

Live Well Be Well

“Let's Talk Love”

Welcome to Live Well, Be Well! A podcast where we speak candidly about all things health and well-being! My name is Christopher Spurling and my pronouns are he/him/his, and I'm a Health Educator at UC San Diego. Along with the other Health Educators, I am holistically trained, and I have an emphasis on Men's Health.

On this episode of the Live Well Be Well podcast, we are quote-on-quote “celebrating” Valentine's Day by exploring relationships, attraction, love, and also thriving through self-fulfillment.

So we hope you get inspired, we hope you feel connected, and we hope you discover new ways to live your best life. Let's get started!

Valentine's Day can be a polarizing holiday. For some, the holiday inspires thoughts of joy and love. For others, Valentine's Day encourages thoughts of loneliness or a lack of love. And for some, the holiday goes by... mostly unnoticed.

Any discussion about love should (first and foremost) start with love and compassion directed towards yourself. Regardless of if you're in a relationship or not, self-love is a vital part of our well-being. Additionally, your relationship status should never negatively impact your self-love journey.

We often take it for granted that we have love or compassion for ourselves. We think it comes naturally, like breathing. The truth is, though, we usually have to work at it and practice. Now, of course, I'm not talking about narcissism, which is obsessive self-talk and self-absorption, to the point where the needs of others are not seen as important. If you've ever dated someone like this, you know what I mean... it can be a challenge. Just like it can be hard to be with someone who is on the narcissism extreme of the spectrum, being with someone at the other end of the spectrum with low self-love can also cause relationship issues. Also, YOU might be that person at either end of the

spectrum and not realize it. A healthy and productive level of self-love can prepare you for success, both, as a single person or as someone in a relationship.

As cultural icon and activist RuPaul says, "If you can't love yourself, how in the hell you gonna love somebody else?"

Now that we've discussed the importance of self-love, it is important to note that "LOVE" looks different for each of us. We all have different ways of expressing, accepting, and giving love to ourselves and others. Let's hear from UCSD student and Wellbeing Peer Educator, Sophia, about what "Love" means to her.

"Hello! My name is Sophia Potalivo, my pronouns are she/her/hers, and I'm here to talk about what love means to me. So, it's definitely changed over the years. It hasn't ever been just one thing, but I would say right now where I am in life, "love" to me is someone who is willing to push me when I need a little help. Of course, I am able to stand on my own, but that support is what's really important to me, especially because how hard school is and just life in general right now. Someone who is willing to laugh with me, and is able to make me step out of the seriousness that I always put myself in... give me a little bit of perspective. Someone who loves me, supports my dreams, helps me pursue my goals, and also (this might be specifically for me) but someone who loves me reminds me to eat. That is something I need a reminder of often. And also someone who's truthful and someone who makes me feel like I can be who I am and not have to apologize for it. These are all things that mean that someone loves me. So when I talk about love, I'm not just talking about romantic love (though I am also talking about romantic love) but more than that I feel like friendships. I remember my first two years of college, friendships were the most important thing for me. They're what got me through everything. And family, now for my family, there are some people who are super supportive and some who aren't, and for me, love is those people who are willing to listen to what I have to say, who support me in what I am doing. And so that's just something that was really interesting for me to see while growing up was figuring out what I needed out of my relationships, regardless of if they were romantic or familial or friendship, and how that could help me be who I needed to be. So I'm definitely still learning what love means to me, but right now, that's what it means."

Wow... to me, I think Sophia brings up some great points. Not only do I want to thank her for sharing her experiences and expectations with us, but also for touching on a lot of other topics. For example, Sophia describes how "love" can be with friends and family, even though we tend to think about love as a romantic term. Also... and this is true in my own life as well... but she talks about how she has learned over time what a healthy and supportive relationship looks like in her life. This is SO relatable and I think most people learn from their loves. And circling back to self-love, I think it also takes time to understand what a healthy and supportive relationship with ourselves looks like, and it is a constantly evolving and growing process.

As far as love is concerned, romance can be wonderful, and love in our friendships and families can be so rewarding, but at the end of the day, the relationship that matters most is the one you have with yourself.

In a more traditional Valentine's Day approach, however, much of the focus in popular culture is on romantic love. Maintaining a healthy romantic relationship is when members of the relationship are constantly adjusting into the relationship together and doing what's best for all people in the relationship. Signs that this is occurring in a healthy relationship are when all are caring and loyal, all trust each other and are honest with each other, all are comfortable sharing their feelings, all feel supported during tough times, there are shared values and interests among all, the differences between relationship members are celebrated, all take the time to actively listen to each other, all feel respected, all are talked to (and about) using supportive words that don't demean each other, all can make each other laugh, and all show affection for each other in a variety of ways. This list is not exhaustive or comprehensive, but it gives some signs that healthy relationship goals are being pursued.

Let's hear from another UCSD student and Wellbeing Peer Educator, Noelle, about what "Love" means to her... and how setting boundaries improved the health of her relationship.

"Hi everyone, my name is Noelle, my pronouns are she/her/hers, and I'm a sexual health specialty with the Wellbeing Peer Educator group. So today the prompt is, what does "love" mean to you? And when we were asked this, I thought quite a bit about it.

I've been in a long-term relationship for the past 3 years, I live with my partner, we have a dog together... So the first thing I think of when I hear the word "love" is "unconditional" right? There's no bounds, there's no limits, ya know, it can overcome all, but one of the things that I think I realized after living with my partner for the past year and a half is, actually, a big part of love is setting boundaries. And especially when you live in a one-bedroom apartment together, where you don't really get any alone time anymore, especially in quarantine, those boundaries become really important. Setting boundaries for, ya know, these are the times I need to do my school work, and these are the time that I need time to myself, to recuperate. These are the times that I need to go to work and make money. It's important because setting those boundaries in advance for me was really helpful because then the other partner doesn't feel, I guess, under appreciated that you're not spending enough time with them, or feel like you're not making time for them. Setting those boundaries in advance has been really helpful for me and I think there is a lot of setting boundaries in other areas too, not just with time. Like setting boundaries with what you're comfortable with in that relationship, and setting those early on has been helpful to me and my partner to kind of developing this healthy relationship where we understand that we're each our own person and we don't have to spend every moment together, even when we do quarantine in an apartment together. So I think that's what "love" means to me... "unconditional" is definitely a good definition of love, but I don't know if it's my version of love. And I think that's ok, I think everyone has their own version of what love means to them, and this is a little insight into the kind of love that I've experienced over the past 3 years with my partner. Thank you for listening to my story!"

Thank you, Noelle, for sharing your experiences and for describing how love can mean many different things. Also, I think it is wonderful how you recognize that "love" can mean different things to different people, and our lived experiences are part of what shapes that. Boundaries are important to every relationship (even with friends and other non-romantic relationships). Quarantine has been an interesting activity for so many relationships, and it's so critical to maintain individuality and some level of personal space.

So we've talked about what a healthy relationship looks like, but it is also important to keep in mind that some relationships are unhealthy or become unhealthy. Unhealthy

relationships can include emotional factors like making degrading comments, ignoring, isolating, controlling friendships, and threatening comments or situations. Physical factors and sexual factors include any unwanted touching, harm, or violence. Financial factors of unhealthy relationships include taking or withholding money, and controlling spending.

There are many signs of an unhealthy relationship, and if you ever feel like you need emergency support, be sure to find the appropriate way to help. For instance, the UCSD Sexual Assault Resource Center (known as CARE at SARC) can be reached 24/7 at (858) 534-5793, again that number is (858) 534-5793. Or if you need support feeling safe, the Domestic Violence National Hotline can be reached 24/7 at 1-800-799-7233, again that number is 1-800-799-7233.

Overall, it is so important to begin with self-love. You are your own person and that should be celebrated, to yourself and also with any partner or partners you may have. I may not know who you are, listening to this podcast, but I know that you are a human being, and you deserve love, safety, and happiness... just like we all do. Never forget that, and always promote healthy relationship factors... especially for the relationship with ourselves.

So that concludes this episode of Live Well, Be Well! If you liked what you heard today and would like to learn more about topics related to health and well-being there's much more to come!

Be sure to check out our website hps.ucsd.edu and follow us on Instagram and Facebook under @UCSDHPS

Stay tuned for our next episode of Live Well, Be Well. Until next time, be kind, be true, be you. And remember, to be well is to live well.