

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 28**  
**Relationships that Matter**

# 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***

## Introduction

*“So, everyone benefits from kindness. And even talking to strangers can be beneficial to your well-being. There's a growing body of research, which I found fascinating, showing that talking to strangers can enhance our well-being. So rather than being stressful, or going to meet new people, it can be pleasurable and perhaps that's difficult to hear, surprising to hear at this stage in your sort of process of moving on. But they're finding that this is true in research. The problem is that we all predict, and this is quite sad, but the predictions are, that we think it would be better to sit in silence than talk to strangers.”*

Hello and a warm welcome to Successful Student Transitions, 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, find your new gear and thrive in this next stage of your life.

Today we are talking all about relationships. Every student in our Voices in Transition series, episode 11 to 15, mentioned the challenge and joy of creating new friendships. It's worth listening to their words of wisdom, but generally their advice for those starting university don't get too pulled into the pressure and myth of fresher's week. More generally, manage your expectations about the speed with which you'll make friends, remember many people are in the same boat and approachable, be active and get out there and do things that interest you, and friendships will follow.

So, with those broad tips in mind this episode is all about why relationships are so important to us, what motivates and drives us to connect and the skills that help us to create meaningful and mutually supportive relationships. It's quite a long episode, we suggest some tasks for you to do, so perhaps break it up and listen in two or three bursts giving you time and space to reflect on the meaning of the content to you. It turns out there is a lot we can do to help ourselves in creating great relationships.

So, on with the episode.

### **Louise Wiles 02:50**

Hello and a really warm welcome to this episode on relationships. So, if you listened to episode 23, you will know that we were talking about a concept called the Well-being Bucket. Now if you didn't listen to episode 23, then now might be a good time to go and take a listen. In short, the Well-being bucket holds our well-being the level of which can and will ebb and flow over time. Challenges and struggles may create a drain on our buckets. But we're always able to replenish it by understanding what enhances our level of well-being. For example, making a big life change is potentially a drain on our buckets. But the good news is that if we learn to understand what feeds and nourishes our level of well-being, we can ensure that we keep replenishing it, and aim to keep our well-being levels high, even in times of some struggle and challenge. And the important thing to know is that well-being and struggle and challenge are not mutually exclusive. Now the past four sessions have looked at the areas of health and vitality, and we shared ideas for enhancing our well-being through sleep, movement, nutrition, and rest and recovery. So today, we're going to move on and focus on the subject of relationships.

**Louise Wiles 04:12**

I'm sure we can all think about relationships that nourish and feed our well-being, and those that perhaps don't so much. The reality is we all live in communities, and the interaction between us and others can both feed and drain our levels of well-being. And the well-being bucket of one person feeds into, or drains another person's well-being bucket, and so on. Because we all live in this interconnected world. And our well-being is both individually and socially constructed. So, we're going to focus on the topic of community in two episodes time. So just put that to one side if you're thinking about community as you move to university, we will come back to that. But today our focus is going to be on the relationship building process. And next week, we're going to focus on what happens when relationships go wrong. Looking at toxic or controlling relationships, conflict, and how to cope when relationships, platonic or romantic come to an end. So, to start, I'm going ask you to do a little practical exercise, which I call a relationship audit.

**Louise Wiles 05:25**

Now, when we move to somewhere new as you are doing or will do in the near future, we can feel isolated. And it can feel at times that we have no friends. And we can also feel daunted by the task ahead in terms of creating new friends. And while it can be somewhat challenging, the truth is, we have plenty of existing friendships and connections to prove that A - we have the friendship developing skills, we've done it before we can do it again, and B - we do have support, it just might not be in the location that you're living right now, or you're going to live when you move to a new location. And often we take our existing friendships for granted. And as I wrote that, I really thought and reflected on that and thought, I need to do some thinking about that, too. So, I want you to think about your relationship network. And the way we're going to do this is I'd like you to take a piece of paper. And I'd like to do to draw a grid with eight boxes. And then I'd like you to label them as follows. One box is going to be for close friends, another for coworkers, colleagues, or if you're at university, your peers, your student, peers, neighbours, another box for professional organisations, another for family and relatives, another for sports teams and hobbies. And a final box, which can be others, others that I haven't mentioned that you want to fit somebody else into, or people into. And so, in each box, I'd like you to sit down and just write the names of people, you know, they might not be your best friends, they might be new acquaintances, it doesn't matter. Just write down their names and put them into the correct boxes. And some of them might be across boxes, you might have a close friend who you do some sports and hobbies with, so that's fine. Write them in both.

Okay, so pause the podcast now and do that exercise now.

**Louise Wiles 07:38**

Great. So, I hope you've got that matrix and lots of names in those boxes. And as you've done that, you've probably reflected on the fact that not everyone is a great friend, or you know, a really close friend. And that's fine because, and you'll be seeing this, is that we will have a variety of friendships with different intensities and perhaps different purposes to those friendships. And it's quite good and useful sometimes to reflect on that. So now I'd like you to ask about number of connections that you have in each of those boxes, what do you think about the number you have? Do you think that's great? That's a good number, do you think, oh, it would be nice to know a few more, nice to have a few more

in that box? A few less than that box, perhaps. Just react to it and write down what you're thinking? So, pause now and do that.

Then ask yourself, how well do the people in your boxes provide comfort, support and affection and a sense of closeness, you could rate that on a scale of 1 to 10. So, one being nothing and 10 being optimal, best friends, providing the best level of comfort, support, affection, and so on. And then ask yourself, how often you connect with the people in each area. And then would you like to connect more or less? So, the aim is not to rate, everyone a 10. This is just about an audit of your connections and friendships. And they're all going to vary, and that's absolutely fine.

#### **Louise Wiles 09:21**

So, it's not just our interactions with friends, which is important. It's having a group of people who are acquaintances, weak ties, people you know, but you don't have a deep relationship with. They're all important and they all contribute to our mood and our level of well-being. And research has demonstrated that, and we'll talk a bit more about that as we go through today's podcast conversation. But I just wanted to make that point. So hopefully, from what you see in your matrix you've got a really wide range of types of relationships and friendships, serving different purposes and supporting you in different ways.

And research has shown that if you're going to college, if you're going to university and you're thinking about those first few weeks and months, college students tend to feel happier and less lonely when they have more daily interactions with people, so often it's the interactions that are important in those early days, and we'll come on to talk about that in more detail. So ,it's not always about the deep friendships, those will evolve. But initially, daily interactions are great. So put your matrix to one side for now, and we will come back to it.

#### **Elizabeth Gillies 10:34**

So, we're going to think now about the importance of actually having friendships. And I think we've mentioned this a couple of times before. But there is some very good research, solid research about why relationships are important. And Edward Deiner dedicated his life to the study of happiness, and subjective well-being, social relationships in a longitudinal study was one of the big, the five biggest causes of true happiness. So, there we are, relationships matter. You might have seen or heard of, there's a great TED Talk by Robert Waldinger. And he's the current head of a longitudinal study of adult development. And it's been going on for about nearly 80 years. And he found that you know, when they track people over time, that amongst the things that are really, that keep us healthier, and happier, are good relationships, and the opposite of that, that loneliness is quite disruptive to us, it sometimes is one of the reasons why people die. So, relationships are critical and helping us to adapt and thrive. And we have a neurological basis for connection and friendship. We need these things to survive. And in tribes, as we talked about in the earlier podcast, we need to be part of groups. So, look up that episode nine, if you want to have want to have that. So, relationships are fundamental in helping us thrive.

#### **Louise Wiles 12:07**

Absolutely. And I think, you know, it's really interesting to think about what encourages us, and motivates us to create friendships and relationships. And there's some really interesting research by a

lady called Susan Fiske. Who did it in 2018, where she synthesised over 60 years of psychological research on relationships. And what she found was that there were five overarching interconnected social motives that are responsible for energising and directing us to focus on forming relationships, meaningful relationships.

So, the first one, this won't come as any surprise after what Elizabeth just said, it's about belonging. Feeling there's a place for us, and that we are accepted as we are, just as we are.

The second one is understanding, relationships help us to understand ourselves and to understand others. And that understanding provides the foundation for collaboration, for cooperation, and for coexistence. We're seen, we're acknowledged, we're understood, and that is really important for ourselves social lives. And as you develop your new life, if you're working, you're moving to work in the workplace, or you're moving to university, you'll see those relationships develop and you'll experience how understanding other people and learning to collaborate with them, helps you to build relationships.

Need for control. For well-being, we all need to feel that we have some element of autonomy in our lives, the ability to achieve goals, to be competent, to be effective. And when we feel that we have this, our anxiety is reduced. So, if we're motivated to connect with others, so we can convey our needs and ask for help, and that's really, really important to us. The ideal is to create a balance between closeness and autonomy. And there's a really great little analogy of porcupines, you know, they will have a prickly, prickly skin. And they, if they get too close to each other, and they get their, the pickles all intertwined, then they become stuck and overheated, and they don't survive well. But if they can just touch, not completely intertwined, they can draw the warmth from each other, and they support each other. And so, I think that's a really nice analogy for that sort of element of autonomy. You know, we want to be in control and to be able to manage our lives individually, but we also need to others to help enhance our well-being and help us with life.

Then the fourth is enhancing ourselves. Now our relationship with others and their validation of us means we learn about ourselves and we build our self-esteem and our self-belief. Now the downside of relationships, and we'll come on to talk about this in the next episode. But to say that there can be some relationships that deplete us, they might undermine us, and they create self-doubt. And that's not good either. So, we want to balance there, of the good stuff, and to watch out for the negative effects of relationships on us. And we need to be careful who we choose to be friends with and consider how well they support us. And linked to that is the whole concept of trust.

We need to learn to trust and be vulnerable, open and curious and recognise that others are trusting us. And that's quite a responsibility for us. So, these are the five core social motives that propel our thinking, feeling, and behaviour about relationships.

So perhaps there are some questions to ask yourself around the matrix that you have created at the beginning of this podcast. So where do you feel that you belong? Look back at your matrix and note:

- Where do you really feel that sense of belonging?
- Which friendships, are they?
- And what is it that gives you that sense of belonging? And why?

- What do you understand about yourself and how you connect and make new friends in new situations? What have you done in the past that has worked?
- What do you want to avoid that didn't work? That's a useful thing to think through.
- What can you do to protect your personal sense of control in relation to friendships, recognising that your autonomy is important? You don't have to be completely taken over by people who become perhaps overly clingy. So, thinking about what you can do to protect that sense of personal space?
- What can you do to ensure that your new relationships are self-enhancing, making you feel good and yourself authentically and comfortable?
- What do you need to have in relationships to feel a sense of trust? How can you be more open and curious.

So, take a few moments just to think that through in relation to your, your matrix. So, the evidence is that relationships of any kind are hugely important. And the challenge when you move to create your new life at university, abroad or in your new location working - you will meet lots of new people, lots of opportunities for new connections. And the truth is, some will work, and others will not.

#### **Elizabeth Gillies 17:40**

And the other truth or not. Another truth is, is that you're not going to necessarily make them in day one, they're going to take time and effort, and repeated kind of connection and interaction. And if you listen to the podcast that we had in the first series about relationships, we talked there about current research coming out of Oxford by Robert Dunbar. And he was saying exactly that, he's finding that it took, remember we were saying that figure, it took 34 hours of kind of prolonged contact, so not half an hour here and half an hour there, but in good blocks of time. So, making sure that it's time, effort, commitment you're putting into any relationship, that's what's going to turn it from a superficial one to a deep one.

#### **Louise Wiles 18:37**

Yeah, and on that note. I know a student that has just completed her first year at university. And it took a year for some of those really deep relationships and friendships to develop. So, it was a long haul. But now she has a really great network of good friends. So, I think you know, as important, I mean, this is important in any new situation, but especially in relation to creating friendships, and that is setting realistic expectations. It will take you time, it's not going to be an overnight thing, sometimes you might get lucky. I know when I moved abroad, I moved to live on the island of Madeira. And it took me nine months to meet someone who I truly connected with, and you know that first nine months was a quite lonely experience. But it did happen. And it's quite interesting how it happened. There's a whole other story, but you know, sometimes you need to be patient I think is what I want to say, and that friendship will be there you will find it, or those deep friendships will be there, and you will find them but they just take time. And so, we understand it can be challenging as you set off for new things, new experiences, new locations, as you develop new friends and it's challenging for several reasons.

#### **Elizabeth Gillies 19:55**

Because you know if you're walking into a new space and being in somewhere new, it's you know, not knowing anybody is a challenge for us, you know. We kind of, maybe, you were thinking as well in



Madeira Louise, 'oh everybody else has got friends and I don't', so all that comparison stuff happens. So, it kind of sparks off our fear-based response and puts us on alert. And it can mean we worry and feel anxious, which is often normal when you're meeting new people, you need to kind of go in and kind of live through that, tolerate those kind of things a little bit. But that's what's going to happen. So, it's not a surprise for a lot of people being somewhere new can be challenging.

**Louise Wiles 20:41**

Yeah, absolutely. And I think also, we have this awful tendency to make comparisons, comparison-itis or social comparisons. And we rate ourselves as lacking. You know, we look around and we go, 'yeah, well, I'm not as funny as that person over there. And oh yeah, look at that person they've got all those people who want to talk to them, and I've got no one here.' But of course, we don't know the context of that. And, you know, there usually is a story around things like that. And we read things into situations that are simply often not true.

**Elizabeth Gillies 21:15**

We might also worry about, you know, that thing that people talk about FOMO, the fear of missing out, especially, you might be looking at social media, we might be seeing all these people doing, saying they're doing wonderful things, which is all curated, I hope we all know that it's a bubble that exists. You know, not often do people put on there, I have no friends, I'm really struggling. So, when you see all these people doing all this stuff, that could trigger that isolation part in you that I think we actually know, within ourselves, we've got this understanding that we want to be connected with other people, so when we have a fear that, that we're missing out, we're not doing all the things that everybody else can do, that can be triggered in new situations, too.

**Louise Wiles 22:02**

Yeah, and of course, we are all vulnerable because we are all in the new environment. And I think that's the important thing to say, it's not just you that is perhaps feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable. Other people will be too. And that's quite normal, because you've moved away from home, perhaps for the first time, and your normal networks. And with that comes a sense of sadness and loss. And it can feel uncomfortable. So, it's important to recognise that and give yourself the space to process that change.

**Elizabeth Gillies 22:35**

That move away from feeling settled, isn't it in the transition cycle? And another thing to consider is, you know, you might have been in a school for the whole of your secondary career, you know, there are seven years about, maybe not having to make any friendships outside of that, of that environment. You might have forgotten what it's like to make some new friends, the skills that you need to have, because you've got them all there that you can interact and move around in. And so, people might, you know, that might be a rusty skill for you. So, it'd be good to think about, well how do I make and keep on making and nurturing those friendships I have. So, it might be something you just haven't done for a while.

**Louise Wiles 23:26**

Yeah, so what we're going to go on and do now is talk about some of those strategies for developing friendships. And the important thing is to remember that it's a process, and that we need to nourish and build healthy relationships.

**Elizabeth Gillies 23:41**

It might be kind of worth thinking about, what does a good friendship look like to you? What's a healthy friendship? What do you give or what do you receive in it? And maybe when I'm talking through some of those things, you might think like, oh yeah, that's important for me, maybe that's less important for me. So, people talk about presence, like really being present with somebody. You know, sometimes when you're with someone, and you feel like you're the only person that they're talking to, they're not that person who's listening into another conversation somewhere else. But you know, how nice is that and you can give it, and you can receive it as well. So, remember, this is a two-way street, where you share things in common, you might have similar values, interests, hobbies. You might know that there is a to, and a fro, in a friendship. That there might be a hard time for you and somebody helping you and there might be a hard time for them and you helping them so it's not all just a one way. It comes. It's reciprocal. It comes back and forward. There's honest and open conversation. So, if there are any difficulties or any challenges or things to celebrate, that you do that with an open heart. You're interested and you're interested in the things that other people are doing, and you're trying to understand and gain what their perspective is on things. So, it's not all just about you, but it's trying to understand that other person. Not always trying to fix things or giving them advice about what to do. Remember, listening is a great skill. Being trustworthy, reliable, having mutual respect. Having a sense of humour, how important is that in a friendship, to be able to just kick your heels back and laugh or something. Maybe this friendship that you have is a bit like the qualities you've gotten yourself and is mirrored in somebody else. We often look for people that have similar qualities to us. And then Dunbar who did the bit of work on how long it takes to friendship, he talks about the seven pillars of good friendship, similar to what we've mentioned, their similarities and hobbies and interests, maybe even religious views, moral views about how you would view tricky situations, having a sense of humour, having maybe for young people have the same musical taste, thinking about where your career wants to go to. And actually even the way you speak, in some dialect, which I found is really quite interesting having my own way of speaking. So, if you're looking for all these similarities, you know about people that you've got this two-way street with and about people that are like you, and people that like the same things that you. No wonder, it can take time to find friends. We would encourage you not to, not to cut somebody out, because maybe they've got a different view about you, but trying to open up, and be more accepting of not just like you, but maybe the ways that people might help you think and develop some different ideas and beliefs and develop something that people call cultural agility. So, you might want also want friends that challenge you a little bit.

**Louise Wiles 27:23**

And you need a good relationship with yourself as well. And I think that's probably the good starting point. I'll refer you back to the self-compassion episode, Episode Five. Because that's where we talked about developing that compassion for yourself in challenging times. There'll be ups and downs in the transition process, you may make mistakes, you may have doubts about your ability to cope, whether

you're in the right place, all of those kinds of things will be running through your head. And at these times, it's really important to be kind to yourself, and recognise that it's not all easy.

**Elizabeth Gillies 28:02**

And so, part of that good relationship with yourself is about self-awareness. And understanding what's going on for you, maybe kind of knowing that there are patterns that can have might happen to you, that repeat over time. So, knowing you, what's important to you, your values in life, and what you value in your friendships, and in romantic relationships. It's all really, really important. So, we've talked a lot about relationships, and its maybe kind of time now to think about what's important to you, in any relationship.

**Louise Wiles 28:43**

Yes, so look back at the matrix that you've created. And perhaps select a good relationship or friendship and write about what has made that so important, valuable and supportive to you. So just get a piece of paper out. And just free flow, you don't need to give it too much conscious thought just see what comes out, what hits home about what was important for you in that relationship. And it's just helpful to develop your self-awareness and understanding for future development of friendships.

**Louise Wiles 29:12**

So, it's good knowing all of this and knowing what you need to be doing. But you also want to develop the skills that you need for developing relationships. Because there is a skill base set if you like, as with many things, we can get better at doing things, and developing relationships is no exception. So, Rick Hanson, he says, as we open up and invest in relationships we become more exposed and vulnerable, and others can more easily disappoint and hurt us. So how we create relationships in a way that means we gain the benefit of intimacy and manage the challenges that come with it, is really important. So, the first thing he talks about, and this won't come as any surprise to you because we've already talked about it before, but he talks about autonomy and the importance of, of, you know, developing that personal autonomy. And we mentioned it as one of the five social motives at the beginning of this podcast. It's important to be our own person to make our own choices and to take care of our own needs. And then when we have this ability and clarity, he says, we are able then to feel more grounded. And it's easier to stay open to the feelings of others. And we can kind of step in and out of relationships and friendships as we wish. And I don't mean stepping in and being a friend one day and stepping out and not being a friend, the next, I mean just going with the flow, but not taking it quite to heart all the time. Because I think sometimes that can happen, you know, we perhaps go for the intensity of a relationship, maybe too quickly. And we need to give ourselves space to perhaps step back and see how things are developing. It's easier when we feel like when we have this autonomy, to also be open to the feelings of others, and to observe those and to manage those. So, thinking about autonomy is really important. And being clear and understanding what's important to you from a values perspective in terms of relationships is important there as well.

**Louise Wiles 31:22**

Then empathy now, lots of people talk about empathy. And empathy is our ability to tune into and understand other people. Empathy helps us to build healthy relationships and live fulfilling lives. When we're able to empathise, we are better able to connect and understand the perspective of another

person. There are two parts to empathy. There's the emotional empathy, which is when we feel the emotions of another person, you know, we have that awareness and understanding of what they're feeling. It's often a gut feeling, it comes from my own life experience. So, you know, a great example would be, you know, walking into a new situation and feeling, 'oh, my goodness, I don't know anyone', I mean, that's a, that's a situation that's likely to occur for you in this new situation, you won't be the only one, you can relate to other people who will be walking into the room and probably feeling exactly the same. So that's emotional empathy. And the other one is cognitive empathy. And it's about understanding the other person's perspective, their attitude and opinion. So, it's more of a thinking form of empathy, it is taking time to ask the questions, to understand people, and to see them clearly from those perspectives. And it's important to reflect on the empathy we feel for people because cognitive biases mean, and this is really interesting and I hadn't really thought clearly about this for a while, but we are more likely to empathise with people like us than those that are not like us. So that, you know, Elizabeth was saying earlier, you know, we're more likely to relate to people like that, but the reality is almost more likely to empathise to, and to share similar feelings, and emotions. And so, in situations of high conflict, we still we'll still be feeling empathy towards ourselves and towards others. But we're more likely to have high empathy for our own group, and low empathy for another group, an opposing group. So just remember that when you are forming your groups, which you will do at, particularly in university settings, and recognise when perhaps, you are less, not as empathetic to somebody who perhaps could do was do empathy, but because they're not in your group, and they're in a different group, and you haven't kind of made that connection. And so really important to think about that.

I think the other thing say about empathy is it doesn't mean giving yourself away. So, coming back to the autonomy piece, you don't have to agree with someone that you're empathising with, you can just understand what's going on for them. And you need to be careful that you're not blindly feeling the emotion of others and allowing it to cloud your judgement and make bad decisions and impact on your well-being too. So don't let it take over in that respect. And the good news is we can develop empathy by increasing our self-awareness, observing our thoughts and feelings and then doing that with other people too. And holding your beliefs lightly and seeking to understand the different perspectives of the connections and friends as well. It's really important, particularly, you know, in new settings, where you have people from different backgrounds and different belief systems, it's really important that we take time to understand those, and recognise the differences and value those differences too. So being open minded to cultural differences, as Elizabeth said earlier,

### **Elizabeth Gillies 34:49**

And a little kind of note on compassion there, and we've talked about it before haven't we, but Rick Hanson also suggests developing our compassion and kindness really helps in developing relationships. And just on that note, there we're thinking about, how does compassion differ from empathy? Well, compassion is an emotion like empathy. But with compassion, there is more of a distance between you and the suffering you observe. Compassion enables you to take a step back and ask, What can I do to help? So, it's more action orientated. And you're less immersed in the feelings of other people, and maybe have more, you can make more of a response about, this is what I can do.

**Louise Wiles 35:39**

And also, kindness, Rick Hanson talks about kindness. And, you know, research has shown that when people regularly receive acts of kindness, their well-being is enhanced. But the benefits are two sided, because the people who carry out the acts of kindness also have higher levels of well-being on average. So, everyone benefits from kindness. And even talking to strangers can be beneficial to your well-being. There's a growing body of research, which I found fascinating, showing that talking to strangers can enhance our well-being. So rather than being stressful, or going to meet new people, it can actually be pleasurable and perhaps that's difficult to hear, surprising to hear at this stage in your sort of process of moving on. But they're finding that this is true in research. The problem is that we all predict, and this is quite sad, but the predictions are, that we think it would be better to sit in silence than talk to strangers. We think things like – 'well, what if they don't like me? What if I'm bothering them? What if I run out of things to say? What if I want to end the conversation but can't? We kind of talk ourselves into that silence, it's not worth making the effort. But research has shown that these fears are all overblown. And conversations with strangers are consistently, not a little, but much better than what people expect. So I think that's really encouraging for those of you who are perhaps moving to university, you're going to live in halls of residence and having to walk in to eat dinner with strangers, just know that it's actually not going to be as bad as you probably thinking it might be right now, you will be predicting, it will be challenging, but actually research tells you that it's not going to be that bad. And, you can really learn to develop this as a very valuable skill, the ability to go and sit down next to somebody, a stranger and strike up a conversation.

**Elizabeth Gillies 37:41**

I agree so much with that, of course, you have to do it in a safe way, you know, don't go at nighttime going out and talking to strangers. But I have twins, and if ever I see anybody with a double buggy or with twins, strangers, maybe it's that thing that I think I got something in common with them, because I have, but I will always talk to them. And I remember my own children saying to me, do you know them? And I'd say, 'No, but I've got, you know, something in common here that we can talk about.' And 9 times out of 10. Or even more than that. There's been a really interesting, nice conversation about, like, you know, having to having two babies or having two children. So, talking to strangers, can be a practice ground a little bit, because they're likely not going to judge you about whatever you say.

**Louise Wiles 38:38**

Yeah. And the research has shown that people will actually like you more than you think. So, don't use that as an excuse either. And so over time, you can improve your skills in talking to strangers and practice has been shown that you get better at it. And also, the other advantage of it, it spreads kindness. And there's some really interesting research that came out of the University of Surrey, which teamed up with Claudia Hammond on BBC Radio four. It was a study about kindness, and they got 60,000 survey responses from around the world. And, only part of the findings I'm going to share here, there's loads more you can go look this up on the BBC website if you want to learn more. But when people are asked when someone had last been kind to them, 10% of the surveyed population. So that would be 6000 people responded that the act of kindness came from a stranger. And it was a minimal social connection. It wasn't a great big, long connection. It was something minimal like somebody carried their shopping, or someone in the parking lot gave them their unexpired parking ticket, or someone smiled at them and paid them a compliment, small humanising acts that cost very little, but

obviously made a huge impact on the person to whom the kindness was shown. And I think we often underestimate how good these acts can make both parties feel. So it doesn't have to be great things, it can just be a little smile and saying hello, and actually Julian Sandstrom, who is the director of the psychology of kindness at the Sussex University says, and I love this quote, "I believe each of us can make the world a friendlier and a little more trusting, a little better and it can start with something as simple as saying, hello.' So, there you go.

**Elizabeth Gillies 40:30**

I like that, too. So let's all try something today then.

**Louise Wiles 40:37**

So, you thought this was going to be in depth dive into the tricky skills or developing friendships, and actually all you need to say, Hello, yeah, a nice start there. So, to end, we want to just share some approaches to developing friendships from a great book called Platonic, really worth a read if you want to, but the first thing is?

**Elizabeth Gillies 40:58**

Take the initiative, you know, so we can, we're believing that friendships can just grow organically by being with them, by taking the time, with a little effort, maybe not to holding too tensely on to something too, holding it too tightly. You know, so just kind of tryit, do something, or believe, you know, you know, catch that thought, if you think about 'oh, I won't be liked, so I'd better not try' or notice things about, you know, it'd be important to put yourself out there and try some stuff. Rather than always be focusing on 'Oh, if I did this, what would happen then?'. So, friendships are a process of putting yourself out there, with time and time again and keep trying and deepening that kind of connection with people. So, it might be about joining groups or activities, about inviting people for coffee, be the person that accepts the invite. So, you know, in person connection still seems to be a bit of a novel experience f after COVID and everything, but you know, it's count. And that's, that's how you're going to make friends is by accepting offers and making offers.

**Louise Wiles 42:14**

And being vulnerable, as well is the next one, you know, being vulnerable enough to share your experiences, and to share some of your fears and worries, because that will help enhance the level of intimacy. Obviously, you want to judge that a bit carefully in the early days, you know don't share everything about yourself, with the first person you meet. You want to balance your moans and gripes perhaps with playful and happy times, and experiences. So. But yeah, do be vulnerable, it is the key to developing and deepening relationships. And research has shown it enhances relationships provided it's not used to manipulate. So yeah, think about your use of it, but be vulnerable in the right situations.

**Elizabeth Gillies 43:02**

And be authentic, it's really tempting to try and be that person that you think other people want you to be. Maybe that party person, or the person that's kind of is, you know, helping everybody out all the time. And if you're trying to be that person that you think other people want you to be, you must know, it is absolutely exhausting. I mean, partly you're going through this transition, you know, of place and new people. So, trying to be a different kind of person from you, is putting more stress and cost on you. And

also, you know, to be brutally honest about it, it's not always a great thing to be just someone that you think everybody else wants you to be. And think back to when we talked about values and trying to align yourself with those about what's the kind of person you want to be? What's the person that makes you feel you?

**Louise Wiles 44:00**

Yeah, really, really important. And then finally, being generous and affectionate, you know, going back really, to the kindness research, people who are all that who are generous and helpful, are likely to have more friends, and a greater level of well-being so the research shows. So acts of kindness are great securers of good relationships, we've just discussed that. But it's really important not to burn yourself out, or to become too much of a people pleaser. So, it's a question of balance, as well to that. And also look for your generosity to be reciprocated, you know, don't be the one that's always giving. Look for people to do the same back to you. And so, yeah, I suppose an important point here when you're talking about affection, show affection in the right way. And I suppose an important underlying aspect of that is being culturally aware. You know, different cultures have different tolerances for affection. So, make sure you're applying it in the right way and understanding that. But you know, it's an important demonstration of the caring aspects of relationships.

So, I think we've covered a lot today, I hope some of it has been helpful and then prompted you to think about where you found strengths in your friendships to date, and your relationships to date, and how you can use that to move forward with your new situation, your new location. So perhaps take out your matrix and think about your friendships and relations with the content of this in mind. And think about how those friendships are feeding your well-being and your well-being bucket. How perhaps some of them might be draining it and think about why? And think about which ones you would like to nurture and develop? And also, it's not a massive task. It's about just nudging those friendships forward. You know what one little thing could I do to nudge that friendship forward? It doesn't have to be great, great things.

Now remember, in Episode 22, we talked about the PERMA framework. So, if you remember that great if you don't then go back and have a listen. But the PERMA framework talks about a framework for flourishing in life, and the R in PERMA P-E-R-M-A, and the R stands for relationships, so no surprises there. They're central to our ability to live well and thrive in life. And they also sort of, relationships feed into other strands of PERMA. So, when we're with people whose company we enjoy, and we feel happy with. It generates positive emotions, the P in PERMA. When we're with people, and we're collaborating, perhaps on sports, perhaps some work, some hobbies, that helps us to feel more engaged and probably as a group to accomplish more and individually as well, because obviously the synergies and the sharing of thoughts and ideas. And when we have good friendships and relationships, we feel we matter and mean something to others, and others to us. And that's so important to enhancing our well-being as well.

So that's all for today. Thank you so much for listening. Please do follow the podcast on your podcast app of choice and share it with others who you feel would benefit from the content. Next week we'll be back to talk about relationships and when relationships go wrong and become challenging. But meanwhile, have a great week and we'll be back soon. Bye bye. Bye

## Resources:

We hope this episode has inspired you to step out and connect with people in your new location and create your new social network and friendships whilst also nurturing your existing networks and friendships.

Please help us in supporting other young people by following and reviewing this podcast on your podcast app of choice and sharing it with your friends and networks.

If you are new to this podcast, you may also find the following episodes of interest:

Our conversations with the amazing young people in the **Student in Transitions Series Episode 11 to 15.**

**Episode 9 – Nurturing Supportive Relationships [HERE](#)**

**This episode is part of our series on the Fundamentals for Well-being. You can listen to:**

- The Introduction to Series Three on Fundamentals for Well-being Episode 21 [HERE](#)
- Well-being Foundations Episode 22 [HERE](#)
- The Well-being Bucket Episode 23 [HERE](#)

## Resources mentioned in the Podcast:

Susan T Fiske (2018) *Social Beings: A core motives approach to social psychology* (4<sup>th</sup> edn). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley

*From Surviving to Thriving: A Students Guide to Feeling and Doing Well at University:* Christian van Nieuwerburgh and Paige Williams

*Platonic: How Understanding Your Attachment Style Can Help You Make and Keep Friends:* Marisa G Franco

*How do you make friends as an adult?* British Psychological Society Podcast, PsychCrunch, Episode 34 [HERE](#)

*Why You Should Talk to Strangers,* Gillian Sandstrom [HERE](#)

Ed Deiner: *Pursuit of Happiness* [HERE](#)

*Friends by Robert Dunbar Review – How Important Are Your Pals?* [HERE](#)



*Resilient: Find Your Inner Strength – Rick Hanson*

BBC Kindness Survey Results [HERE](#)

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