

A T I M E T O T H R I V I N G

Successful Student Transitions

Fundamentals for Well-being
Dynamics for THRIVING
through change

Episode 24 Sleep Fundamentals
Why Sleep Matters

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 to develop self-awareness, understanding and the ability to thrive through times of transition.

This episode is part of Series Three: Fundamentals for Well-being – Dynamics for thriving through change and transition.

This is the full transcript with links to associated episodes.

You can also access the show notes, resources and worksheets mentioned in the podcasts 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 - Introduction

“So let’s start off by thinking about why sleeps there? Well at the heart of it we are all animals and we are programmed to be active in the day and asleep at night. And at night in rest and recovery there’s many processes taking place across our whole body and we are starting to understand the importance of this restorative part of the day and the processes that take place.” Elizabeth Gillies

And welcome to Successful Student Transitions, a podcast where we aim to help students thrive through any life change and transition.

Perhaps you’re facing a big life change, moving to university, a year abroad, a work placement or out into the world of work. Times of change like these can be both exciting and challenging. Our aim is to support you as you step out and find your new gear.

Using the latest from research in this field we will be suggesting ideas from evidence-based practice to help you enhance your well-being. Our mission - to help you settle well and thrive in this next stage of your life.

If you’d like to access the full transcript and learn more about our other podcast episodes click on the link shown the podcast description given on your podcast app. That will take you our website where you can download the full transcript for free, and while you’re there why not register for our newsletter, so we can keep in touch and send you other goodies as well.

So, lets get started, today’s episode is devoted to the very important topic of ‘sleep’ and we start with a few words on sleep from Raphie who was one of our student voices in the Voices in Transition series, Episode 11.

“It’s so easy to just sleep until like midday, one o’clock, because obviously, for the first time, your life, you’re not at home, and you haven’t got a parent watching you. But I know a few people who did that. And it just, that just leads to really bad mental health. So I think trying your best to stay in a routine. I mean, like, obviously, there were days where I slept in, after nights out and things like that, it goes without saying, there has to be a balance. But you know, generally in the week trying to, you know, I’m not saying you’re gonna make every lecture and you’re gonna wake up at 8am every day, but just just keeping a handle on a bit of a routine, and having a little bit of exercise, I think just like a bit of everything in moderation, really.”

So sleep matters and in this episode we discuss why, and how we can improve on this most fundamentals of well-being practices.

Elizabeth Gillies 01:54

Welcome to Successful Student Transitions - A time to thrive. We're on part of the series of Fundamentals for Well-being. And today, Louise Wiles and myself, Elizabeth Gillies, are going to be talking about sleep, the benefits and challenges. There's an author called Matthew Walker, he's a neuroscientist. And he says that sleep is the most important factor to our physical and mental health. It's fundamental to us all. And when you're a student, or you're working somewhere, you're often on

your own in a new place, needing lots of energy to do different things. Having fillers and drains and maybe if you're not sleeping well a drain could be part of that thing if you're not sleeping. So we're going really focus on sleep today. And before we were kind of recording today, Louise said a really interesting thing about, it's such an active thing, but actually a kind of almost like passive thing as well. So we're bringing it up to make it a really active thing and talk about it. And we're going to talk about the science of sleep, and we have to say the story so far, because there's so much we don't know about sleep, but something that's fundamental to us all. And we're starting to understand more about it. So we're going to talk about the science, what gets in the way, some strategies that might help you get a good night's sleep. Some of them might be not what you expect. We'll link in how the PERMA framework might fit in. And we're going to share some resources for you.

Elizabeth Gillies 03:39

So let's start off by thinking about why sleeps there? Well at the heart of it we are all animals and we are programmed to be active in the day and asleep at night. And at night in rest and recovery there's many processes taking place across our whole body and we are starting to understand the importance of this restorative part of the day and the processes that take place. And I guess we all know the benefits of a good night's sleep. In the short term, we feel quite refreshed and ready for the day. And even a poor night's sleep, just one, can affect us. Think about what happens to you, if you've had a disturbed night, maybe noise around you, or maybe the effects of having too much alcohol, or you just didn't get into that window or going to bed at the right time. So there are short term benefits, but the longer term benefits are becoming much more clear for our well-being. So people talk about the Circadian Cycle. And that's the 24 hour body clock that's in charge of sleep waking cycle that's linked to day and night, light and dark. And of course, we're living in times where there's artificial light. So we've got to be in some ways even more conscious about when it's supposed to be dark and it's light and what we're doing. And our body is primed to be in partnership with the natural world. And it makes sense to be active in light and rest during the nighttime. And this body, a bit like what we've been talking about with our fundamentals, it's not just one thing, but it's a complex system of things that play dynamically together. And for different people, there'll be different things that are in play for us about sleep throughout the day, not just when it gets to nighttime.

Elizabeth Gillies 05:40

So we know that there are important neurotransmitters that release and get activated at different times of the day. In the morning, you likely know this one called cortisol. It gets us up in the morning, it wakes up our body, it starts to give our energy it gets us hungry. And then throughout the day, especially if you get out early in the morning, serotonin is released and that manages your mood and energy. And that early morning light is really really important to it. Then when evening comes around, the excess serotonin if there is some, is actually converted into melatonin and melatonin is that thing that we know helps us get to sleep. It doesn't help us stay asleep but it's that neurotransmitter that's kind of working to make us feel tired and sleepy. So you can see this dynamic of things. You don't just need melatonin but you need you need the cortisol to wake you up in the morning. The serotonin to be activated and in your body to help your mood and then the excess of that gets made into melatonin. So there's a really interesting dynamic of things and we can influence these things happening. Of course, if you lie in bed all day, your serotonin is not going to be made, or if you if you do certain things, or if you maybe eat later at night, because that's going to have an impact on our circadian rhythm because it's not only like

we feel, you know, are, we feel that we've got this circadian rhythm, but organs in our body have that, so our heart and our lungs and our stomach, they almost like have their own circadian clocks, their clocks are important, and it's about working with them. So you might know that, if you eat really late at night, as I said, that might interfere with your sleep, because your stomachs kind of have to do that. So a regularity of what you do, and how you do things throughout the day is going to affect your sleep, not just when you go to sleep.

Elizabeth Gillies: 08:04

And we know that hormones are released during sleep, that repair our cells and influence our use of energy. And these changes can affect body weight, your immune system, the energy you have. And also, during the night, our brains are almost washed with a fluid that gets rid of debris from neurons firing in that thinking process. So that important aspect that your brains washed in the night is really important for you to remember things and to have kind of a good working brain the next day. And dream state sort of are really important to thinking about how memories consolidated. So sleep is a really protective factor for our body and how it's working, and our mind and our brains and how it's working. And there's some sleep cycles that happen, and they have different functions at different times of these cycles. So they'll be deep sleep cycles and dream cycles. And when these kind of cycles are going through each one of them is important to you. So if you get a short amount of sleep, you're likely not getting all the cycles you need. We also know that part of us, as humans, some people are described as larks, right, in our sleep. So we're kind of fundamentally all the same, but there's differences within us. So we're alert in the morning, and we like to go to bed early in the evening. And other people are night owls. So we're alert in the evening, and we like to sleep in and, and often that's more of a kind of young adult, teenage kind of sleep cycle, isn't it? Where you, you know, you're really and maybe not wanting to go to bed and 'oh no, it's time to get up again.' So it's kind of good to know which one you are. So if you know you're a night owl, then it might be important to try and wind down at the end of the day. And also to make sure you're getting up early in the morning at some point to get some light, and if you know you're a lark, you know, get your work done early in the morning because you're going to go to bed early. So fitting in with about what you know about yourself and works for you. Louise, what do you think you are? Are you a night owl? Or are you a lark?

Louise Wiles 10:50

I used to think I was a night owl. Yeah, because I would work late, but I can't do that anymore. So I don't know whether you can change. But neither am I a Lark. So I am somewhere in between. Go to bed at 11 get up at 7. I don't think I could ever be, you know, you hear about all these people with their morning routines that get up at 4am. That's never been me. So yeah, I'm somewhere in between the two. I think

Elizabeth Gillies 11:24

And I think I would say I would say the same. I mean, I know I'm not I'm, if I was to choose one I'd be more kind of in the middle but I'd be more of the night owl. I'm certainly not a lark. When I've got to get up in the morning. It does cause me a little bit of stress in my body, I'm aware of it. Especially I've got up in the morning and I've got to get somewhere. I know then for me the night before, getting a good night's sleep is pretty important.

Elizabeth Gillies 11:53

And of course, there's a little bit of debate as well about how many hours sleep we need. Some people talk about 7/8. However, you know, for teenagers, often teenagers need a lot more sleep, because there's lots of growth happening in your body. So, be kind of aware of one, about how important sleep is. And two, about, we're going to be talking to you about how to understand your own sleep as well. But given the information that it affects all our body, all our brain likely you know, you can read things about Alzheimer's, and you know that's a long term challenge is that maybe sleeps been, whether it's a chicken and egg thing where that comes first or whatever, we don't really know. But certainly people with Alzheimer's, they often have poor sleep, for a number of years before that. So who wouldn't want to get a good night's sleep?

Elizabeth Gillies 13:00

So we know that sleep difficulties, it's a challenge to us when we're not sleeping well. And there might be kind of things we could take into an equation or think about how these contribute, so, are you making sleep a priority? Knowing all these important things that sleep does for you if you're going to give it a number, it's my number 10? Or is that a number 1? And of course, it might change if you've got a lot of time, pressure and to get work done, that might change. But try and make sleep some kind of priority. We know that stress and worries maybe might affect your sleep. So we're thinking about how you might manage that. We know that there you know there can be problems where you sleep, can have a an impact on sleep. So if you're maybe sleeping in a noisy, where there's a lot of noise around, or you were maybe even working in your bed as well, using your bed as a workplace that can interfere with it. You know, we all know jetlag can interfere with with sleep. Changing time zones, caffeine, drugs or alcohol. Some medications can interfere with sleep. If you've got mental and health problems, they can also, anything else that I haven't mentioned that can interfere sleep.

Louise Wiles 14:30

A snoring partner.

Elizabeth Gillies 14:32

Yes. Noisy? Yes,

Louise Wiles 14:35

I guess that's noise isn't it? Yeah, not having a routine around sleep and not, you know, going to sleep at same time. I don't know. I think, I do wonder whether age is part of it as well. Because I definitely, yeah, we're talking to you as students. And I don't think I ever thought much about sleep when I was a student other than I'm tired, I'll go to bed earlier tonight. So I mean, perhaps I should have done and I'd have been more productive and energetic had I had more sleep. But I think our sleep profile probably does change over time as well.

Elizabeth Gillies 15:10

I think it does. And knowing, as well, what we talked about in the Well-being Bucket and PERMA, if sleep is an important thing for you, then when you don't sleep, there's the challenge. So try and kind of

make sure you've got enough sleep in your bucket so that if you've got other challenges, it's not going to it's not going to take it away.

Elizabeth Gillies 15:34

So when we're thinking about how you promote sleep, and of course, in each of these segments, there's you know, there's people write books about all this stuff, and what we've tried to do is just take a few things that might be more straightforward things to think about. And we know that different things will work for different people, but it might be worth keeping a sleep diary, about looking at when you're having a good night's sleep, what contributes to that, or what's interfering with it? So people have you know, if you go onto the internet, you can find sleep diaries, but it could be a useful thing about just think about when you're going to sleep, kind of roughly what time are you continuing to sleep throughout the night, waking up? Is there some disturbance or can you then get back to sleep quickly? So keeping a sleep diary is a really good thing to do. Maybe also in your sleep diary, think about what you're eating, drinking and what your exercise you're doing, that might impact on it. Maybe record it for about seven days and see if there's any patterns. And try and do the more helpful than the hindering stuff. People talk about resetting your circadian clock. And often advice is to get up, at least 20 minutes out of light in the morning, we've sort of said that. Outside is much better than in, to set your circadian and your body clocks, eating at regular intervals, that'll start your serotonin release. Eating serotonin rich foods, and we are going to be talking about nutrition in another level and see the dynamic of things that are happening together. So things high in protein, like eggs, chicken, nut seeds, things like that, will give you that sort of boost throughout your day so then it can be converted into melatonin. And so try and keep a pattern asleep and wake times when you sleep. Try your your environment to be cool, quiet, comfortable. Careful, as I said not to work in your bed, don't use it as a desk. Weighted blankets are sometimes quite good. And that dark, try to have a dark room, it's supposed to be really important to get to sleep. Try and limit your electronics before bed. Have that phone charged away from your bed, is it the last thing you do at night, and the first thing you do in the morning - pick up that phone? I know I'm conscious of doing that sometimes. But you know, I know there's you can monitor how much you're on these screens? Because of course that light will affect how you're going to sleep. But be conscious of, is that one of the things that's helping or hindering? What's your bedtime routine? Do you wind down? Do you signal change and that transition that you're moving from and you know, a time when you're moving and doing lots, to a more restful recovery time? How can you relax? How can you switch off your mind? Do you listen to music? Do you do something that's boring to send you off to sleep? Building relaxation, mindfulness, body scanning things, there's lots of apps we'll maybe share some with you, that work well to kind of make that a transition time to signal to your body, signal to your mind. Yeah, this is a time for recovery. If you're lying awake and trying to fall asleep, try not to struggle with it. That's a hard thing to do. But try and kind of like relax and breathe into that. If you're not sleeping, kind of people suggest you get up after 20 minutes. You don't want to associate bed and not sleeping. So try and kind of use your bed as a place just to sleep. And don't lie in bed if you're not sleeping. So those are the kind of nighttime things and the daytime things are about avoiding excess alcohol and stimulants. What's your caffeine intake, sometimes caffeine throughout the day can cause difficulties in falling asleep. And be careful of caffeine in tea as well as in coffee, and chocolate. Making sure you get exercise in the day, people say about 20 minutes at least. Have those consistent meal times and avoid eating heavy meals before bed. Try not to go to bed hungry. Try avoiding naps. Sometimes, people might manage their worries during the you know, during the daytime. And maybe we'll refer you back to

that minding your mind podcast that we had. One of the things that we said in there is that having a time to worry, if you're worried about things, setting yourself a worry time can be good, so that you know, if it comes up for you, you can say if I'm going to worry about that later at that other time. Louise, you said something earlier about bookending your day?

Louise Wiles 20:59

So, I think this links to something that we said in the PERMA session around writing down at the end of your day, things that you're grateful for, accomplishments throughout the day, so things that you've achieved during the day. I noticed for me, it helps if I sit down and write down what I'm grateful for, accomplishments. And then I just write down the key things I want to do first thing the next day. And I just put that to one side. And that kind of finishes the day. But it's also highlighting in my mind what's going to happen the next day. So I think the idea is that subconsciously, when you're sleeping, you know, some of those connections will be being made. And hopefully that helps you, when you wake up in the morning, you're clear on what's coming next. So the book ending the day is recognising that actually, how you go to sleep, at the end of one day, is really how your next day is going to be. So it's, it's finishing the day well, it's preparing well for the next day, and preparing yourself to sleep well, too. Yeah. And the other thing I would say round exercise is the recommendation is that you don't do too, too heavy exercise just before you go to bed, so often to leave two or three hours before you go to bed to give yourself time to wind down your body to wind down, the adrenaline to calm down and everything. So exercising, yeah, throughout the day, anytime. But perhaps very gentle stretching kind of exercise, fine before bed, but don't go and do some CrossFit training one hour before you want to go to sleep, because certainly in my experience that just wakes me up and I don't go to sleep very easily.

Elizabeth Gillies 22:47

So remember this whole podcast series is about transition. And going into sleep is a transition. That kind of thing that Louise said about bookending, you have to end well to make a good new beginning. And that's what we talked about in those early discussions about what transitions are about. You have to end well, you have to finish off all things, you have to leave, you know, leave well leave your day behind well, in order to make this next day. And to view it as a transition and do something intentional, like this is, you know, really, it's really important. And of course, if you've got any problems for sleep, you know, ask for some help. There are places out there, you know, go to your GP or there are places out there that will help you, there are sleep clinics, there are things you know, that you may get some help from. And we're gonna just kind of try and finish these fundamental series off with the same kind of thoughts and questions about linking PERMA to this. So think about noticing. Notice about how sleep is related to your positive emotions. You know, when you have a good night's sleep? What happens to your emotions? Or what doesn't happen to your emotions? Notice how sleep impacts your Engagement with things. That's the E isn't it? Notice how sleep affects your Relationships. And how if you have a good night's sleep, or not a good night's sleep, how that affects relationships you have with other people. Notice how sleep affects what matters to you, and the meaning you make and things and notice how sleep can have an impact on your accomplishment. And having noticed those things, what can you do about it?

Elizabeth Gillies 25:00

So bringing your awareness to it, and then choosing to do something intentionally about it, putting sleep up the higher priority level for you, if it is an issue for you. So that's how we're going to bring sleep and PERMA in a close relationship and also be thinking about how sleep, poor sleep is on your well-being bucket. Does it have a high register with you or a low one, so some some resources to share with you if you want to read a little bit more. The Matthew Walker book is a really good book and it's called Why We sleep. Nick Littlehales has written a book just called 'Sleep;. The Sleep book, How to Sleep well every night, by Dr Guy Matthews is also a good book. And for listening Headspace is a great App. As is Calm, Headspace is www.headspace.com and calm is www.calm.com. You can look up a sleep journal online, there's a there's some You Tube stuff that's quite good on that. And if you do need some professional help, think about your GP. Think about university support services or your Work Support Service. Mind www.mind.org.uk has got some really useful information on sleep. And there is a sleep charity in the UK. And it is called the sleep charity. And they also have some really good information about sleep on the website. So we're hoping this brings you a good night's sleep, so that you can rest and recover. Finish your day well. Ready to start the next day. Thanks for listening.

Resources:

We hope you have found this episode on sleep helpful.

Why not take some time now to think about the key messages for you from this podcast. Does sleep feed or drain your well-being bucket? What small changes could you make to enhance your sleep?

If you are listening to this podcast for the first time, you may be interested to link back to the three episodes that provide the background knowledge for Series Three.

Episode 21: – introduces you to the series – **Fundamentals for Well-being – The Dynamics for Thriving through change.**

Episode 22: – **Well-being Foundations:** describes the framework we have referred to in this session called PERMA based on the work of Professor Martin Seligman.

Episode 23: – **The Well-being Bucket**, introduces you to a fun way of thinking about your well-being inputs and leaks.

Episode 11: - **Student Voices in Transition** - Raphie

Books:

- Why We Sleep, The New Science of Sleep and Dreams – Matthew Walker
- Sleep – Nick Littlehales
- The Sleep Book: How to Sleep Every Night - Dr Guy Walker

Online Apps and Resources:

- Calm App – Calm.com
- Headspace App – Headspace.com
- Mind – Mind.org.uk
- The Sleep Charity - Thesleepcharity.org.uk

If you are really struggling please seek support from your GP, your Well-being Services at college/university or other mental health professionals.

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