in our body and our mind.

**AARON:** So, the more we can do some things that help my body feel safe, secure, stable, that's going to be huge. And through that door, when we can begin to do that, that is really going to kind of open the door to helping us connect with how we're feeling emotionally. So we get to kind of address like our social self, we get to address like my physical self and that's going to help me then go way deeper into understanding my emotional self.

**CHAD:** Yeah. And I think that may be, at least in my mind on this 14th of April, 2020, kind of the silver lining to this is that the lessons that we've learned through this are going to be lessons worth sharing as well. And, if you are coming from a social circle or maybe even a family unit that isn't a super open about talking about how you're doing, if they're not really open to real talk, odds are they still do need people to show up for them. They still need an outlet. They just don't know how to ask for it.

**CHAD:** So I think this is a great time to start fostering some and cultivating some of some habits that can, really allow us to be good role models for our coworkers, for our schoolmates and classmates, for our family. This is something else that Aaron, you and I have seen on the road completely independent

from the pandemic. But people are ready to talk about this stuff. They're just normally not ready to be the first person to say the first word.

**AARON:** Yeah

**CHAD:** So I'd say, man, thank you so much for helping us, kind of really boldly come to terms with some of what we're feeling right now. If it's not in this moment, then it was probably sometime this week or this month, and we got a lot of time in front of us that we can continue to practice better self-care. Man, I love you and I miss you and I can't wait to, to high five, or hug or grab some coffee hopefully in the near future.

**AARON:** Yeah, man.

**CHAD:** Is there anything that you'd like to add?

**AARON:** Well man, I love what you said. You know, in terms of that we can kind of model that for people. What I would add to that is like, I think some of the most powerful stuff is, some of y'all may hear that and go, okay, I got to like be really healthy and help these people. And I'm like, no. Like what I love about what you're saying, Chad, is like, we kind of just get to go, 'Hey, I'm gonna love myself really well and I'm going to invite you to love me well,' by maybe being vulnerable with people that can receive it. So many of us have people in our lives that, you know, you may have people that are not going to be able to care for you in that. And so we gotta do the work of finding people that can, but being able to do the work of going, man, I can be vulnerable, and in me being vulnerable about how this is affecting me, that's going to encourage and free up others to be vulnerable. We are so impacted by authenticity. And so when we can offer that authenticity to people around us, we free other people up to be where they're at and the more free that we are to be honest about what we're feeling, that is going to set us on a path to finding wonderful, healthy ways to cope. That in and of itself is, is going to be healing, you know? So those are huge steps, man. So, I love what you're saying there. It's really good stuff.

**CHAD:** Well man, thank you so much. And now we clearly haven't solved everything in 45 minutes. but I'm sure we'll...

**AARON:** We were close. [laughs]

**CHAD:** We came close. [laughs] But Aaron, thank you again much for finding the time to chat with us. For those of you listening, definitely check out our website at [TWLOHA.com/selfcare](https://www.twloha.com/selfcare). We have a number of resources that speak specifically to this day and age that we're walking through. So, if you have any questions, send us an email. We'd love to connect with you online through email or through our next Instagram live event.

**AARON:** Yeah, yeah. Which, the Instagram lives have been great. So, if you haven't checked out some of those, jump on those. And, you know, I would say even to echo something I heard Jamie say earlier

today, try to remind yourself, he said, 'Hey, we gotta remind ourselves this too shall pass.' This period of time, we will transition out of it. Things may not go back to exactly how they were, but you can make it through this. You totally can make it through this. So, find some people that could care for you, find some people that you can care for and keep your head up.

[music playing]

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