

## Episode BW02: “We Need Your Presence, Not Your Perfection” - A Conversation With Tianna Soto

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

**TIANNA SOTO:** And that's great. But it's also nice to remember you are not your resume. If you were to take away your resume, your title, your name tag, if you were to stop going to work, like honestly a lot of us are experiencing right now at this time, if you're just to sit at home and be with yourself, who are you? For me I think it's helpful to ask those questions to ourselves and to others when we feel like we might be far away from ourselves because things like accolades and professional roles and titles can make us feel really safe and give us structure, right? It's a way of introducing ourselves at the dinner party or writing in our Instagram bio or whatever it is. Like, “Oh, this is who I am. This is what I do.” But I think it is important to invite those deeper questions of, “Well, who am I underneath all of these layers? And if everything were to be stripped away, who would I be?”

[music playing, INTRO]

**CHAD MOSES:** Hey everybody! It's Chad Moses, TWLOHA's Director of Outreach. Last week we launched a new miniseries on the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast in honor of Mental Health Month. The miniseries follows along with our Black and White Campaign which centers on three statements we believe are non-negotiable. We're hoping these statements will act as the starting place for conversations, awareness, and storytelling. And each week we'll also be sharing two new stories on our blog that explore specific mental health challenges.

If you haven't already listened to the first episode in the Black and White Miniseries, we definitely suggest you do that as a way to introduce yourself to the three statements and the campaign as a whole.

But, if you're hoping to dive into this episode because of this particular statement, then we welcome you. We're glad you're here. Today our conversation will be inspired and guided by the words: “We need your presence, not your perfection.”

As we were working with this statement we knew there would be a lot of layers to explore and dialogue to unpack. This statement holds the weight of some pretty big themes that we all struggle with—like the contrast between being allowed to exist just as you are and balancing the societal norm of aiming for perfection. We want to address the idea that life and we ourselves are oftentimes expected to look a certain way and how that erodes away at our sense of belonging and value.

So to talk a bit about these themes we've invited Tianna Soto, a human our team adores and a former TWLOHA intern, who worked with us while she was between her undergraduate and graduate studies. She is currently a writer and a wellness educator based in New York City. She holds an MA in Clinical & Counseling Psychology from Columbia University, and is a graduate of the Spirituality Mind Body Institute.

As a certified yoga and mindfulness instructor, Tianna works with diverse individuals to help cultivate a deeper sense of well-being. We'll get to talk today about those practices, something known as duck syndrome, and why perfection simply does not exist.

We're really excited to share this conversation with all of you. And I hope it isn't a spoiler alert but we invited Tianna to help lead us and our listeners in a mindfulness exercise toward the end of the episode, so you may want to make sure you're in a place where you can get comfortable and safely enjoy the listening experience, whether that's pulling over if you're listening in your car, or finding a quiet space in your home. It's a real treat and something you can return to as often as you like. All right let's get started.

[music playing]

**CHAD:** Tianna! How are you doing?

**TIANNA:** Hello! I'm great. How are you?

**CHAD:** Doing great. So good to hear your voice again, so good to connect with you. Where's home right now?

**TIANNA:** Yeah, it's great to connect with you, too. Home is New York City at the moment, but I'm calling in from North Carolina. I'm visiting some family here since the city's a little hectic right now with the times. But hope to be back soon when everything opens up again in the future.

**CHAD:** Awesome. Like I mentioned earlier, Tiana, you helped out several years back as part of our internship program. What's life been looking like?

**TIANNA:** I can't believe it's been four years. I loved my experience there a couple years ago and since then I made the leap and went to graduate school to do clinical psychology. I studied a mix of psychology, mental health, and also holistic wellness. A little bit of yoga, meditation, mindfulness and studying and practicing how we can bring all those worlds together to really help people feel better and happier and take care of their wellbeing. I've been in New York for the past couple of years, just learning, taking it all in, trying to teach as well and connecting with fascinating people. It's been such an interesting learning journey, and I love that a lot of my inspiration for that came from my time at the internship. It's been kind of cool to see how things evolved.

**CHAD:** Man, that's so cool. We love those stories of, you know, stories still going, of finding different pieces of your life, of your passions and really diving into it. I don't know if I ever had a chance to tell you congratulations on finishing that Master's, for really kind of digging in into some really beautiful spaces, kind of combining worlds. I feel like so often people feel stuck by degrees or by career paths or by passions, so it's really encouraging to see how you can blend them all together and really speak to people in some beautiful, unique ways.

**TIANNA:** Thank you so much. It's definitely easy to feel stuck with degrees. I totally hear that. Especially in psychology, I feel like there are so many great ways to help people and often, figuring out how to do that is tricky. So I'm very blessed that I was able to find a program that

allowed me to study all these creative, wonderful things. I often joke that it's like going to Hogwarts and taking all these magic classes. It was certainly a privilege, so very, very lucky.

**CHAD:** Well, while we're there, what house are you in?

**TIANNA:** Oh, man. According to the Pottermore quiz, I am in Gryffindor, which makes me very happy. What about you?

**CHAD:** I'm Hufflepuff to the bone for sure. Why don't we go ahead and transition into the conversation at hand, which is our Black and White campaign for Mental Health Awareness Month. So we're talking about, "We need your presence, not your perfection." For us, this statement that we're about to dive into is one that really states quite plainly that you exist, and perhaps your presence, how you exist right now, is better than you trying to reach for the unattainable, really. Better than trying to reach for an unachievable version of yourself. How have you seen this play out, whether in your own life or people that you've worked with? This disparity between just being and being better.

**TIANNA:** Yeah. Well, first of all, I love this statement and this whole idea of being perfect exactly as you are rather than aiming for perfection. Or at least that's how I kind of reflected on it. I think so often we try to strive for, you know—whether it's perfection or reaching these achievements, successes, accolades—we want to put up this wonderful face and front that we have it all together, but really just showing up exactly as we are, is enough and we're already whole.

I really saw this play out on a personal level when I was in college. I went to a really big undergraduate university in North Carolina. Absolutely loved it. I was doing a million extracurriculars, like multiple degrees, and was super honored to have all these fellowships and scholarships and accolades. Being the first in my family to really go to college and complete college, I felt this subconscious pressure to do it the right way. I really wanted to take advantage of all the gifts I was being given in this space, which I was so aware that other people didn't have, and that my family before me didn't have. I think for a long time for me it was less about being perfect and more just like taking in all the experiences and making sure that nothing slipped through the cracks.

And through that, I think the perfectionism came in a lot. I found myself pulling all nighters in the library all the time. I was watching the sun come up and the birds were chirping and totally exhausted, totally burned out. Just trying to stay afloat to be honest. And even though I looked super happy like I was achieving a lot on the outside, my mental, emotional, physical health was really crumbling. I found myself in this space where I was almost living double lives. Like on the outside things were great and even friends and family were like, "Oh, you're having the perfect college experience. You know, you're doing it all." But on the inside I really felt empty, like something was off, something was missing. And I realized I just wasn't tuning into my own mental health and emotional health.

This kind of played out for me during my senior year. I found myself in a pretty rough spot where I was crying a lot, really feeling like I was drowning. It physically felt like the walls were caving in on my life. I was so close to graduating and was really doing a great job on the outside, but didn't feel so good on the inside. And so one night I rolled out a yoga mat in my room. I hadn't

really practiced yoga before, so I'm not sure why I felt like this was the time. But I pulled out a video on YouTube and started this 30 day yoga journey with YouTube videos. I like to think that that's where my self care journey began. I started noticing a shift in my life and just carving out those few minutes every day to be present made me realize how far I had actually been for so long from my mental health.

**CHAD:** Yeah, I think so often when we're talking about this word perfection, we kind of get blinded. It's only occurring to me for the first time now that it's worth asking, "Perfect in relation to what?" or, "Perfect for whom?" I think we all have our different standards of beauty. We all have our different standards of what is good. Let's take music for example. You know, I could play for you a song that I consider perfect and maybe it sounds just like noise to you or to anyone else. So I think acknowledging this phrase and digging a bit deeper into it, I think we need to really examine it with a healthy sense of self-compassion, and realize who we are performing for. Right? Who are we trying to attain perfection for?

**TIANNA:** Absolutely. I love that you mentioned the music reference as well because I'm a singer and a musician and that idea has come up so many times in my performing arts life. It's like, "Yeah, we're performing, but at the end of the day like we're perfect as we are. And that idea of who are we performing for?" Oh, I love that you said that.

It's like, what even is perfection? Because, who's deciding that, and by what standard are we defining that? It's so interesting to think about that because we do place so much pressure on ourselves. I mean, I think in school it can be particularly hard because maybe you're measuring your grades compared to the person next to you, or how many scholarships you got compared to someone else. But at the end of the day, when all that is stripped away, it's just you and it's just a human experience that we're all having together. I think it's really healthy to remember that, like you said, perfection in comparison to what?

**CHAD:** So often like we're holding ourselves to projected standards. We really lose a sense of focus. When I think of the word focus, I remember going to optometrists exams and they always tell you to focus on the middle points of light. Forget about what's on the periphery, but focus on what is most central and kind of use that as a baseline. So let's talk about centrality. Let's talk about center. As someone that has worked in the field of yoga and mindfulness and also with clinical psychology, what does the word center bring up to you?

**TIANNA:** That's a great question. I don't think I've ever been asked before. It's a really good one because, a lot of times, even when you're watching TV, and there's your stereotypical yoga teacher, they're like, "Find your center." And people are like, "What is that?" I think the center, or finding a sense of what your center is, can really be connected to the body and present moment awareness. For me, center is less about finding a perfect balance in your life because, to be honest, I don't know that that ever exists for anybody. But I think for me, center is tuning into the body, noticing where you are in the present moment, whether it's the physical sensations like, "Is my jaw clenched? Am I furrowing my eyebrows? Does my stomach feel tight? What's going on in this moment, and how can I release to find myself in a place where I'm just fully here in the present moment with myself?" I know it's hard to describe. It's a little mysterious, this idea of center, but for me, I think that's what it is. It's coming home to the body and learning to listen and tune in so that, when life gets chaotic and hectic, your focus remains on making sure that you're okay before trying to appease everybody else's standards.

**CHAD:** Right on. So let's kind of dig into that sensation you talked about kind of being present, checking in with your body. What are some challenges, frequent challenges, that someone might face when they're beginning a meditation or mindfulness or yoga practice and finding that center? What hurdles do you often see?

**TIANNA:** For sure it can be really, really intimidating to start this work. I mean even in little ways. I think I totally hear what people out there say about, "Well, I don't, you know, how do I tap into my body? That seems really scary. That seems really intimidating." I think one thing that I've seen a lot of is people are afraid to get quiet. Often, especially in where I live in New York city, we don't often get quiet. We don't often take the moment in our day to carve out the time, sit with ourselves, notice our thoughts, feelings, emotions, you know, that's really scary for people. There are easier ways to distract ourselves from those very important things. And so that's a big hurdle is just getting started and figuring out how to give yourself that time.

I think another thing I've seen a lot of is, we hold so much in our physical body. A lot of people talk about how we hold grief in our body. We hold grief in our hips. Sometimes we hold it in our jaw. Maybe we get headaches. These are very physical symptoms of what we're going through in life. When we take the time to tune into our body, a lot of those things can come up, whether you're in a yoga class or you're sitting down to meditate, and that's really scary. I've worked in substance use treatment as well in the past, and that's something that we would see a lot of in group therapy when we would start the session with the meditation. It was really hard for a lot of us to sit there and be present. There's tears and there's emotions. Even in some of the yoga groups that I was a part of, you know. Moving the body, it's a very emotional experience. So I definitely see a lot of hurdles with not only just getting started, but also taking the time to open up a lot of really hard stuff that's being held in the body and then having that next moment of like, "Okay, what do I do with this?"

**CHAD:** I remember anecdotally going on some mindfulness retreats and yoga was a piece of it, and I really didn't get the most out of it. I was so preoccupied with, "Man, am I hitting this stance correctly? Am I doing yoga right?" I'm afraid I'm going to do it wrong or I'm just not good at it. And kind of on the other side of my heart and my head, I hear a reminder from a mentor of mine who encourages me, with my personality type, just to regularly consent to stillness. Like it's ok to not be doing everything. It's okay to not be busy. Maybe like that's a yoga practice in and of itself, just allowing my body to be intentionally at rest.

**TIANNA:** Oh, yeah. It's really hard.

**CHAD:** To kind of return to this conversation of perfection and who we are performing for, we get this idea that life should be easier than we allow people to believe. Or rather, "I have a vision of life that I would love to put forward to you." You've written a bit about duck syndrome lately. Do you mind unpacking what that is, what that looks like, and ways that we can be aware of duck syndrome in our own lives?

**TIANNA:** So, I love this topic because I think it affects so many people. Essentially, years ago, Duke university took a survey of its student body, and I actually think they included staff members as well. What they found in this study was that so many students reported feeling the pressure to succeed all the time and to be effortlessly perfect. That quote specifically would

come up among a lot of the students. They would find that students were saying, “I feel like I need to have this perfect exterior and make it look like I'm not putting in any effort at all, but I am perfect on the outside,” which speaks volumes to the expectations we place on ourselves and each other in this country, in this world.

But essentially the idea of duck syndrome is if you imagine a duck gliding on the surface of a pond, it looks pretty serene, but underneath it is paddling like hell to stay afloat. If it stops paddling, it might not be afloat. So it's kind of a cute image, but I think it really speaks to what a lot of us go through, right? We want to have this perfect exterior and make it look like we're cool, we're cool. But on the inside we're really panicking and we might be totally crumbling, but we don't want people to see that.

So when Duke university released this study, it sort of sparked a wave of conversation around the country, and the term duck syndrome was coined by Stanford University because they really felt like that spoke to what their students were experiencing on campus. The University of Pennsylvania calls it “Penn face,” which is this idea that, you know, we all put on the face, that calm exterior look of seeming super happy and successful. We're busy, we've got places to be, but really we're suffering on the inside, our mental health is really taking a hit here.

I love returning to this idea of duck syndrome because it reminds us that we don't have to have it all perfect and figured out on the outside, and yet we feel that all the time. I think it's relevant to a lot of students and just humans because we're trying to exist in this world that places so much on us. But we also want to hide what we're going through, and that ultimately is really harmful for us.

**CHAD:** Yeah. It's at once both interesting and tragic that we feel the pressure to show this grace, this effortlessness, when at the same time, so many of us would prefer nothing more than to know that our friends, that our loved ones, that are family, are struggling and we would be honored if they were to ask for help. But for some reason we don't offer ourselves that same sense of compassion. We are, in a way, kind of robbing our friends and family from playing super formative roles in our life because we feel this pressure to hold it all together. I'm kind of reminded, you were talking about working with groups that are dealing with substance abuse disorder and addiction, and a phrase that comes to mind is familiar to our friends in AA and NA, but they just offer a gentle reminder of, “Just keep coming back. You don't need to have it all put together right now, but keep coming back.” I'm wondering in your more clinical psychological work, how have you seen that play out? How has practicing compassion with other people really afforded you the opportunity to be more self-compassionate?

**TIANNA:** I think when we're able to be compassionate toward others, it becomes easier. Well, in some ways it's harder to turn it back on ourselves because it's ourselves, right? We never want to give ourselves that same grace for some reason. But I do think the more you practice compassion toward other people and fill your life with that feeling of noticing what other people are going through and showing up and doing—often what they're doing is so hard—just noticing that, extending that gratitude, that gentle compassion to them and noticing what that feels like in your body—it's a really wonderful feeling, if you take the time to step into it. The moment of thinking about what it might feel like, what it might be like to extend that to yourself. I find that helps me in my work to remember to extend it back to myself. I know that was kind of a roundabout way of saying that, but self-compassion and compassion toward others is like this

beautiful circle. If you can do it one way, it becomes easier to extend the compassion to the other person in another way.

It's challenging at first, for sure. Cause you're like, "Wait, me? I deserve that, too?" But absolutely, you do. When you practice giving that love and compassion to other people, it's almost so much easier to do it for others than it is for ourselves. I always say in mindfulness work, or when I'm teaching a mindfulness class or something, "Are you speaking to yourself the same way that you would speak to your best friend? And if not, how can you shift a little bit to extend that same grace to yourself, and what can you learn from this?" You know, whether it's, "Why am I talking to myself this way, or is there another way I can be looking at this that I can treat myself?"

**CHAD:** Yeah. Even in that, you just framed that in the form of questions and questions are where we get to learn more about stories, right? Whether it's a fairy tale or a novel or a musical, they're pretty boring when the audience has all the information on page number one, right? You're hoping to lead people on a journey of exploration, and maybe even self-reflection and self-exploration as well. To kind of bring it all back around to the self, I think that there's a lot of work that we need to do within society and within our daily gazes in the mirror to accept that every part of us is valid, that every part of us is worth knowing. You're not going to be penalized just because you're experiencing life differently than someone else, right?

**TIANNA:** Absolutely. That's such a beautiful way of putting that. You're not going to be penalized just because you're experiencing life differently. Because we are all going through our unique journey and it's important to recognize that.

[music playing, AD BREAK]

**LINDSAY:** Hey friends, it's Lindsay Kolsch. Just popping in to let you all know that we're super grateful you're here listening to the Black and White Miniseries.

We believe that conversations about mental health are more important than ever as we journey through the uncertain time of COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges we're all experiencing are unlike anything we've had to face before.

That's why we believe talking honestly about mental health and how it has impacted you or your loved ones has even greater significance.

This month we want to give you more opportunities to participate in Mental Health Month and carry these conversations into your home and community.

Right now, we're giving our podcast family 20% off the Black and White collection available in the TWLOHA Online Store. Visit [store.twloha.com](http://store.twloha.com), and just use the code **PODCAST2020** that's **PODCAST 2020** at checkout. Your purchase is also an amazing way to support this mission of hope and help.

Thank you for believing in this work.

[music playing]

**CHAD:** I'm curious, given your background, what role does our past or maybe even do our future aspirations play in forming our sense of identity? And is that even necessarily a healthy way to form that identity?

**TIANNA:** I think we often associate our identity with what we do. Like when you're at your standard dinner party or you run into someone and they say, "What do you do?" We're immediately like, "Oh, you know, I work in corporate," or "I'm a music director," or whatever you do, but it's not who you are. It's not your identity. Although those things can be so important for our identity, they aren't even close to describing the brilliant existence that we are as human beings. So I definitely think there's a difference between what we do and who we are, how we're spending our time and what our human essence is. A lot of times I work with folks who have trouble separating those two, especially when they are super high achievers and love deeply what they do and take pride in their identity as a professional or as an entrepreneur, whatever that is. And that's great. But it's also nice to remember you are not your resume. If you were to take away your resume, your title, your name tag, if you were to stop going to work, like honestly a lot of us are experiencing right now at this time, if you're just to sit at home and be with yourself, who are you? For me I think it's helpful to ask those questions to ourselves and to others when we feel like we might be far away from ourselves because things like accolades and professional roles and titles can make us feel really safe and give us structure, right? It's a way of introducing ourselves at the dinner party or writing in our Instagram bio or whatever it is. Like, "Oh, this is who I am. This is what I do." But I think it is important to invite those deeper questions of, "Well, who am I underneath all of these layers? And if everything were to be stripped away, who would I be?"

**CHAD:** Thinking back... To Write Love, we just turned 14 and I've had the pleasure of being with the organization for 12 of those 14 years. I've been able to see and hear a lot. I think one of my favorite things, one of my favorite phrases that I remember Jamie introducing really, really early on is the suggestion that you are loved in ways that don't depend on your performance. And that's a phrase that again has just been kind of echoing in my life and in my head for over a decade now. I feel like I speak for our entire audience here that we have a lot of pride in the times that we do well. That means that we often hide the times that we under succeed. I think for many of us, we can easily go beyond shaming ourselves for not being perfect, and wade into some more dangerous territory of punishing ourselves for doing something "wrong." I'm wondering, what do you reckon are some good guardrails to make sure that we are being kinder to ourselves, that we don't get stuck in comparison mode, whether it's to someone else in our orbit or even to what we believe we should be able to obtain?

**TIANNA:** I think in terms of guardrails, something that's been helpful for me and people I work with is noticing what your relationship is to social media. I think because we have the access to see what everyone's doing at all times, it can automatically make us feel like we're behind just by opening the app. This might not be true for everyone, but I do think it's true for many in this digital age where everything is instant and we can see what's going on, whether someone's on a cool vacation or they just got into grad school. It's constant. I think if you want to really practice not worrying about what other people are doing, it can be helpful to set some limits around social media. Even in your own life, creating boundaries with people who might make you feel insecure or less than because often they don't mean to, but it can totally affect the way that we



speak to ourselves. I think sometimes creating those boundaries can be really healthy and can help us be kinder.

Another thing that I love to recommend to folks is coming up with a mantra or an affirmation for yourself. What's important here is not that the affirmation is overwhelmingly positive, because if you come up with something to say to yourself that's like, "I'm having a great day. Everything's fine," we know that that's not actually helpful. But to come up with something that's sort of your anchor, that's going to root you in the present moment that you can sort of pull out as a superpower when you are feeling really low or when you want to, like you mentioned, punish yourself for doing something that you feel wasn't good enough for someone or for yourself. I'd say coming up with an affirmation or statement, a declaration. A lot of what To Write Love is doing now. Post on your mirror, write it in your journal, have it a place where you can easily access it to root you in the present moment. It can be something as simple as "I'm doing the best I can, and that is where I'm at right now," right? Or it could be, "I am loved exactly as I am." Anything that helps you feel secure in that moment, anything that's just going to be a reminder for you. I think those written things can really help change our language and eventually can help increase positive ways to speak to ourselves. Because so often we fall into that spiral of, "Oh, I'm a failure. I didn't do this right. This is all a mess. It was all for nothing." But it might just take a moment of recentering and breathing, connecting to the breath and repeating a mantra that feels right to you to remember that it's okay, have a little grace on yourself.

**CHAD:** Yeah. It's such a radical idea that we get to build a new foundation. Through these practices of being present, of repeating these mantras, we get to establish some firm grounds to return to. We've been fortunate to stay in touch as a team, as an organization and we've been thrilled to be learning alongside you. Certainly we as an organization and me as a person have so much more to learn. I'm hoping that you can teach me and perhaps maybe teach our team and our listenership maybe just a little bit about what being mindful can look like. Would you be comfortable leading us on a little mindfulness journey?

**TIANNA:** Yeah, absolutely. I can lead us in a little mindful exercise. Just to answer your question about what mindfulness can look like, I want to give some validation to folks listening that mindfulness can look like a lot of different things. Especially if you may have heard that mindfulness and meditation are very similar to each other, and they're actually different. But just know that meditation, like yoga, like any practice in the world, it can look different ways and it's all about finding what works for you.

[music playing]

I figured I could lead us in a little brief body scan meditation. You may have done this before, perhaps in a yoga class, maybe you were lying down. But this is one of my favorite mindfulness practices because it really allows us to notice what's going on in the present moment and actually bring awareness to the physical body, which opens up space for us to notice so many more things in addition to what's going on physically.

Wherever you're listening to this, whether you're sitting at your desk or maybe you're laying down, find yourself in a comfortable position that you can stay for a few moments. If you're

sitting, I invite you to just place the feet flat on the ground. Find a comfortable position. It doesn't have to be super rigid. Allow your hands to fall gently in your lap. If you could use some energy to receive today, if you're really open to learning and creating space, I invite you to place your palms facing up. If you need a little bit of grounding and centering today, feel free to place your palms facing down on your lap. If you get somewhere and realize that's not where you want to be, feel free to change at any time.

Finding yourself in a comfortable position, I invite you to also close your eyes if that's comfortable. If not, you can just bring them to a soft gaze. Maybe focusing on something a little bit in front of you. Notice what it feels like to arrive in the present moment. Just bringing awareness to the body, feeling the weight of your body on your chair, on the floor, wherever you are. Noticing the breath. Is it shallow? Are you feeling the belly rise and fall? See if you can bring a sense of ease to the breath without trying to hold or control. With every inhale, feel the oxygen just enlivening the body, bringing a sense of being awake. As you exhale, imagine that you're melting deeply into your chair, your seat, wherever you are. This feeling of rising and falling, expanding and melting where you are.

We'll begin this body scan with noticing the feet, bringing awareness to how your feet are settled on the floor, the weight, the pressure. Maybe they feel warm or tingly. Imagining that you're traveling up through the legs, feeling any pressure against the chair. Imagine that they're growing lighter, just letting gravity do the work. Imagine you're melting down into the floor, traveling up through the hips, the pelvis, relaxing the stomach, if you feel like it's clenching. Noticing what it's like to have the breath fill the belly and just having it rise and fall. If your mind starts to wander at any time, just bring a sense of lightness to that moment. Have some compassion for yourself because this is what the mind does. Then see if you can bring your thoughts back to the present moment. Notice your hands. Are they tense or tight? Are you clenching or gripping? Wherever they are, see if you can allow them to soften. Now noticing the arms, feeling any sensation, any tingling, just like before, allowing them to soften, to melt where they are.

You continue to grow and expand with every breath. Notice the chest, the neck, the throat. So often when we're stressed, when we're uncertain, we hold tightness in this area of the body. See what it's like to relax that space. Softening the jaw, the cheeks and the cheekbones, allowing your face and your muscles of the face to grow softer. Imagining this feeling, growing up the forehead, up to the top of the head. Whether your eyes are open, closed, or at a soft gaze, imagine looking at that space just above the head. You may imagine the color yellow or gold or even white. Imagine that color just melting over your body over all these areas that we just brought our awareness to from the top of the head, all the way down to the toes. As your whole body is present here, start to deepen the breath, noticing what it feels like to be in this moment, not worrying about what happened before or what's to come, but being here for yourself fully.

Take another deep breath and you can start to bring your awareness back to the room. Wiggle the fingers, wiggle the toes, you can roll the ankles and wrists around. Maybe you add some gentle neck rolls or soften the muscles of the face once more. Whenever you're ready, blink the eyes open and come back to the space.

All right. How was that for you?

**CHAD:** Awesome, that was great. I was kind of struck with the realization that you were just there as a guide, that I didn't need your permission to take some time for myself, I didn't need a written approval before embarking on this. Really, I was struck with gratitude that this is something that is accessible as often as I care to access it. It can be done whenever I need it or whenever I want it. So, thank you.

**TIANNA:** Of course, and this exercise is wonderful if you're about to fall asleep. Sometimes people really like it right in the morning, which is amazing. For me, it calms me down and grounds me. It's nice to be still, but I want to offer to listeners as well that mindfulness can look like a lot of different things. If you're a musician, maybe mindfulness looks like listening to a song that really brings you peace and not doing anything for those three or four minutes that that song is playing. Maybe it looks like going for a walk on the beach or in a place that makes you feel really safe or energized and turning your phone on "do not disturb" and not stopping to get distracted by something. Being present in that environment, it can also look like silence. People really enjoy that. I think it's personally really difficult to sit in silence for a couple minutes, but there are folks that really enjoy it.

Mindfulness can look like a lot of different things and can also show up in our conversations. Just being more aware of the present moment without thinking about what you're going to say next or how you're going to respond, but really listening and actively listening. I like that mindfulness is sort of this umbrella topic, but it can be implemented in so many different ways.

**CHAD:** Tiana, thank you so, so much for the time you spent with us, for the time that you dedicated to learning and honing your craft. It's just been such an honor for you to play a role in our story, and we can't wait to see what happens the next four years down the road. But for you all listening, if you're curious to learn more about Tianna and her work and her writing, please give her a visit online at [tiannafaye.com](http://tiannafaye.com). That'll be in the show notes. Tiana, is there anything else you care to add?

**TIANNA:** Oh my gosh. Well first I want to say thank you so much for having me. I mean, To Write Love has been such a part of my story. I feel very blessed to be part of yours, even if a small part. I have learned so much from you guys and would extend love and compassion to anyone who's listening, I think we often feel like we're alone and platforms like To Write Love remind us that we aren't alone. I just want to speak to anyone who's listening. If you need help, please reach out. There are people who love you and want to help, and chances are, whatever you're experiencing, someone else is going through it too. If it's just extending a little bit of compassion to yourself every day, if it's taking one minute, 60 seconds to breathe or watch something funny or listen to a sweet song that makes you feel safe, I would just invite you to do that because you don't have to be perfect. You don't have to put yourself through that expectation. You're whole exactly as you are.

**CHAD:** Awesome.

[music playing]

**LINDSAY:** 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 okay 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](http://twloha.com). That's T-W-L-O-H-A.com. And Click FIND HELP at the top of the page.

Or, 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. And you'll be connected to a crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

Finally, if you've enjoyed this episode and you want to hear more, we really hope you'll subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get this podcast. And if you can do us a favor, we'd really like for you to write us a review.

It'll 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](mailto:podcast@twloha.com).

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 Lindsay Kolsch, with editorial support by Rebecca Ebert. Music assistance was provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor.

I'm Lindsay Kolsch, thank you so much for listening.