



## **Episode Three**

**Minding Your Mind**

**With**

**Elizabeth Gillies and Louise Wiles**

# Welcome to Successful Student Transitions – A Time to Thrive

**This podcast series is for you if you are:**

- A student leaving full-time education and moving into the world of work
- A student moving to university or some form of higher education
- An educator, parent or counsellor supporting students as they take the next steps in their journey from school/college/sixth form into the world of further education or work.

**For many students this represents the first big life transition. It can be an exciting and challenging time.**

This podcast series provides strategies that develop self-awareness, understanding and the ability to thrive through times of transition.

This is the full transcript.

You can also access the show notes, resources and worksheets mentioned in the podcast by registering [HERE](#).

## About Your Hosts

### Elizabeth Gillies

**Elizabeth is an Education Psychologist based in London who has worked in schools as a psychologist at the individual, group and systems level for over 30 years.**

She has been fortunate to live, work and raise her family in America, Japan, and Australia so, unsurprisingly, she is interested in the challenges and opportunities of transitions.



Elizabeth is a CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) and ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) specialist. She works in schools, on-line and, near her home base in South London, incorporating walking with talking therapy in green spaces.

At the crunch points at the beginning and end of the school year, Elizabeth runs workshops for young people, teachers, and parents to help them understand common patterns of transition and how to use this knowledge to help themselves during this time and future changes.

Together with a great group of professionals in London, Elizabeth is growing a multi professional support service called Special Networks and can be found [HERE](#)

Elizabeth is a member of FIGT (Families in Global Transition) and with Louise and another FIGT member, is a co-chair of the FIGT UK affiliate. Link to FIGT. Connect via LinkedIn [HERE](#)

## About Louise Wiles

**Louise Wiles is a well-being, change and transition consultant, trainer and coach and the parent of two teens.**

Alarmed by the recent explosion of well-being challenges amongst children and teens, especially during exam years and through times of change and transition. Louise believes we should be better preparing young people for life beyond school and university so that they can thrive through the natural highs and lows of life.



Louise combines her professional background in organisational psychology (MSc) and coaching, with her expertise as a wellbeing, positive change and strengths practitioner and her personal experience of life on the move, to develop training courses and coaching programmes that help her clients prepare for, and thrive, through the challenge of change and transition.

You can connect with Louise on LinkedIn [HERE](#)

Website [HERE](#) and contact Louise [HERE](#)

Louise is also the author of ***Thriving Abroad: The Definitive Guide to Professional and Personal Relocation Success***

## Transcript

**Elizabeth Gillies 00:00**

Welcome to the third podcast, Student Transitions - A Time to Thrive. This is Elizabeth Gillies and Louise. Welcome to you all today. Today we're going to talk a little bit about thought patterns that take place around these transition times. And there's lots of kind of interesting research about us being able to kind of capture and notice thoughts, of course at any time, not just a transition. So, I'm going to put Louise on the spot straightaway. And ask Louise, when you've been through a transition, or when you know other people have gone through them, people you've worked with? What are those kind of normal thoughts, or those thoughts that often arise in these transition times?

**Louise Wiles 01:00**

Okay, well if I think about myself in transition, and perhaps when moving country, that might be one that's probably fairly similar to anyone listening who's thinking about moving to university or moving to a different area and a new job, career. I guess one of my big worries is always around friends, and my thoughts will be around, how easy will it be to make friends? What will I need to do to make friends? Where will I need to go? And how challenging will that be? You know, going to new situations where I know no one and having to sort of make the first move, I might worry about that. And I suppose if I extend that, then I might worry also about feeling isolated and lonely, if I don't make friends, or feeling left out.

**Elizabeth Gillies 01:57**

So, what if I'm left out? What if I'm lonely? Anything else?

**Louise Wiles 02:03**

And I suppose also the questioning around my ability to cope with new challenging situations. So, for example, moving abroad, you know, if you, how do I deal with the basics that I take for granted, and do easily in my own country, but in a different country where I'm not speaking the language, so there would be the language challenge there. But that might not be so relevant for university transitions, but certainly, you know, doing all the things that I need to do, and finding out how to do them. So, I imagine, yes, if I was thinking about going to university, in my mind, there would be this question around, will I understand how everything works? And will I be in the right place at the right time and not look silly? Well, I make my lectures on time, my tutorials, how will I get on with my tutors? How will I get to know them? Will I look stupid in front of other people? If I say stuff, and I suppose also around being able to do the work? How will I cope with that? And how will I compare to other people?

**Elizabeth Gillies 03:11**

So, I'm hearing, I guess what Louise and I often hear when people are in transition, a lot of these kind of what if thoughts, you know, what if I'm lonely, what if I'm on my own? What if I don't meet like-minded people? And also thinking about, what if I go and other people are doing other things? And I'm not that, that's kind of social comparison. So, I mean, it's funny to say this, but they're all pretty normal. You know, they're the kind of thoughts that we all have. And, and it might just be useful to deviate just slightly and think about why those thoughts are there. So, I'm going to ask you to imagine that you're living in the Stone Age times. So, we're living 200,000 years ago, and of course, people at that time

they lived in small close-knit groups. And it was really important to be part of that for your survival. You needed to be in that small group, because otherwise, otherwise you'd die, there was a big threat there. So, you'd be always forever comparing, am I fitting in? Am I doing the work? Am I contributing as much as other people? Am I doing my part? So, that's where that social comparison comes from. And where also those Stone Age people were kind of always on the lookout for threat and danger, new things because there would be things coming along the horizon like you know a Sabre toothed Tiger, people talk about, and you'd have to work collectively to deal with threatened danger. And if you didn't look out for threat and danger, the other thing is, well, you wouldn't survive. So, there we have social comparison, looking out for threat and danger. Something I didn't hear you say, but it's quite common is people will replay things. Because, if you are one of those Stone Age people and you survived something, often the thing that you would do in your mind would replay it, because you survived. So, you would know it, you would go over it and over and over it as a kind of learning tool. To kind of think this is how I did it, so I need to use it again. And then the other thing would be about having more, and then actually maybe enough, and even more things, you need more, you need enough food and water and shelter. So sometimes that's where we have a drive for needing more of this stuff. So, there are bits that coming out from you that are in our mind, you know, our mind has been very slow to evolve. So those things are still there. But just like our computers or any technology, we need an update. So, we need to kind of notice is this is this around for me? Oh that's part of my Stone Age mind. So, we need to know where it comes from. And actually I think that was the two things that were around for, you know, when you were talking about it, was about the social comparison, and about threat and danger, wasn't it? And so, people might listen, be listening and thinking about, well, how did these things play out for me? You know, is it about me, thinking I need to have lots of stuff to go to university? You know, I need to take all my stuff with me, making sure I've got more than enough stuff? Or is it about kind of replaying other situations when I was new? So, it'd be interesting to know about those kind of thoughts going on in your head. And the other thing, before we go on to have a little try about something, it's maybe good to think about, you know, the number of thoughts we have a day. So, I don't know if we've talked about this before the Louise? Do you remember? Do you know how many thoughts the research people say we have a day? Do you know? Are you going to have a guess?

### **Louise Wiles**

Is it 100,000?

### **Elizabeth Gillies** 07:16

Well, if you put people in an MRI machine, they say between 6 and 7000. But I actually think, it's much more than that. I've heard between that, and 60 to 70,000.

I think when you're anxious about something, those anxious thoughts often take precedence over everything else, because we are still in that stone age mind have this negativity bias where we're always looking out for threat and danger, because we have to do something about it. So, there are what I would call, or what people call, Velcro thoughts. And so, I've got a nice bit of Velcro that you can hear. Here it is. So, these Velcro thoughts are the sticky thoughts, the ones that are hard to kind of get away from, that are around for us, that kind of bother us and we have to deal with stuff. And so, you know, what, if I'm left out? what if am I lonely? They sound like Velcro thoughts. You know, if your thoughts like, you know, I think there's going to be a good kind of swimming team on the campus or they're going to university. That's not necessarily a Velcro thought that's what I would call a Teflon thought. So, my

props don't lend to kind of this. But imagine, you know, a Teflon nonstick frying pan, and things just going on and off. So, we have those thoughts that stick to us and the thoughts that just come and go. And so, what we need to kind of learn with these is identify, Oh those are my Velcro, my sticky thoughts. Notice them, name them, and then try and kind of help them come and go. Does that make sense?

So and so how do we do that? Well, I think the first thing we need to know is trying to kind of name them to tame them, is what people talk about. So, we name them to tame them. And then there are various things that we can do to almost let them go. We're taught to connect, we're taught to belong, we're taught to kind of unite with things. We're not taught how to kind of break with things, and to let things go. So, this little exercise that we're going to do now is called Leaves on a Stream. And I've taken this, there's lots of various versions of it. This is an adapted one from TherapistAid.com and we can put the link below. So, the overview is of this exercise, I want you to visualise yourself resting near a stream. And when there is a sticky, a Velcro thought that enters your mind, you'll imagine placing it on a leaf and watching, put it on the stream and the leaf or thought will flow past. So instead of seeing the world from inside of your thoughts, you'll take a step back and view them from afar. So, in doing that, you'll gain more perspective about your thoughts and feelings. And you'll be able to kind of let those you'll teach your mind how to bring these thoughts to you instead of trying to avoid them. And then let you go. So, Louise, can you think about a kind of Velcro thought that we could put on a leaf? What would be a good one for you?

**Louise Wiles 11:01**

I think for me, it probably would be the making friends. So, the challenge of yeah, the challenge of making friends.

**Elizabeth Gillies 11:08**

Okay, so, the thought could be, there's going to be a big challenge for me making friends.

**Louise Wiles 11:17**

Or just, it's probably not, I probably wouldn't phrase it, I'm just thinking I know I said that. But it would be - I might not have any friends.

**Elizabeth Gillies 11:29**

So, what if I don't have any friends? Or what if? Because those what if are so often, kind of those hypothetical future things that we never know what's going to happen. We project ourselves into the future. So, what if I don't make friends? So, let's get started. So, if we're in a quiet place now we can do it now, if you're sitting down in a comfortable position, you can close your eyes softly, you can close your eyes or soften your gaze, and I want you to take some slow, deep breaths.

Okay, now I want you to imagine that you're resting by the side of a stream, the scene can look however you like. And try and use all your senses to imagine what this stream and the surroundings look like, might be a warm day, there might be trees in the background, that you might have some wind or physical sensations. So, it's a peaceful, tranquil scene. And your task here now that you're rested by the stream, is to just focus on the stream. And if like there will be, if distractions come into your mind,

such as thoughts or feelings about, oh, I've got this thing to do later, or I've got something else that I need to do. Just notice them and without judgement, bring your gaze back into kind of this stream visualisation. And this stream that we have is a circular stream, because of course, our thoughts just don't come past once they keep coming round again. So, if you can imagine this as a kind of root canal stream that's gone round in a circle. So, it's going to come and your leaves going to come in front of you and go and then come back again. Okay, so let's notice that Velcro thought. And I want you to, in particular, if you can write that thought on a leaf, imagine writing it on a leaf. And I want you to place the leaf on the stream. And then I want you to watch the leaf come and float down in front of you, and then past you until it disappears. And I want you to continue visualising the stream, simply observing the thoughts come and the thoughts go. There's nothing else that you need to do. And when you've, when you've done it a few times, I'm going to ask you some questions about it. So, I'm going to give people a little bit of time to practice it for themselves. So, I'm not going to talk any more. So just notice that leaf with your written thought on, just slowly come in the stream, be in front of you and go.

You look like you're coming back to us, Louise.

**Louise Wiles 16:07**

I was in a very nice, nice place there.

**Elizabeth Gillies 16:11**

And so, what I'm going to ask you, what did you notice about yourself? What did you notice about you doing that exercise?

**Louise Wiles 16:20**

First of all, the situation that I was, I was thinking about was somewhere that I've been by a river, very relaxed. And so, it was lovely to have that feeling and to imagine that, but then I noticed as I was putting my thought on my leaf and letting it go, and then it was coming around again, as it sort of approached me I kind of thought, oh, no, and then I suddenly realised, oh, but there's nothing to do. And I just let it float on by. And that was, yeah, that was quite sort of revealing for me really, I don't think I've thought about thoughts in that way before. So. Yeah, just that real recognition that actually, there's nothing I need to do with this. Nothing I need to do. I can just watch it. Yeah, float on by.

**Elizabeth Gillies 17:10**

You know, I think people often talk about thoughts aren't truths or sometimes thoughts aren't things to act upon, and it kind of sounded like that would be, that happened to you a little bit there?

**Louise Wiles 17:24**

Yeah, yeah. I just I, well, I suppose nothing to do, there was nothing that I needed to do in that moment. And that I could just let it go by. I didn't really think beyond that, though. I suppose I was just in that exercise, I was thinking that. But that's very useful. Because now in everyday life, if that thought bubbles up, I can think, okay, let's just let that go. There's nothing I need do. Yeah.

**Elizabeth Gillies 17:54**

And just kind of notice it. Because often, when we have these kind of Velcro thoughts, we get into a struggle or a challenge with them, you know, they're challenging for us. And this kind of helps you have a different relationship. So, you know, if we've got, you know, those hundreds of, you know, lots and lots of thoughts anyway. You know, we can choose the ones that we want to kind of hold on to, or the ones that we, you know, are difficult, but the reality is, we can't necessarily control what comes into our mind. But we can decide how we're going to respond to it. So, if we respond with curiosity, and oh, there's that thought, again, there it's come up for me, that's been one of those sticky thoughts. I'm just going to let come, and then let it go. Because once we decide to get into a fight with it, or a struggle with it, or try and avoid it, then that relationship becomes a much more difficult one. So, it might be something to think about in the future about when these thoughts come. This is one strategy that you can try and develop a different kind of relation. And even we're thinking now then, about what kind of relationship do you have with that thought? Maybe I should have asked you at the beginning about in a scale of 0 to 10. How much, how big was it as a Velcro thought? How much did it stick onto you? And maybe how much did it stick on to you now, so it might be? You know, I should have asked that at the beginning. I didn't, but it might be worth thinking about as you begin to think about it now. And then as you continue to practice about, am I changing my relationship with this thought?

**Louise Wiles 19:45**

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And I think the interesting thing is as you let the thought go. So, you think I don't need to do much with it, you know before I might have in my mind, right. I need to start thinking about that, and then build a story around it that is a, not true, because we don't know what might happen around meeting people, making friends. But of course, as you explained earlier, we see that more as perhaps like a threat or something to be concerned about, so perhaps we build a more negative story around it, and a worry around the activities that we might have to be involved in to meet friends. And so, it becomes this whole narrative that is not helpful at all. But by seeing the thought or hearing, or whatever, whichever sense we were experiencing that thought with, we would we let it go, we then don't create that narrative either.

**Elizabeth Gillies 20:36**

And it's, I mean, some people might call that a narrative, it's rumination, when we go round and round things. And there we're back to that stone age mind of wanting to replay things to try and problem solve. And of course, sometimes replaying things is a good thing to do, because it will help us in this situation, but you have to notice when it's not helping anything, actually, I'm overthinking this, I'm ruminating. So that's the thought that you'd have to think, right, let me change my relationship with it, and let it come and go.

**Louise Wiles 21:09**

Yeah, I suppose the other thing I like about that is changing my relationship with it, rather than thinking I need to change this negative thought into a positive one, you know, how often do, I'm worrying if I was talking to somebody, perhaps, you know, or they were talking to me about it? And they might say, Oh - we didn't have to worry about that. Because you're good at making friends, you know, turn it into a positive. You know, it'd be a positive experience, it will be fun. I mean, sometimes that can be helpful,



but not always. And actually just letting that thought go rather than doing anything with it is perhaps a healthier thing?

**Elizabeth Gillies** 21:45

I would agree. I would agree. So, it's about, it's not trying to make everything, Oh, see the positive side, of course, there is, there's a place for some of that. But if we're able to mind our mind, and notice what our mind will naturally do, and raise our self-awareness of what it will naturally do, then we've got some choices open to us that might be that might help us. So, if we could maybe put on some other things, if people are interested in understanding more about this, it comes a lot from what people call ACT Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. So, kind of accepting that, you know, our mind is going to be a busy place, things will come and go. Knowing that that's what our mind does. And then being committed to some action, that's going to help us not just in the short term, but in the long term. So that's our kind of third session done. Hopefully, you've got a little bit more understanding about how your minds working, about why those thoughts come into your head and one strategy called Leaves on the Stream for helping you develop a different relationship with those Velcro thoughts.

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