



A TIME TO THRIVE

**Student
Transitions**

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Episode Five

Nurturing Self-Compassion

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 00:04

Hi again, everyone, welcome to Student Transition A Time to Thrive. This is Elizabeth Gillies with

Louise Wiles 00:12

Louise wiles. Lovely to be back again.

Elizabeth Gillies 00:15

Yeah, and today Louise and I are going to be talking about something that we both feel is central to these times of change and transition. And it's self-compassion. So, if we just take a little moment to think about that self as part of that word, before the compassion, I think, I think we all have an understanding about compassion is having empathy and wanting to support people when they're suffering. And there's some nice research around all this area in that most of us know how to be compassionate to other people. If you look at the work by Kirsten Neff, who, and she's got a great book called just called Self-Compassion. And if we if, she looked at how compassion is used, and her statistics came back with 78%, this is in America, 78% of the population, thought they were more compassionate to others than themselves. 6% thought they were more compassionate to themselves. And 11% thought they were about equal. So, a really interesting bit of learning for us about, maybe we can talk about this later, but about why this should be. And I guess we would all kind of agree that being compassionate is a good thing. And thinking about these flows of compassion. So, there's this obviously clear flow of compassion from us to other people, that's that 78%. And then there's maybe another compassion when we receive support from other people. And normally, people are alright about that. But then there's a bit about how to be compassionate to ourselves. And that's what we're going to be talking about today, as about how to bring that compassion to ourselves. So maybe if I can use Louise as my talking partner, and say, so Louise, let's imagine, let's just talk, let's just use this kind of context of transition, like moving to somewhere new. But if you had a treasured friend, who was struggling around kind of moving on somewhere, or even a change. How do you think you would respond to them? What do you think you'd say? What would your tone be like? Is there anything that you would do? Like a gesture or something? Would that be something you do for them? What do you think Louise?

Louise Wiles 03:17

Well, I suppose the first thought that kind of comes to my head, knowing how we can be with ourselves in times of change in the transition is that we have huge expectations about what we should be able to achieve quite quickly. So, I think that's perhaps where I would start. And, you know, and emphasise that it takes time to transition and to settle, particularly if it's a big move, leaving home and setting up your life in a different place. And so, it's really important that people think about that, and recognise that they are being challenged, and so to take time to be kind to themselves, and perhaps to take time to recognise what they have achieved. I think often we recognise what we haven't achieved, we don't sit down and look at what we have achieved over a period of time. And so, I would encourage them to think about their achievements in that period since they've made the move and what they've gained through that, that period.

Elizabeth Gillies 04:33

So nice, reassuring, soft tone I'm hearing there.

Louise Wiles 04:38

Oh, yes. A reassuring, soft tone. And probably encourage them, I think from that, go and have a coffee or a drink. Take them away from everything for a while and talk about it in a place that's away from, you know, what they're experiencing. I think that emphasises the importance of having breaks and recovery time, which we have discussed in previous podcasts. But you know, really important to be kind to yourself in that way and to build in that time, and to recognise that's part of self-compassion. It's the actions that you take for yourself, not just the thinking that goes behind it, and the mental chatter, you know, I can relate to the mental chatter, you know beating ourselves up, that's not a good thing. So, thinking about how we're talking to ourselves about what we're doing. But then being concrete in thinking about what we've achieved and proving to ourselves that we're coping with quite a lot, and therefore need to give ourselves a break sometimes. I think there's another thought that's occurred to me as well is that I know that in a new situation, I'm comparing myself a lot to other people. So perhaps I would point out that social comparison isn't always the best thing to be doing. And I know now, that Tik Tok and being online and seeing what others are doing is quite addictive. And it's something that people are doing a lot of, but perhaps suggesting that taking a break from all of that, and not looking for opportunities to compare all the time, recognising that you'll go at your own pace, and that's absolutely fine too, we all do things with a different pace, we don't have to be achieving things at the same time.

Elizabeth Gillies 06:35

So very nice, supportive, nice tone, you're not being overly directive to this friend, you're pointing out to them maybe the things that normally happen at these times, these are tricky times, you might go to a place where you take a break and have a bit of space to think about it together. So, a very nice kind of supportive thing to do when you see this good friend who's struggling. So, holding that in mind, I now want us to think about, and we can both do this together, when we've gone through a struggle ourselves. And maybe we could take a change and transition and think about what we actually do to ourselves. Because often there's not that soft support voice there. This is a time when that inner critic or the judgments come to mind. So can you think Louise, there was a time then when you didn't respond to yourself like a friend would. But you responded to yourself in a different way?

Louise Wiles 08:01

Yeah, I can think of perhaps moving one thought comes to mind moving back to live in the UK, we'd been living in Portugal for a long time, we moved back to live in the UK as a family. And I know sort of the first few months I was very much focused on doing all the stuff that I needed to do support the family and the kids to say transition to their new schools. And I was very aware of their transition process. And I didn't give any thought to mine particularly. And I know that towards the end of that sort of couple of first couple of months. I remember feeling absolutely exhausted. And I was trying to work on my business, I just had no energy, I felt completely drained. So, I hadn't given myself the time to adjust that I realised I needed to be giving my kids and family. Yeah, there was no self-compassion really there and I paid the price. Because what happened was I kind of burned out at the end. So, if I

had my time again, I would have built in the things that I was just talking about the activities, the self-compassion, the recovery, and all, but I didn't so.

Elizabeth Gillies 09:12

And I think that's what self-compassion is about. It's about treating yourself like you're a good friend. Because, if we kind of, if we were saying to yourself 'Oh God Elizabeth, you're hopeless, you're not doing this really well, look at everybody else who are getting on far better than you. You're never going to make any new friends here.' If we take a moment and think, if our friend was in difficulty and we said that to them, we wouldn't be friends for long, would we? So, we need to, this is about this kind of relationship you've got us with yourself. That's what self-compassion is, it's about having that kindness and is knowing what you're going through, and treating yourself with care. And that care sometimes can be a soft care, it can be a nurturing care, it can be a supportive care, or it could be quite a kind of fierce care in that, 'No, I'm not doing that, you know, I need to look after myself at this time.' So, it can have those kind of two sides to it. So, it's about developing, it's about thinking about how we're reacting to ourselves, and noticing all of that. And, you know, going back to Kirsten Neff, you know, she has her model of self-compassion which, has three parts to it.

So, the first part is about treating yourself with self-kindness. No judgement, no harshness, no kind of like, you know, remarks made to yourself that you wouldn't make to a friend. So, it's got self-kindness. And the next about it is, is that getting to that point that this world is not a perfect world, that tough times happen, we have some ups and downs in life, and this is what she would call common humanity. You know, we have to learn with the ups, you know, the rough and the smooth, we have to know that there are good times, bad times, so everything's not just to be perfect. You know, watching out for all those 'oh, I shouldn't have been making mistakes, and I shouldn't be doing this.' Those are kind of quite rule based things and are getting into not kindness, but they're getting into more judgement. So self-kindness, kind of the world is a is a is a tricky place. And the third thing is about just being mindful of what your feelings and thoughts are at a time. And knowing that, if things are tough you can recognise that, and acknowledge it in yourself. And maybe, sharing a little bit about how I learned this for myself through an experience was, very many years ago, a very good friend of mine was unfortunately terminally ill. And they were in a hospice. And I went to I went to see them there. And of course, a lot of the people that were working there were volunteers. And I was I was understandably, really upset. And this volunteer took my hand, and said to me, held my hand and said, 'this is a hard time.' And do you know what? It's the most, it's one of the most amazing things that anybody has ever said to me, just to acknowledge that what I was going through was hard. And so, for us, you know, we will all have our own kind of words and phrases about the things that we can say to ourselves, to kind of acknowledge this is difficult, this is a hard time, this is a time of struggle, change is difficult for me. So that's the mindfulness part of it. And then there'll be kindness parts of it. So, the kindness would be about: 'What can I do for myself right now? How can I look after myself, You're doing the best you can.' So having some kind of language around that. And the common humanity, the kind of life struggle bit, is about, you know, life has ups and downs, this is a phase where it's going to be really difficult for me, being in this new place. So, it's, it's good to kind of develop these kind of words and phrases that we can use towards ourselves. And with that, I think, we know that there's,

you know, during these COVID times when people have found connection and touch with people, how touch is so important. So, I often help people develop a gesture, you know, often when friends are in difficulty you put your arm around them, or you get close to them, or you get on their level. And I know we're not doing this as a video, so you have to listen. So, gestures and you might just have a little play along as I'm saying this, so have a play and just hold your own hand and see what that feels like. Does that feel nice? Does that feel supportive? Sometimes a gesture can be enough, sometimes it's good to use with words. Sometimes I would encourage people to kind of make a fist with their hand and then put a nurturing hand around the top, so there's strength and nurture there together. You might want to just give yourself a hug. Often, I talk to young people like this, they kind of laugh a little bit, because then they think, it's ages since I've had a hug from anybody. And when you're alone in a transition, it's touch that is something you could give to yourself. And another one I often use is just to get your, maybe a hand, I've got my right hand and just kind of put it just below your throat and on your upper chest, and give it a nice kind of press. And the interesting thing about this, is that we know that, you know, when people are stressed, there's lots of things that you do, you might have heard this thing about, you know, fill your well-being bucket, and what you put in your bucket and stuff. And often you the things that you'll put in your bucket is, you know, go for a walk, or have a hot drink, have a bath. Well, if you're in the middle of something really difficult, that first seminar that you're going to at uni, or that first meeting in a workplace, you can't go, 'actually I just need to go and have a bath.' But what you can do, in the moment of it all, if you feel that this nurturing, holding your own hand, is a kind of self-compassion, kind of soothing thing for you to do, then you can do it right at that moment. And nobody would know, unless they've listened to this as well, but nobody would know, it's a time that you're saying; 'This is a hard time, This is a challenge for me at the moment, I'm nervous, because this is the first time I'm doing it.' So, in that way, you can give yourself self-compassion in a moment. And it'd be something that's easily portable with you wherever you go. I don't know if you ever use gestures, Louise, sorry, I've talked a lot there.

Louise Wiles 17:11

As I'm listening to you, I'm thinking that I'm very bad at self-compassion. I think my brain is full of a lot of should, and why haven't you's, and not necessarily really nasty to myself, but high expectations, that's perhaps where I started anyway, I said expectations right at the beginning. And I think for me, that is, yeah, that's just made me really think about, you know, my expectations are probably way above where I need to have them, to be honest with you, about what I do and how I conduct myself. And I could do with bringing them down a notch or two, and building in some of this language for myself, because I don't very often say any of it to myself at all, if I really reflect on that I, it's full of what I must do, where I need to get to next, whatever I'm doing during the day, there might be a little bit if I go for a dog walk and then at that point, think, but I don't, I probably plug into a podcast and try and learn something else.

Elizabeth Gillies 18:23

So, I think maybe saying, 'I'm doing really well today', because that mindfulness bit, it's about noticing and naming, so, noticing this is a struggle for me, or noticing, 'I'm really enjoying this.' Because it doesn't always have to be to do with the challenging stuff. It can be like, gosh, you learnt that really well there, you really were able to put that into practice. That's also self-compassion. Because the idea about self-compassion is we don't actually, funnily enough, want to remove the pain, we want to just acknowledge it, and make sure that we're recognizing, and you know, it's there.

Louise Wiles 19:08

Brilliant, that has given me a lot of food for thought, to be honest with you. I didn't think it was going to be, I was thinking that I'm okay with self-compassion. I think I'm not actually.

Elizabeth Gillies 19:22

And so, you know, I wonder why, we're not doing this, why aren't we good at this?

Louise Wiles 19:27

I think we're just so busy moving through the day. I think going back to my point about expectations, we have expectations about what we need to be doing and achieving and how we might be falling short. So, setting goals that, you know, and it's not that I don't think you should have goals. I think goals are important, but I think we should spend a lot more time recognising the progress we're making in that journey towards achieving our goals rather than just looking at the end result and realising we're not there yet, because we spend most of the journey not being there yet, so really, if we're focusing on what we've achieved that that's, that's really helpful. I think we're spending a lot of time comparing ourselves to others, finding ourselves lacking, of course, because we would always do that. Yeah. So, it's taking time and step back and really thinking about how we would speak to our friends and make sure that we're speaking to ourselves in a similar way.

Elizabeth Gillies 20:29

And I think we're socialised to kind of look after other people, you know, we're taught to do those things. That's what society says, that's what society values. And there maybe has been a kind of, tinge of, though not borne out in research, about if you're thinking about looking after yourself, maybe it's selfish, maybe it's, you know, being overindulgent. But actually, the research does show the opposite. The research shows that people who have higher levels of self-compassion, you know, have greater happiness, more life satisfaction, less mental health problems. So, it is a kind of good recipe for being able to sit with difficulties, because there will be difficulties and be able to be kind to yourself when those kind of difficulties arise. And there's lots of really interesting research, I said, I wouldn't talk about it, but one bit I want to share with you. So, procrastination is a huge thing, right? So, we're all kind of putting things off, or going off and doing the easy thing first, before the difficult. And university students they were either taught, you know, a group of procrastinators, they were either taught self-compassion, or just to have something to read. And the students that were taught self-compassion, were less likely to procrastinate the following day, really interesting. So, very useful in terms of a whole range of things, kind of looking after yourself, looking after your mental health, and actually sort of getting on with your work and the stuff that you're supposed to be doing.

Louise Wiles 22:23

Yep, I can actually see, I can totally see why that would be, as well, I'm just thinking you have some self-compassion for what we've achieved you know that in itself is motivating. But if we're not noticing that, we're not seeing the achievement and we're tearing ourselves apart and being cross with ourselves, and actually we don't need to be, so yeah, write down five things you've achieved in the last two days, and celebrate those for yourself

Elizabeth Gillies 23:52

And I actually even today, I was procrastinating a lot. And actually, that was kind of hard, because I didn't get on to do the other stuff I needed to do. So just being able to use that mindfulness of, this is what happened. And treating it with kindness, and I wonder why? And curiosity even. But not judging yourself for it, not thinking, 'Oh, you were so stupid, because there's another day wasted.' So have none of that, but have the acknowledgement part of it, that's really important.

Louise Wiles 23:27

Yeah. And I think in the compassion research, there's something about, you know, compassion, being about, being able to support others. And then, but also quite action orientated, so you know, this has happened, so how can I support you to move things forward in a positive way? And I think that probably applies to self-compassion, too. So, it's yes, reflecting on what perhaps didn't work, and recognising that it didn't, for whatever reason, but then, being kind to yourself about that and thinking, 'Well Okay, what will I do differently tomorrow?'

Elizabeth Gillies 23:59

Yeah. And I love that, that question about what do I need right now? And so, when you've noticed that moment of struggle or difficulty for you, what do you need? And it might be you need a hug, you know, it might be you need some kind words, you know, may you be kind to yourself. It could be lots of different things, but knowing how to you could be really kind to yourself is important.

So it is about relationships, isn't it Louise? And we're going to talk more about relationships next, but it's about it's about, you know, the longest relationship you'll ever have is with yourself. It's so good to be kind and compassionate to friends, but actually you can be more you can be kinder and more compassionate to friends if you can do it to yourself first.

Louise Wiles 24:48

Yeah, absolutely.

Elizabeth Gillies 24:51

So, we'll put some little notes on a think sheet for you. And you can think a little bit more about self-compassion.

Further resources and references

Self Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself. Kirsten Neff. HarperCollins

Fierce Self-Compassion Kirsten Neff. Penguin Books

Kirsten Neff's website is full of research and resources, including self compassion exercises
<https://self-compassion.org/>

The Self-Compassion Workbook for Teens: Mindfulness and Compassion Skills to Overcome Self-Criticism and Embrace Who You Are. Karen Bluth and Kirsten Neff. Instant Help Books

TED x Talks Kirsten Neff. The Space between self-esteem and self-compassion
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvTZBUSplr4>

A great article on what self-compassion is and is not from Positive Psychology.com.
<https://positivepsychology.com/self-compassion-self-love/>

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