



Your Story **MATTERS**

Audry Van Houweling, PMHNP
Columnist

Owning my wellness to love you more – a Valentine’s Day promise

One could name a lot of reasons to be stressed these days. Putting aside personal concerns, simply turning on the news can raise anybody’s blood pressure. Much of our social economy thrives on fear-based messaging that adds to unease and uncertainty. Finances, family stress, job woes, academic pressure, stable housing, and social isolation are among many anxieties we might be facing. Feelings of overwhelm, worry, and pessimism can be hard to dodge. Even worse can be feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness.

When such negativity gains a tight grip, we can lose sight of our own agency and may feel that the powers that be have ultimately failed us. Certainly, there is something to be said for very real systemic oppression that

makes stability for some near impossible. That is another soap-box for another day, but for many of us, our feelings cannot be purely blamed on circumstance, but are very much the product of the story we tell ourselves about our circumstances.

The story we tell ourselves and what we choose to do with our story plays a significant role in how we interact with the world and most definitely how we operate and relate in the context of relationships.

Some of us have been long familiar with dysfunction. Throughout our lives, adrenaline, fighting, flighting, and freezing may have been common companions. Chaos can become more comfortable than order and stability. We may have been caregivers in such situations, which can reinforce beliefs of people-pleasing and perfectionism where our validation comes from being “needed.” We may also have been acclimated to be perpetrators of instability — to create chaos, to seek confrontation, and more comfortable with expressing anger than calmness. Lastly, we may depend too much on another to care for us. In all

cases, codependency in relationships can be a common outcome.

Codependency is an *excessive emotional or psychological reliance on a partner.*

While appreciating and desiring certain qualities from a partner is central to a healthy relationship, problems arise when we place too much of our well-being on the shoulders of another. Not only can codependency cause resentment and stagnation, but the bottom line is that the people we may be too dependent upon will ultimately fail to meet our expectations or validate us the way we were hoping. This may cause us to feel lost, uncertain, or stuck.

We may also become too reliant on extrinsic factors for validation — money, appearance, job performance, athletic performance or other measures that often shift and lack permanence. Is it okay to have goals and standards? Absolutely. If you fail to meet these goals and standards, do you lack value? No.

How to Own Your Wellness

Owning your wellness does not mean relying purely on self-sufficiency and hoping you can follow the

cowboy model and find your bootstraps. Owning your wellness means accepting responsibility for the story you are telling yourself and being open to editing this story either by your own processing or via the assistance of others. Editing your storyline and maintaining a narrative that allows for forward momentum takes time and energy. It also takes self-trust and direction. These are a few things I find useful:

1. Make habits that support time and energy.
 - Sleep. Shoot for 8 hours each night.
 - Get moving. You don’t have to push yourself. Just go on a walk. Try to get in 30-60 minutes of movement most days.
 - Eat real foods. I am not going to get too technical here. Just eat foods that are “real” that your body knows what to do with. Avoid processed foods.
 - Minimize the booze. Minimize the caffeine.
 - Limit social media. It is an all-too-common robber of time.
2. Check in with yourself.
 - If we have lived a life revolving around and dependent upon others, it is likely we have yet to get to know

ourselves that well. Take time for quiet. Meditate. Pray. Get out in nature. Take time for stillness. Ask yourself how you are feeling. Learn to appreciate your voice. Try new things (on your own) and take some risks — this is how you ultimately learn to trust yourself again. Get to know what keeps you grounded, what gives you joy, and what may be depleting.

3. Establish boundaries.
 - As we reclaim our wellness, we need to learn how to say “NO.” We need to become familiar with assertiveness and resist being too passive or too aggressive. We may need to have tough conversations with our significant other who we share codependence with. Sometimes the most loving thing to do is to say no and let go.
4. Get spiritual.
 - In my opinion, spirituality is simply connecting to what gives you meaning. Finding meaning outside our relationships and circumstance allows us to have more resilience when there are bumps in the road. The bumps that may have been jolts can be softened as spirituality

See **PROMISE** on page 14



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