



A TIME TO THRIVE

**Successful
Student
Transitions**

A TIME TO THRIVE

Episode Nine

**Nurturing Supportive Relationships
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

Louise Wiles 00:00

Hello sorry. Hello, and a very warm welcome to Episode Nine of student transitions. I'm Louise Wiles, and I'm here together with...

Elizabeth Gillies 00:17

Elizabeth Gillies.

Louise Wiles 00:20

It's lovely to be back with you again today. So, today we're going to be talking about friendships. I know that you are starting new lives, either you are moving into a new life at university or taking on a new role, a new career in a new workplace. And so developing friendships and new connections will be a big part of that experience. And we know it can be quite a charged experience. So we thought today, we would spend some time thinking about 'why' it can feel quite the challenge it does, often, and offer tips for coping with that. So we're talking about friend, making friends in your new place, and then in the future, we'll have another session talking about friendship with yourself. So just to make that distinction up front, so you know, what we're talking about today. So let's start talking a bit about the issue and why it is such an issue. We hear quite a bit at the start of university academic years about how students feel this sense of social anxiety around finding their place, if you like, in the new social environment. So there are lots of ideas and reasons why this might be. So we'll talk through some of those now. So Elizabeth, do you wanna kick off?

Elizabeth Gillies 01:43

I think there's a, there's a kind of almost a straightforward explanation about why, you know, people might struggle to get those friends at university because, you're coming from a place where you know your friends at school, you've maybe been there for a long time, and you've got an established group, or even established groups, maybe a few people that are your true good friends, and you've made them over a long period of time. And so remember in the transition cycle, when we talked in podcast one, where you go from a place of feeling settled, and knowing your friends, knowing the place you are in, knowing what you're studying, to leaving and going somewhere new. So those friends are being left behind most of the time, and you're going into a new place where you have to meet some new people. So it's not surprising, in this kind of part of, you know part of young people's development, their friendships are very important to them, it helps them develop their identity helps them kind of discover who they like to be with and what they like to do. So it's not a surprise that this going, you know, when you go to work or university, that friendship is a big issue. Will I make friends? And also, I think we've got to remember that we're social beings. And so, remember, we talked in a previous podcast about worries, comparing ourselves with other people? Are we fitting in the group? Am I going to be rejected? Am I doing enough to be accepted? So when you're entering into a new place, that will be heightened. You want to be part of a group, we know that social connections are good for us, they're good for our, our mood, they're good for our physical health, they're good for actually living a longer life. The study by Robert Waldinger from Harvard, looking at what made people have a long satisfied life, was about

having quality social connections. So we kind of know within ourselves that this is an important thing to do. And going into a new place can be a bit tricky. What do you think?

Louise Wiles 04:17

Yeah, and I think drawing on that as well, we talked about in a previous episode, and we will put the link in the notes to this as well. But we talked about the importance of being in the 'in group', and why from a biological perspective, and a security safety perspective that was so important to our ancestors, and that still is an important thing for us today. You know, we feel threatened and a bit fearful if we're not part of a group, or we're observing other groups that we're not part of. So if you're walking around campus and you're looking around and you're seeing people in group and you're not in one, it is quite a natural feeling to feel a bit uncomfortable about that, and to wish that you perhaps had your own group. And hopefully over time, you will become part of a group, you know. And that's, I suppose one of the things to think about, and we'll come on to talk about 'how' to make your way into groups and create friendships in groups. But just to normalise that feeling and recognise that. And I suppose that leads me on to say, it's a roller coaster ride this sort of social, creating these new friendships and developing new friendships. And one day, you'll feel great, I've made some lovely new friends or a lovely new friend and had great conversation. And it's all looking good. I've been out to your pub and the club and it was all good. And then the next day, perhaps you don't hear from them, you think perhaps they've gone out without you. And suddenly, it feels very different. And that normal, and you probably will find everyone is having these ups and downs. But what happens is people don't share that, because they don't want to admit to feeling uncomfortable, you know, that is a stage of a relationship when you start to share that content. And initially, when you're making those friends, relational stages of friendship, you often don't share that level of detail with others. So it can be challenging, because you're looking at things no one else is feeling the way you're feeling. Actually, some of them will be. But it's totally normal to be feeling that way. And I think it's important that we say that.

Elizabeth Gillies 06:50

Yeah, I think that's spot on Louise. I mean, that kind of worry that some people might have or say, 'Oh, can I share that this is really hard for me.' But you know, it's one of those help things that help when you're vulnerable. Remember, when we talked about the podcast about asking for help, sometimes having a vulnerability will aid that relationship building. And there was a recent sort of, it's been all over the press, we're doing this in October 22. But recently, there was something in a study that was published in Oxford by somebody called Robin Dunbar. And he looked at friendship development and wanting to kind of really explore this, because what an important protective factor is in our life. And he came up with some really interesting kind of statistics. So like making a friend, he suggests in his research, takes five and a half months. We need about 34 hours of 'investment'. I like that word, to shift from a superficial friendship, to a true friend. And he talks about having 11 interactions, about three hours, so this is not just going for a quick cup of coffee. This is like intense talking. So it's not small, fast paced things. It's about, you know, spending time investment, effort to, if we're thinking about investment is about the dividends that you'll reap from that. So, you know, you could be quite frustrated, and say 'I talked to this person, I talked to that person', you need to do it for depth and a long time and consistently, in order for those friendships to be developed. Yeah, so it's interesting isn't that we can think, oh, maybe we'll make in that friendship frenzy that people talk about at the beginning of university, you're not going to make those true friends well into after the first term it's going to take, it's

going to take quite a bit of time, but we want it early on, because of the reason we've talked about before, because we want that social connection. We want to feel good with other people. But it takes time.

Louise Wiles 09:12

Yeah. So I would say perhaps one of the ways to kind of think about is recognising it will take time. Is just to note each day the achievements you've made in developing friendships. So have you met somebody new that you clicked with because you were talking about a certain subject and it felt good, did you have a nice conversation with a group of people over dinner or in your, if you're in an apartment with your mates in your kitchen. Just noticing those moments of connection and, and recognising that each time they're a step forward, a step forward to this point where you will feel comfortable and enjoying that process. That's the other thing. You know, thinking about it as a process that we all have to go through and it's an enjoyable one because we get to discover new things about new people, and to learn about others, and to make choices about friendships as well. And I think that's a really important point because not everyone is going to be the kind of person you want to be friends with. So as well as feeling you've got to make friends, and that feeling that pressure, it's really important that you think about, well, what kind of friends do I want, what's important to me in friendship, so thinking about your beliefs around what makes a good friendship, and the values you have about what you put into your friendships, what's important to you, and what you hope your new friends will be too.

Elizabeth Gillies 10:39

There's something that will include in the, in the Think Notes, and it's called a friendship funnel. So it's hard to explain where we're just listening. But imagine a V. And at the top of the V, you know, there's a, there's a, there's a kind of line where you've got lots of acquaintances, and then the next layer down would be about, you know, having people that you spend a bit of time with and then there will be the people that you're actually going to make more of an effort to actually be with and then, you know, there's people that you're going to see on a regular basis, you seek out, you do a lot of things together. And then at the bottom, you know, you've got your core one person or, you know, Robin Dunbar talks about, you know, having those true friendships that are maybe you're a small group, they're not going to be large groups. So again, it's about you might have different groups of friends, you might have a group of friends that you know, you go to a particular lecture with, or you work on a particular task with or you have a study group with, or you go out after work with. So it's about not just having one group of friends, which maybe we can tend to think about, but having different groups of friends, that fill fulfil different kind of functions for you. So, you know, the good thing about you know going to university and work is that you are in social places, where you've got space and time, as Louise says, to set up those processes of making friends. So, you know, university gives you a little bit more of a freedom and flexibility about it. Work is more about, a lot more continuity and putting you in constant kind of face to face with people where you're maybe working on projects together. It's maybe a lot more kind of structured, but they're both fantastic places to be to make friends.

Louise Wiles 12:46

Yeah, absolutely. And thinking about what I said about you what's important in those friendships to you, you had some really good questions.

Elizabeth Gillies 12:54

I think we've also got to remember that we're seeing friendships are a protective factor in life. Sometimes some friendships aren't. And maybe we'll have another session as well, thinking about how do you deal with that? How do you deal with friendships that are difficult. But you know, I think going into like Louise said being open and going to try friendships. So to try these relationships out is a really good thing. I kind of think it's a little bit for me, like, you have to try on clothes to see if they're a good fit, and you look good in them. And I think friendships are a bit like that as well. Does this feel good for me? So my questions around friendships would be. Do they feel they like you for who you are? Not about who you might portray to be but for who are? 'I'm having a hard time with this at the moment.' You know, they like you because you can be honest about how you're feeling? Do they respond and listen when you need help? So you know, are they that shoulder to cry on? Somebody you can really rely on. And you're not going to necessarily get that, if we think about that six months that Robin Dunbar is talking about. That's going to take a little bit of time. Can you share important things with them. And they do that for you. So there's a two way street here. It's not just one way. Are they somebody that is a life enhancer that adds to your life and maybe you are for them too. So you know some good questions to be thinking about, 'yeah, they're possibilities in my life there. There's something that can add to me and me to them. Remembering that it takes time.

Louise Wiles 14:43

Yeah. And it's a two way process. I think that's the really important thing. It's not just you giving so thinking back to the previous episode where we talked about asking for help and giving and receiving help, but making sure that you are getting something back and they are participating in that relationship. And equally as well, it's really important.

Elizabeth Gillies 15:06

And how you are in these friendships are really important. Like, can you be yourself and stuff like that is good. And I know maybe starting work and starting, you want to kind of put a kind of good face on and whatever. The interesting thing about this Dunbar study as well, they found that there were certain qualities that were important for friendship. And 61% of their respondents think that having a sense of humour was an essential ingredient in friendship. Isn't that good? Isn't that nice? So, and they also said, something that you said earlier, Louise, about 44% said it was about values. So having similar values, and also there was something there about being driven by similar interests and activities, being trustworthy, being reliable. So you could be thinking to yourself, you know, can I bring my sense of humour to this, you know. First of all, do I know what my values are and how I look for people with similar ones? And am I trust, I just show up, you know, I'm a trustworthy. And also, you know, those are for basic friendships and into that true level of friendship, maybe it's about people knowing you're there in the hard times for them, and they are for you. That's kind of maybe about true friendships, isn't it?

Louise Wiles 16:34

And I think, it's interesting, isn't it? Because one of the points you raised there was of having a shared interest? So yeah, I think that for me, that is a really important one. So if you don't know what your interests are, then that's quite difficult. So spending some time to think about what am I interested in? And what do I want spend time doing, because when you're doing something, it's so much easier to make a connection with people. And you've got that shared purpose behind an activity. So think about

interests. And I know at university, there are plenty of clubs, and it's almost too much I think, you're perhaps feeling a bit overwhelmed by it all. But yeah, making sure that you've chosen a few of those interest groups that you enjoy and meeting people through those.

Elizabeth Gillies 17:26

So I think that's good Louise, you're kind of thinking about, well, what can you do? So, you know, join things. There are things on university sites that are actually focused on how you can do this. Because they know people might have been not doing this these kind of things recently. So like we said, joining societies, hanging out in areas where other people are going to be taking up invitations of stuff and making invitations, organising a study group, organising something, you know, a place where you're all going to meet up after work. So that doing things, you almost have to be willing to have some nerves and discomfort about it, knowing you're doing it because you want to have connection with other people.

Louise Wiles 18:26

And I think also the important thing that struck me about doing is that it can feel a bit like you're doing everything and no one else is. And the reality is a lot of people are quite complacent. You know, not everyone will do, there are doers. And it can feel I suppose that you're trying too hard, if you're the one that's doing all the doing, but that isn't necessarily it doesn't mean about you, and perhaps a judgement about other people who aren't doing, who are quite complacent and just quite happy to follow the flow. I mean, that's another thing to think some people will just go with the flow. And you know, whether they then ultimately make really good friends in the end, who knows. But I guess there's also this balance between doing and being, and you want to do and take action, but also give yourself a chance just to be and to relax and enjoy things. Rather than thinking I'm going to be driving all the time to make these conversations, have those conversations and meet those people, because that's exhausting. It is exhausting thing. Yeah.

Elizabeth Gillies 19:40

I was also thinking about Louise, going back to that self compassion podcast that we did about being kind to yourself in this transition. And especially around that if you really want friends, and it's not going the way you want, it's being compassionate to you. And having things in your toolkit like that, but also having other things with you when you're at university or you're thinking of going, I mean, often people are advised to take one of those doorstops with them, so that they can have their door open when they need it and closed, you know, when they when they weren't some time on their own. So it's not about you have to be out there all of the time, it's really important to have some time to yourself. And something I read on one of the university websites that said, take some some games with you social games, like Twister, or some games like that, so that you can, can can say, oh, anybody Fancy a game of Twister at my place tonight or something. So you're inviting people in, not just to sit about and talk but to kind of do things that you can think back on. So other things to take with you maybe a kind of book of the city, you're going to the place you're going, to and explore roundabout. Recipe books or something that you can maybe make and cook together have a have a you know, I've got this really good spaghetti bowl needs. Who wants that tonight? So being able to offer in, you know, make experiences, is really important

Louise Wiles 21:25

And there's also some research about it's from a professor Jane Dutton, whose researches into sort of social connections and relationships, and she talks about the value of positive micro moments. So the value of just those those little hellos, how are you, smiles, those small things that we do that build the beginnings of connection, but really help you to feel that you're part of a community. And apparently, they really support our deep psychological need to feel respected and valued and appreciated. And yet, they're small things. So it is just, yeah, perhaps after a while, once you've been in your accommodation, or in your new office, if you're in a new office situation, you perhaps stop doing these things because you think it doesn't matter, I've been here a while, everyone knows me now. But you know just going in and just smiling at everybody and saying good morning, offering people a coffee, those small micro moments make a massive difference, not just to you, but to everyone else. So take time to remember those. You know, as you're running out of your residence or hall in the morning, going to a lecture as you pass people, smile and wave and say 'hi', and your brighten their day as well as yours and if you get a response from them then that's self-reinforcing too.

Elizabeth Gillies 22:52

Love that. So, we've concentrated a little bit on the things that you do. And we've started we also did a little bit about how you think. And I kind of like this idea of scripts. And I don't want you to kind of hold too tightly to this. But about especially when you're new somewhere. How are you going to introduce yourself? What you're going to say about yourself and maybe sometimes you need a short version of the long version, you know, that you might want to say something amusing or interesting. I think that's a good thing to have. And going back to the thing that Louise was talking about earlier, is really watch that mind you have, that kind of active mind, that compares itself with other people, it's prone to do that. And maybe kind of like use that when you're thinking about 'everybody else is making friends, am I?' Use that mind to say, 'Oh, that's me telling myself, that mind is saying friendships are important, so that's what I've got to do.' That's where it comes from. It comes from that need for us to kind of be healthy and happy in social connection, so you can remind yourself of where it's coming from. And then be willing to do the kind of difficult and that thing that gives you a bit of discomfort to go and do the things that you need to do. And then the other thing that I would say about the thinking bit, go back to when we talked about in podcast one I think it was about strengths, and how you're going to use your particular strengths. And of course if you've got a strength of humour this is going to suit you well making friendships, but think about if you know if one of your strengths is something like perseverance. 'I'm gonna keep at this I know it's gonna take me six months at least to find friends.' So be using the things that are 'in you' to kind of help me move forward in this process of making friends. What are you thinking about?

Louise Wiles 25:09

Yes, I'm thinking, yeah, definitely I like the idea of thinking about what you want to share about yourself with others. And an understanding your strengths, most definitely because I'm very pro strengths. I think also, perhaps just creating you in your mind some questions you can ask other people. So if you're sitting, having a meal with someone, you know, you've got some questions in your mind that you might follow up and ask them. And, you know, one of the things that I would think about question is, when you first sit down with somebody, you might say, 'Oh, hi, how are you?' That's usual. 'How are you? Fine. How are you? Fine.' Okay, where's the conversation going next? So, need to ask things

like: 'How's your day been? What's been the best bit of your day? What was most interesting about your day? What did you do last night? What was fun about it?' So asking those follow on questions that gets them to give you more detail, that really generates, and people love to be invited to talk. So if you are the person that does that, people will remember you for that, because they'll remember that you made them feel comfortable, and that you were interested in them. And that's quite an unusual feeling. Because people often are very prepared to talk at you. But they don't often show any real interest or real genuine interest in you. So if you're that person who's doing that, that can make a difference as well. And the other thing I was just thinking about in terms of the stories we tell ourselves as well, we'll create all kinds of stories about what's going on, outside of ourselves, situations and friendships, around the room or in the canteen, or wherever you are. And we're right about 50% of the time, the rest we're not. So don't get too hung up on your internal stories, challenge them, ignore them, and just carry it on, because we do create these complex stories that kind of justify perhaps what we're wanting to think or we think we should think about a situation, which often are incorrect. So, don't rely on those. Particularly, I mean, obviously, if it's pretty clear what the situation is that's fine. If you're talking to people and they turn their back on you and they want to talk to you. I mean, I talked to my daughter the other day, and she was saying there's an area where people meet, before they go out to socialise, and go out to their social events. And they'll meet and sit down and wait for their friends to join them and then they will go off together. And two guys decided, well, we're going to see if we can a little social experiment that can see if we can get these people to talk to us. So they sat down at one of these tables. And these other people all turn their backs on them and didn't talk to them. Yeah. So in that situation, I think you just kind of have to laugh and say it's more a reflection on the other people than you. You were there with the right intentions. They're wrong with just being unfriendly and move on. And I think that's true of friendship. Sometimes we have to just choose Yeah, this isn't the right situation, the right group, the right feeling, so I will just move on.

Elizabeth Gillies 28:16

Yeah, I'm friendships change, don't they. You know, in the Dunbar's study, that was one of the things that they found, was that friendships, often some friendships have a life of about seven years, and then they moved on. So friendships are fluid, right? They're a process, they're fluid. I don't know if this is a good place to end or not. But there was, I was reading something recently, and there was a quote by George Bernard Shaw. He said, 'life isn't about finding yourself, it's about creating yourself.' And I really liked that. I like that in terms of kind of building your friendships, you have to be active in this process of it.

Louise Wiles 29:02

Yeah, yeah, I like that really like that. That's a great note to finish on. And I just want to add one final thought. And that is, if you're in a new work situation, a new location, because of your work situation, making friends, or university making friends. Remember that these are some of your new friends. But you will also have a social network that is located back home, or connections elsewhere. They're also really important so don't forget to maintain those connections to talk to those people, and continue communications with them and developing those friendships because they're part of your broader social network. It's not just about where you are right now. But you have a network, not just in one location. Remember those friendships, and draw on support from them as well.

Elizabeth Gillies 30:02

I agree. Maybe you keep the old, some are silver, others gold

Louise Wiles 30:11

Brilliant. Well, that is definitely a good place to finish today. Thank you very much for listening everyone. Bye for now.

Resources

Robin Dunbar. Friends: *Understanding the Power of our Most Important Relationships*. Little Brown 2021

Making friends is hard but work can help www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2022/10/05/new-study-making-friends-is-hard-but-work-can-help/?sh=85508497a774

Sue Larkey at www.suelarkey.com.au

Robert Waldinger TED talk [/www.ted.com/speakers/robert_waldinger](https://www.ted.com/speakers/robert_waldinger)

Heathy Mind Platter by Dan Siegel and David Rock

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