



A TIME TO THRIVE

Student Transitions

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Episode Six

Why it Helps to ASK

With

Elizabeth Gillies and Louise Wiles

Welcome to 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

Louise Wiles 00:04

Hello, and a very warm welcome back to Student Transitions. I'm Louise Wiles, and I'm here together with Elizabeth Gillies. And we're thrilled to be back. Today we're going to be talking about relationships, and in particular, about asking for help. So, it's perhaps follows on from the previous episode about self-compassion because this is one way that you can demonstrate self-compassion for yourself - by asking them for help. And if you haven't listened to that previous episode, go back, I really highly recommend that, and it's probably a good one to listen to before you listen to this one. Now, I reckon if I were to ask many students what one of their biggest worries was about their move to university, or students moving on to a new area, and a new job, they would probably say that they're pretty worried about making friends, fitting in, developing new relationships with other students or with colleagues. And I think this is a totally understandable and natural concern. I was just wondering Elizabeth if this is something that you've perhaps struggled with Elizabeth, I mean, knowing that you've moved around the world, you've transitioned to living in new countries - how did friendships and building friendships figure for you in those scenarios?

Elizabeth Gillies 01:28

Well, you have to start from the beginning again don't you, because everything is left behind, and you're back at base one about where do you go and meet people? How do you do it? You know, what kind of people are you even looking for? Where am I going to meet those people? So, you go off into these new situations, and you have to be really kind of conscious and intentional about how you're going to do things, but you haven't been before so, you've had your group of friends. So sometimes, you have to kind of be thinking about well why were they my friends? What did I like about them? because that's what I've got to kind of replicate, or I want to kind of continue doing that kind of thing that that worked for me. So, it is kind of been back at the beginning again and I do think for, you know, if we go into the leaving school scenario. Often you know, you as young people have been in the same school for a long time, and you've never really had to make new friends or do things, or ask for help, because you know where it all is. And so, it's a new, it's a new place, you have to find out those things. and it's about starting again, knowing nothing, knowing what you need to know.

Louise Wiles 02:59

So, a lot of good reasons why we might feel a little bit threatened by the task of building new relationships and friendships, learning to live in a new environment. And, you know, from a psychological perspective, much of the motivation that drives our social behaviour is governed by a sort of overarching organising principle, where we aim to minimise threat and maximise reward. And the area of relatedness as it's called in often in psychology is, is one area where our sense of safety with others is really important. So, if we feel that is threatened, then we can have quite a sort of a threat response to it. And you know, our threat response circuitry is activated when we feel threatened in that area. And often our response is then to disengage or avoid. So, if you're at university or moving to university, and you have in your mind, you know those first meetings, perhaps you've got, you're working, you're living in a catered accommodation, you know, you're gonna have to walk into that, that dining hall, not knowing anybody. You know, that can feel challenging and our threat response to that is to well, I'm going to avoid that. Perhaps I won't bother doing that on the first day or the second day, I'll

go and have a sandwich instead. But I think the important thing to know is that actually that feeling is so normal. It's nothing different from probably what the rest of the students are all feeling even though they may be smiling and looking very confident. Everyone will be feeling a bit uncomfortable about that. And you're no different. So, I just wanted to put that out there and explain why you might be feeling that sort of fear response in a social situation absolutely can feel threatening, and it's totally normal. And we need to know it's normal. And we won't be the only one feeling that way.

Louise Wiles 05:27

So, in terms of relationships, and building new relationships, here's a few things to bear in mind. Our response to new situations can also be sort of enhanced and made to feel awkward, or a bit awkward by our inability to accurately predict other people's thoughts and emotions. So, we all think we know what other people are thinking. And we think we know that people like us, think in a similar way. But actually that's not the truth. And you know, people genuinely are not thinking in exactly the same way as us. And our predictions about what they are thinking are not always right. In fact, our guesses around whether people are telling the truth, and whether they are thinking like us, we are about 50%, right, 50% wrong, so little more than chance, really. So, one thing to tell ourselves when we're for meeting new people and building that sort of narrative in our heads about what they're thinking about us, what they're thinking about the situation, is that actually we're often quite wrong. So, let's not believe what we're thinking, necessarily, take it with a pinch of salt, and ask some questions to clarify. And, you know, our need to develop that relatedness and our connection with people has a really strong evolutionary roots. And, Elizabeth, I know you talked about this in a previous podcast, so I just wondered if you could just quickly summarise for us why we have this strong desire to connect and to be part of a tribe? Well,

Elizabeth Gillies 07:13

Well, the kind of story goes, we basically have the same mind that we have had for 200,000 years. So, our mind says, you know, when we lived in the small tribes of Stone Age people, if you weren't part of the tribe, you would die quite quickly. So, being part of the tribe, you had to make sure you were a part of the tribe, and you didn't want to be thrown out, you needed to think, you know, am I doing my job as part of the tribe? Am I contributing enough? Am I being accepted? You know, Am I friendly enough with people? Am I doing the right things? Because if our mind wasn't thinking of that, then we weren't going to survive. And of course, nowadays, we don't live in these small tribes, we're highly connected with other people. But our mind sometimes goes into that default setting. And we have to know that that's what our mind does sometimes. And also, we have to remind ourselves that well, that is one way of thinking it's trying there to protect us. But actually we don't need that anymore.

Louise Wiles 08:33

And, you know, I think as we're thinking about why relatedness and building relationships is so important to us, you know, in times of transition, these relationships really help us through those periods, because when we're experiencing the positive emotions that are connected with often good relationships, so that sense of sort of joy, and compassion that we've talked about in previous session, but also trust with friends, and even love, love for our friends, love for relationships, depending on the context. That all helps us to connect and attach to social networks. And from that, we then develop our ability to cooperate and support each other, to feel physically well, intellectually well, and to prosper

emotionally. So really positive reasons for developing that sense of relatedness in our in our relationships with others. And also there are strong physiological benefits as well. So, when we're in situations of good relating, if you like, where we feel comfortable with others and good social context, we produce a hormone such as oxytocin, which reduces anxiety and increases our ability to concentrate and focus. So, there's a very positive outcome of that sort of connection if you like from a physiological perspective. And then also over time strong social connections based on our cardiovascular system, our immune systems, and that means that the better our connections, the better we function. So, it's beneficial, to develop for our bodies for our psychology, our connections and relationships. And they help to reduce our stress and increase our overall sense of well-being. And belonging to a community gives us a higher sense of life satisfaction, greater sense of self-esteem, and faster recovery from illness, apparently, as well. So, lots of positive reasons. So, over the coming weeks, we'll probably come back to this subject of relationships and connection. But I think the really good thing to know about developing relationships is there doesn't have to be any great overarching strategy or complexity around it, you know, small steps, and micro things that we can do that can move relationships further, and we will come back and discuss that in more. But one of the ones that helps is, is asking for help. And I think this is one of our weaker points as a human race, we tend not to do it, there's a lot of evidence that suggests that we are often very good at contributing and supporting others, but a bit like the self-compassion, we don't take the time to look at the help that we need, and then articulate that and ask for it. And the reason we don't well, I don't know, Elizabeth, why do you think we don't ask for help?

Elizabeth Gillies 11:34

Do you know the word that was coming to mind when you were saying that is about vulnerable. I think it's hard to be vulnerable, sometimes. It's hard to kind of be, to say that I'm struggling, partly because of all the social comparison stuff that we've been talking about. And you know, reading minds as well. You know, it's about if I'm saying I'm struggling, or I'm saying I'm vulnerable, how are people going to respond to me? So, you're kind of starting to judge what other people might be to like towards you. And in fact, most people, when we say 'I'm struggling, I'm vulnerable, I need help.' Most people are doing that compassionate thing that we talked about earlier and saying - How can I help? What can I do? So, it is a bit like kind of we're judging ourselves, we're judging how we think other people are going to view us. There's vulnerability around there isn't there Louise?

Louise Wiles 12:35

Yeah, absolutely. I think we'd kind of feel that we're going to come across as incompetent, or perhaps a bit lazy, because we're not doing it for ourselves. Or maybe we've had requests rejected in the past. And so, we know how that felt, and it wasn't particularly enjoyable and so we want to avoid that happening again. But research has shown that on the whole people do want to help. And when we make a reasonable intelligent request, the asker is more likely to be perceived as competent. So actually, the reality is the opposite way round, you know, so if we asked for help in a positive way, in a way that demonstrates that we know what we want, the person who is thinking and receiving that request will actually see us as more competent than had we not asked it in the first place. So, I think that, and that's probably a really important message for you, in the university setting, or in the work setting where you have questions about your work and what you need to understand. Ask, if you don't

know, ask, no one will judge you for that. And they'll probably see you as more competent, more organised.

Elizabeth Gillies 13:43

So Louise, I was gonna say asking for help is a strength, isn't it? If we go back to talk about strengths, asking for help, saying I'm not sure how to do this, is this how I do it? You know, it's a very, it's a good quality to have?

Louise Wiles 13:59

Yes, definitely. And if someone has previously refused your request, they're more likely to help you a second time, if you ask a second time. So, there is that request and refusal, it's difficult, I know, but perhaps go back and ask again and you'll find you'll get a different response. And also, the recipient of a request for help, is likely to feel closer to you. And that in return increases their inclination to help you and to continue to help you in the future. So, it contributes to your relationship. So, there's a positive benefit of asking for help in that sense, too. And as I said earlier, research has shown that most of us are better at as being givers than actually askers for help. And many people are over- generous givers. So, they spend all their time giving at the cost of their own performance and productivity. So, it's really important to take time out to think about this and to think about how much you do give in relation to how much you ask. So, in his book, and there's a guy called Wayne Baker who has done a lot of research about asking for help. And in his book, he says that, you know, he categorises the ideal person as a giver - requester person, who's doing both, and he reckons that only and, Elizabeth, could you guess what percentage of us overall, he's found in his research are this ideal group of giver requesters?

Elizabeth Gillies 15:49

So, you would want it to be 50:50, wouldn't you? So, how many people are equal to giving and receiving? Is that right?

Louise Wiles 15:59

Well, how many people are yes, yes, yes.

Elizabeth Gillies 16:03

10%, is that right?

Louise Wiles 16:10

Spot on, you've read the book, so 90% are actually not doing it, so that probably means most of us. And in our resources, I'll put a link and you can actually go and do an assessment and find out what your sort of giving requesting strategy is. But the whole point is that we need to think about how we ask for help. And when you do this, others will think well of you because you, you are able to, for those reasons I've talked about above, it helps you to develop relationships. So, we need to ask for help. But we also need to help learn how to ask for help in a way that gets a positive response. So, we need to think about what we're asking for help about. And Wayne Baker has a strategy for that, he calls it his not his SMART strategy. So, a bit like with the goal setting, there's a SMART strategy, there's one for asking for help, too. And it's actually different, so it's not the same as the goal setting strategy. So, SMART is an acronym. And it starts with S. S stands for being Specific. So, he says, be as specific as

possible about what you want. So, if it's information, be specific about the information that you need. So, clarity around that. Then M stands for meaningful, and that's about 'why' you are making the request. It's really important that you explain 'why' it's important to you that you get this help from somebody else. And if they understand that, then they'll be quite motivated to help you. This is why, why is a great motivator. Then A stands for Action Orientated. So, what actually needs to happen? What do you want this person to do? Realistic, don't be asking for too big a stretch, you know, for someone to help you, be realistic, you know they have busy lives, so ask them something that you think it's realistic within the time that you're giving them that they would be able to respond. And then make sure your request is Timed. So, give a deadline. So, by tomorrow, could you do X for me? And then everyone knows where they are in relation to that. So, I will put this in the notes that go with this podcast. And you can go have a look for the mnemonic there.

Elizabeth Gillies 18:32

I really liked that Louise, I like having that thought about 'why' this is important to you. Yeah, because I want to have a good grade, I want my bit of work to be in on time. You know, I want to be able to complete the first assignment or something. So, do you know, for me anyway, that meaningful bit is, that M is really important.

Louise Wiles 19:00

Yeah. And I think you know, if you're asking, you know, for support from say tutors, or you know, people in your departments, understanding that, you now that probably will set you apart from other people who're just expecting some support of some kind and haven't really defined it well. And if you have defined it well then people know that you're taking it seriously that you are clear about what you're asking for. You're not just a time waster or asking someone to do something for you because you don't want to do it yourself. You know, if you're clear about what you're wanting and why then that helps the person that you're requesting help from. So, I was thinking about, you know, in the university setting or perhaps in the work setting as you're developing your new connections, relationships and settling in and have a lot to find out and discover and to understand. Asking for Help has a really big part to play. And you know, as you develop your new friendships, take time to think about what you're asking people for help for, and how you phrase it, because that will contribute to developing the relationship with them. And think about your giving and requesting ratio, you don't want to be giving in huge excess to requesting, I don't think it has to be like for like, but you don't want to be seen as a giver, sometimes also referred to as perhaps a people pleaser, and not actually getting some support for yourself in return. And I was also thinking in a university setting, but then also in a work setting. If you're working on projects with people and you're starting meetings with people a nice way to start the meetings and to develop some connection between everyone is to say, 'Let's spend the first 5-10 minutes of this meeting just going around asking everybody well, what are you actually working on now? And what help do you need?' And then anyone within that group can offer the help if they feel qualified to do so. So, you're increasing, enhancing the resources available to everybody by the number of people in that group. And then also it gets everyone into this habit of asking for help and offering help, which I think is really powerful. Then I think more broadly thinking about is the university setting and the services that are provided, you know, this gives you a framework for asking for help. So, use the SMART acronym, but if you are needing help, financial help, or wellbeing support, you have this framework. And you can go and put together a request and ask for support. And I think it's really important at the beginning of

your time at university or in your new work setting to find out what facilities and support services are available to you. So, I know Elizabeth you had a few thoughts on this.

Elizabeth Gillies 22:01

Yeah, I think we're going to put some links in the think sheets. But there are good, Student Minds is a good one that gives lots of advice about mental health issues, in particular, but, your own university website will have some kind of portal about where to get help, now it could be help for study, it could be help for money, it could be help for accommodation. So, there'll be whole kind of hosts of things so it'd be really good to get to know your online university, before you actually arrive there. So that you see if there's support there, you know, I know, some young people who have sort of some needs, and they get those things sorted out. So, you might have a visual problem. Or you might have ADHD, or even going into a work setting, you might have a specific need to be met. And usually, universities are very supportive of those things once you have your paperwork. Best of all done, you know, before you start, try and get it all done before then and submit it and often there'll be support there for you for a particular thing. So, get to know your own university website.

Louise Wiles 23:26

Fantastic. Great. Okay, well, I hope that that has helped you think about how you might build relationships, and use asking for help as one way of building those relationships, but also supporting yourself and in getting the best resources and support you can for your time in your new career or at university.

Thank you so much for listening today. We'll be back soon with our next episode. Bye bye for now. Thank you. Bye

Further resources

Warren Baker resources on asking for help

A conversation with Dr Wayne Baker: How to Ask for Help [HERE](#)

Book: *All You Have to do is Ask.* Wayne Baker. Currencybooks

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