

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Welcome to *12 Degrees*, the podcast that offers real life strategies for nurturing full spectrum wellness. I'm Lindsey Whissel Fenton.

Christina Lightner: I'm Christina Lightner.

Deshna Nagar: And I'm Deshna Nagar.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: If you're new to this podcast, we're really happy to have you here on this journey to improve wellness, and we do that by attending to realistic ways that we can nurture the twelve different degrees that can support wellness.

Deshna Nagar: In our last wellness deep dive, we talked about the physical degree. Today, we're going to be looking at emotional wellness and what we can do both at the individual and community level to support it. Since this episode is about emotional wellness, I just wanted to do a quick check in with the both of you, and this is one of my favorite ways of checking in with myself and the people around me. What color do you feel right now and why?

Christina Lightner: Ooh. That's a good question, Deshna.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I know.

Christina Lightner: I would say purple. What were you going to say, Lindsey?

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I was going to say the first one that comes to my mind is blue, but I hate being this uncreative. It might just be because my home office is blue, so let me think about that. OK. What about you, Deshna?

Deshna Nagar: Right now, I feel yellow because I enjoy doing this, but right before I came in, I was feeling blue, like you. But not because my office is blue. Before I came in, I was looking at my Google Calendar, and all the tasks I need to do, and I was like, oh, I do not have a lot of time to rest today. And my brain just went, oh, you know what might be helpful right now. A 15-minute anxiety attack. So yeah, that's why I was feeling blue.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Oh, no! I want to hear what you did to work through that anxiety attack and I'm also glad that you're yellow now, but let's backtrack a little to your blue period.

Deshna Nagar: I was just trying to practice what I preach and tell my clients. So, I was just like, what do I feel right now? Let's label it. I feel anxious. Where do I feel it in my body? And then I tried to describe it.

Christina Lightner: Yeah. I totally get the looking at the calendar and feeling so overwhelmed. And for me, one of the things I try to do is try to focus on the now, and what do I have to do right now instead of looking at all of the things that I have to do? Because it can be so daunting when you're looking at all of it, especially when you start looking at days ahead. So being here now, and I try to practice that, so that's what I do.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: We skipped Christina. Why were you—you said you were purple. What does purple mean for you, and why were you feeling that way?

Christina Lightner: So, it's my friend's birthday, and my daughter drew her a flower birthday card, and she colored it in with lots of purple. And then we also have tulips right now, and the purple is coming out in them. And so, I just feel ready for spring. So, feeling like the flower color, and purple is my favorite flower color. So that's why I was feeling purple.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Oh. That's a nice color.

Deshna Nagar: Yeah.

Christina Lightner: Yeah. Did you say why you were feeling blue? Did you—oh, you did. Because of the office color.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Well, yeah. I'll go deeper than that. I mean, so I was feeling blue does feel calming to me. There's probably an element of also the fact that maybe there is a downward association with blue. So, I'll share that. I'm someone who I have a chronic, low-grade type of depression that's just always there in the background that can occasionally spike into more of a major depressive episode if I'm—don't stay on top of it, or if just things happen in life. And that's why I'm really glad we're talking about emotional wellness today because I have had to prioritize that degree. I don't really have a choice. I've learned tools and strategies that work for me, and I've definitely noticed that staying on top of those—I almost think of it like any other chronic issue. If someone had diabetes, you know what you have to do. And that when you're not doing what you're supposed to be doing, you start to not feel so great. And so, I've learned to be extremely checked in to that inner experience. And then looking at how that correlates with what's going on around me, what I'm doing to take care of myself. And so, I don't feel particularly blue today, but I will be honest, and that it's usually there on a low volume in the background.

Christina Lightner: I'm glad you brought that up, Lindsey. I'm similar, but with anxiety. So, I have that low-grade anxiety. A little bit of anxiety is good for us. It helps us get things done and be productive, but whenever that anxiety starts to creep up, I definitely have to also pay attention and take care of myself and make sure that I'm addressing those proactive measures that I can take so that I can reduce anxiety, like deep breathing. That's one of my go-tos.

Deshna Nagar: It's really interesting that both of you say that because I look at a lot of people around me. And I think, wow, they seem really put together and very functional. And then over time, I'll get to know them, and it's like, bestie, you are not OK. And mental health conditions are surprisingly common. And if you're someone who appreciates numbers, about 26% of Americans ages 18 and older, which would be about one in four adults, suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder in a given year.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah, and I do want to be careful as we're talking about the prevalence of mental disorders that when we're talking about emotional wellness, I think, especially more than any of the other degrees, we really, as a society, conflate that term with mental illness. And so, I just want to be clear that on this episode, we're talking not just about how to not be ill, but how to be well and how to thrive. And a lot of what I'm sharing is because those things that have been challenges to me have really given me tools that do help me live a happier life, where I do feel like I can thrive.

Christina Lightner: Taking proactive steps towards our emotional wellness is important, so it's important that we check in with ourselves. So, I appreciate you checking in with us today, Deshna.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah, me too. That was really nice, actually. I will say, in terms of how we're thinking about emotional wellness, I like this descriptor, which is from the National Institute of Health. They define emotional wellness as the ability to successfully handle life stresses and adapt to change and difficult times. I think that's a great framework for us to continue the conversation.

Deshna Nagar: I agree with that. I think there's also so many key ingredients to strong emotional wellness, like being flexible, being optimistic, emotional regulation, and acceptance, like you said, Christina. But even if you have all of those skills, life will sometimes still punch you in the throat. And honestly, it's also not fair to put the entire responsibility of emotional wellness on an individual because there are so many things in our environment that can be barriers to our wellness. As a woman of color, I've dealt with my share of microaggressions, and on tough days, it can be difficult to not internalize that.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Thank you for sharing that, Deshna, and I'm curious what you have found that helps you when you are having those experiences.

Deshna Nagar: That's a great question. So, I have this list of responses for myself ready, and based on what mood I'm in, I'll pick one response to go with. For instance, today, my Uber driver said something that I didn't like, and so I just chose to ignore him. But there are other days when I'll just give a sassy

response back. And so, it's not for everyone. You really need to pick and choose how you want to deal with it based on maybe your personality or how much energy you have in the day.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I want to ask you, Deshna, honestly, when those happen, do you experience anger?

Deshna Nagar: Yeah, a lot of anger, for sure.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I wanted to ask that because as I've been on my emotional wellness journey, I've discovered that I had for a long time a really difficult time acknowledging or even recognizing when I was feeling angry. So, when you checked in with us earlier, one thing I spent a lot of time doing with my therapist is using a feelings wheel, which there are lots of great free templates. We can put one on the website, but it's just a tool for us to check in with ourselves, see what we're feeling. And I used to do an activity where I would just about three, four times a day, stop, check in with myself, and ask myself what I was feeling. And I noticed after a few weeks of doing that, I was scanning through, and I pretty much never—I don't think I once wrote the word anger, which I'm sure there were things that made me angry during that time period. But what I did see a lot was the word anxiety. And so, I started realizing that in our culture, women are really conditioned to not express anger. It's not usually encouraged for us, and that can be even more so in certain family dynamics. And it's actually sad because a lot of men aren't encouraged to express anything other than anger. So, there's no winners here. Everybody's conditioned around what emotions are OK to feel. And so, I know for me, it's been a journey that I'm still working on to figure out what anger actually feels like for me and what I can do with it. And so, Deshna, I'm really—I don't know—impressed by just how easily when I asked you if you felt angry, you said yes. And I'm wondering how that feels for you, how that feels in your body, and what you do with it.

Deshna Nagar: If you want to take it one step further, anger is a secondary emotion. So, if you think about it, underneath that anger is probably other things like pain, loneliness, and hurt. And I think that's what was underneath or is underneath that anger. For me, it's just hurt. An acceptance of that—and when I say acceptance, I mean sitting with it and acknowledging it. That really helps me because running away from your emotions can really bite you in the ass. And this is an analogy that I use with my clients. Think of your emotions as a beach ball. The harder you try to push the beach ball into the water, the harder it's going to push back. And the moment you let it go, it will pop back up, and maybe it'll even hit you in the face if you've been pushing it too long or too hard. But on the other hand, if you just let the beach ball be, it'll probably float away.

Christina Lightner: I like that analogy. I just wanted to back up the conversation and just mention that emotions are those automatic physiological responses, and then our feelings are how we interpret and label them. And so, sitting with the emotion and feeling it, I feel like that's important. And so that sounds like what you were doing.

Deshna Nagar: Yeah.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah. And I think that can help normalize that there are no bad emotions, and there's so much cultural conditioning for us that anger, sadness—any of these I would say, like, difficult emotions or emotions that challenge us, we tend to label as bad or negative. But again, they're all just electrical currents that run through your body and help you process what's happening around you. And I do think that emotional awareness, that acknowledging what you're feeling is so key to emotional wellness and being able to sit with those more challenging feelings. And I think this is something that we can offer people as a strategy. Is practicing just your own emotional literacy. This is something we do a lot for little kids, but then we lose as adults, where it's like, we give them all these charts. And what are you feeling today? And we lose that somewhere along the way. And I'm thinking of when we started working on Speaking Grief, which is a project we did, and that's still ongoing at WPSU to promote grief literacy. We invited a wonderful educator and author named Alesia Alexander to do a training with our team on grief literacy, but she spent a lot of time with us just teaching us how to care for ourselves. And her quote that I never forgot was the greatest gift you can give both your kids and yourself is feeling words. And that as adults the example she gave was how often when someone asks us how we're doing, our answer is just tired. And so now, actually, my bestie and I have a running joke, where if one of us says, I'm tired,

we're like, but are you really tired, or are you—and it's a joke, but it's kind of not. And sometimes we'll check in and be like, no, I think I really am just tired, but then sometimes we'll say, I'm so tired. So that's when you are feeling some of those heavier emotions, but I think that can be a good place to start when we're talking about emotional wellness is just developing or redeveloping our emotional literacy of just all of the different emotions we can feel and then learning what those feel like in our own body.

Deshna Nagar: Yeah. You can't see me right now, but I'm aggressively nodding to that. I've also noticed that people who focus solely on good vibes and only the positive emotions are often doing so as a way of avoiding their own insecurities or struggles, which is a completely understandable thing to do. However, when we insist on maintaining only positivity, we also inadvertently send our loved ones the message that they can't be vulnerable around us.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I really dislike good vibes only and toxic positivity. I see this come up a lot in the grief space, where there's this idea that focusing on the positive and gratitude negates difficult feelings. And that really frustrates me because I think the truth all feelings live side by side. And the way I think of it is like I do engage in gratitude practices. But when we're talking about toxic positivity, it's saying there's not also space for the difficult feelings. So, it's like if you had a shelf with a jar on the shelf that was your difficult feelings—to me, toxic positivity is like putting another jar up there that's like gratitude, and it pushes the difficult feelings jar off the shelf. Whereas the way I think is more realistic is I can set them up on that shelf, side by side, so I can have difficult feelings and be grateful for things at the same time.

Deshna Nagar: I love that visual, and I'm curious. How do you both keep those two jars side by side?

Christina Lightner: I love that Lindsey brought up gratitude. That's one of my go-to—is gratitude. There's a lot of research around gratitude, and it does help us rewire our brains and all of that and improves our stress levels, our mood, gives us better sleep. And one of the things that I do is three good things. And so, it was research that I read that shows us that if we write down three good things at the end of the day, it increases our happiness and also can improve depressive symptoms. And so, they don't have to be large things. So, they could be like, I'm grateful for my mom, or I'm grateful for my daughter. I'm grateful for the sleep that I had last night. So, it can be simple. It doesn't have to be anything complex. Also doing reframing work is another thing that I work with. I also give myself room to journal, and so I'll journal a lot about things that I'm having internal struggles with.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yes, to all of what Christina shared, and to Deshna's question about keeping them side by side. My favorite word in the English language has become the word "and." So, I used to have a lot of shame around if I wasn't feeling grateful enough for things. How could I not feel? What do I have to be sad about, or what do I have to be upset about? And I've learned life exists in the realm of "and," where I can be really grateful for X, Y, Z, and I can be really upset about X, Y, Z. Both of those things can be true at the same time.

Deshna Nagar: I really liked that you mentioned the dichotomy of emotions, because that's what I'm going through so many times, where I'm feeling really positive or happy about one thing, and at the same time I'm also not feeling all that positive about something. And it can be confusing. Emotions and feelings can be confusing that way.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah. I'm also glad that you mentioned journaling, so I'm a big journaler. I think it can be intimidating if someone isn't in a journaling practice. So, one that I started with was just checking in with what am I feeling? Where am I feeling in my body? What is this feeling trying to tell me? What would I like to accept, or what am I resisting about this feeling? And then what do I need in this moment can be a nice framework for not only checking in with yourself but then also moving into that emotional regulation.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, I like that structure of the journal. When I first started journaling, I used a lot of the guided journals, or I would look up questions—like the guided journaling online. So, I'm glad you brought that up, Lindsey. Yeah. And one thing that's been really helpful for me with that particular journaling structure is it really helps me be more embodied. So, I live very much in my head. I'm an intellectualizer, which means that a lot of times if I'm feeling something, I go into my head instead of into

my body, and I will start getting philosophical about it. And I'll start kind of—I can be like, OK, yes, I'm feeling this, and I'm feeling this because—but instead, like, I basically go right to, oh, I'm feeling this because—and I go right to the reason. And then if I can reason it out, then I can get through it, instead of actually dropping down into my body and actually noticing how it shows up there. And I've become really passionate about this, honestly, especially for women because you look at stats. I was just listening to an interview with Dr. Sara Szal Gottfried, in which she talked about when we stifle emotions, when we don't feel them, they get locked in our body. That can contribute to autoimmune disease. And I say especially for women, because 80% of all autoimmune diseases happen to women. And while there are obviously genetic components, environmental components at play, a lot of this can do with that socialization to not upset others, but that there is a cost. Energy doesn't dissipate. So, if we're not allowing it to move through us, it can stay stuck in us, and there can be negative health outcomes down the road.

Deshna Nagar: That's super important for us to understand just how strong the mind and body connection is because your body truly does keep score. If you guys have read that book, I love it, but it remembers everything that you go through. And so, if you don't find a proper way to channel it or for that energy to leave your body, it's going to stay stuck. And it could lead to high blood pressure, a weakened immune system, fatigue, muscle tension. You name it. I also don't know if you have heard of the ACEs study—Adverse Childhood Experiences. But it talks about how if you go through something, or if you go through chronic stress when you're really young, it increases your chances of getting autoimmune disorders, cancer, addictions. I mean, it's really wild if you think about that—about how your mental health can have such a huge impact on your body.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah. I do want to be clear too we're not saying that that's like a prophecy for someone if you have had traumatic experiences. I think what we were trying to encourage is that there absolutely are things you can do to nurture wellness in both your mind and your body, and I'm glad you mentioned the body keeps the score, Deshna. It can sound kind of woo-woo when we start talking about embodiment and feel your feelings and all these things. And I assure you, there's actual science around these connections. There's studies on this. One way that really helped it click for me was I had noticed my hips are often very tense, and that when I would get stressed, I would start having hip pain. And it could just be sitting at my desk. All of a sudden, there would be this sort of inflammatory response. And I would get hip pain. And then I learned that in our fight, flight, or freeze responses, when we are activated in that way, your brain sends signals to your body that you are in threat, and it prepares you to run for your life because it thinks you're facing down the tiger. But in our modern society, when I'm getting that signal, and I'm just sitting at my desk or whatever it may be, that signal is still going into my hips to prepare my legs to run. But then I don't do anything with it, and I just sit there, and that can get trapped. So, I know for me, when I do even some light stretching or some light movement, especially with my hips, it is like—it sounds so silly. I remember actually the first time I started doing that type of movement, I got so exhausted, and I was barely moving. I was just stretching on the floor, but it was such a wakeup call to me of just how much our bodies do hold.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, and I totally relate with you, Lindsey. I'm also one that is in my head with my emotions and my feelings. And one of the things that I do is big movements, so like jumping jacks, or dancing. Anything that's a bigger movement can activate our parasympathetic nervous system, like you were mentioning. It puts us into fight or flight. So, these bigger movements can help to signal the body to relax. Then music also adds that extra joyful release.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: What I really love in this conversation that we're having about emotional wellness is that we have spent a lot of time talking about anger and anxiety and some things, again, that we would deem, air quotes, "bad," but that are really just challenging and difficult. Because I think when people hear that we're going to be talking about emotional wellness, there is that tendency to think, we're going to talk about how we can all be happy all the time. But I really firmly believe that emotional wellness is just our capacity to allow all of the emotions, even the challenging ones—And that's a good opportunity to shift into talking about once we are open to experiencing those what we can do with those in terms of emotional regulation.

Deshna Nagar: Yeah. A quick trick that I use to emotionally regulate when I'm dealing with difficult emotions is the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 technique. So, you notice five things around you that you can see, four things

that you can hear, three things that you can touch, two things that you can smell, and one thing that you can taste. And you can alter this as needed for a disability. I found this really helpful because it brings me back to the present moment, and it really engages all five of my senses. While the both of you were talking about being in your head, I also thought of this quote. That your search for the why can always be an avoidance of what is, and that really stuck with me.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Get out of my head, Deshna.

[LAUGHTER]

Christina Lightner: We were also earlier talking about how busy our schedules are and how it can lead to those anxiety producing moments. So, one of the things that I do is set boundaries. Saying no is a big one for me. So, I'm a people pleaser by nature, so I want people to be happy. So, I say yes, a lot. And then I find myself internalizing on a Saturday morning is why did I say yes to this? And I could have easily said no. And so that's what I've started doing. I've started—have a script prepared, and one of them is setting boundaries around my weekends. I try to do it with evenings. I'm still working on that. I'll have the script prepared, and I'll say it, and then I always tend to end with, but if you really need me to, I can do that. And I'm like, no, leave that part off. So yeah, saying no is a big one for me. And so having that prepared statement has been very helpful in many situations.

Deshna Nagar: I like the idea of having a script beforehand because in the moment it can be difficult for me as well to say no. But then when you already have those rehearsed dialogues, it can be way easier.

Christina Lightner: Yeah.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: And the other thing I like that you said, Christina, is that you have taken time to figure out what those boundaries are—if it's evenings or weekends. Because before we can communicate our boundaries, we have to know what they are. And so again, I think that this all plays together with we can tell in our bodies when you feel that kind of sense of dread. Usually, you'll feel that in your body or that resistance that can be an indicator that you might need a boundary somewhere. I also want to continue talking about different emotional regulation tools that we can offer to people, and I'm thinking of them in two categories of regulating in the moment tools, and then maybe we can talk through some more proactive things to just help you maintain a good emotional state of wellness over time. I think the grounding tool was really important. Another one I love that can be done immediately in the moment that I heard in a good inside podcast with parenting expert Dr. Becky Kennedy—and Dr. Becky was talking with an occupational therapist named Larissa Galleries, who specializes in sensory processing disorder and helps parents with sensory and emotional regulation. And she offered this really simple strategy, and that's just lean against a wall. That's it. You just lean against a wall, and it does a few things. It grounds you in the space you're in, so that grounding again, it also cuts off auditory and visual stimuli from behind you, so it can stop that feeling of overwhelm. And then it can help you feel supported and offer that deep pressure that would be similar to a weighted blanket, which can be really soothing for your nervous system—and again, that brain-body soothing.

Christina Lightner: Physical grounding is definitely on my list, and my go to is the 4-7-8 breathing method, where you breathe in for four seconds, hold for seven, and then breathe out for eight.

Deshna Nagar: I was watching this reel created by Dr. Nicole LaPera, and she was talking about certain points in your ear that you can press to increase nervous system regulation, and it's really quick and easy. You take your finger, put it in your ear canal and very gently massage it for about a minute or two. And I tried it, and it really seemed to help me.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: No, I like that, and I like really tangible things like that. And I think that's so helpful. I would love to also talk a little bit about that long-term proactive nurturing of wellness. And I'm curious what each of you do that are your staples that you want to make sure you keep up in your life.

Christina Lightner: One of the things that I do is I have a nighttime routine because I feel better emotionally when I get good sleep. And so, I try to keep my nighttime routine similar. I did mention in a

previous episode that it is a struggle for me, especially when I have to get up early, like at 4:00 AM. I'm not used to going to bed at 8:00 PM, so that does throw off my routine schedule, and it does give me some difficulty sleeping on those nights, but I like to get a warm bath before bed, which I know is that little bubble bath thing, but it really works for me. So, finding what works for you is important. And I also like to use essential oils. I use a lot of lavender and field of flowers, and there's a lot of research around essential oils and how they can help us to relax and reset. And I also use positive affirmations. And so, when I'm brushing my teeth before I go to bed, I say my 10 positive affirmations, and they can be simple. So am I enough? Or I am enough, excuse me. Not am I enough. So, you're saying the statement that you want to feel that feeling. So, you don't necessarily have to be feeling it to say it but just saying it 10 times can be helpful.

Deshna Nagar: I also have a mantra that I chant over and over to myself when I'm feeling low, and it's also not just about what you do when you're feeling low. But I also just try to practice all of these things that we talked about, even when I'm feeling good. And so, when I do feel low, my brain is like, OK, this is what we need to do. And it automatically switches into that space of, OK, we're going to ground ourselves.

Christina Lightner: Yeah. I like that you brought that up. That you have those routine things that you do, and then the things you do when you're like, oh, I need a tool. What tool am I going to use? I'm very similar as well. So, I do take proactive steps, but there are those times where it's like, OK, I'm feeling overwhelmed. What can I do? And I'm going to try that pressure point in the ear thing next time.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I wanted to mention the affirmations and the mantras because that's something I used to struggle with. And I think something that helped me is that it has to be real to you. You have to be able to get to a place where you can believe it, and that helped me come up with some that are my go-tos. One is this feeling will pass—so when I am feeling one of those more difficult feelings. The second being I can handle this because there's a quote, I love that's like, never forget that your success rate of getting through difficult days or moments is 100%. So those are some of my affirmations. And I also have some just regular ongoing practices. For me, exercise is so foundational. And I know we talked about this in physical wellness, but something I've really learned about myself is when I start to slide on exercise, everything else starts to slip because then it's like I won't eat as well. I won't pay. I'm an all or nothing person, so it's like that's usually because I exercise first thing in the morning. If that doesn't happen, it's much easier for me then to be like, well, I'm not going to journal today. I'm not going to—who cares if I don't eat as well today? Or like, well, I don't need to go for a walk after work. It's like it sets me up for the right mindset, and it just helps me feel better in the day. And again, as someone who does struggle with depression on and off, it is instrumental in keeping my mood regulated. And I like to do yoga. One thing I wanted to mention with yoga is that if you've never tried it, just know that there are many types of yoga with—I've seen estimates ranging from over hundred to several hundreds. So, I've heard a lot of people say, oh, I don't like it. And I'm not saying everyone should go out and do yoga, but I like a style called yin yoga. It's a very slow style, where you usually hold poses for three to five minutes. And I like to do that in the evening, and it really does just give my body that release of any tension or any emotions I might have held in within the day. And I'm not like a yogi. I'm not super flexible. I'm not someone who does this hardcore. I just do it in my living room. Half the time, I don't even use a mat. Just use a rug. But I find that very regulating, especially in times of high stress.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, I agree. And it sounds like some of what you were talking about was positive reframing. Our automatic thoughts begin around 8:00 or 9:00, and so it's important that we manage those thoughts. And before I started managing my thoughts, whenever I did start managing them, I was very surprised at the things that I was saying to myself. So instead of saying things like, I always mess this up, try to say, I'm learning and growing through challenges. And it sounded like that's some of what you were using as well.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah. And I think a quick trick I like for that, and that sort of self-compassion is just, would I say this to a friend? Would I say this to someone else I care about? And often, none of us would say some of the things we say to ourselves to another living person, and I think that can be a reality check of then why am I saying it to me?

Christina Lightner: Yeah. And I think we talked about we both similarly have pictures of ourselves when we were younger, and we refer to those. I have mine on my refrigerator. Would you say it to your younger self? Like your three-year-old self? So, it is important that we remember to be kind to ourselves through all of this.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah. I am looking at—I have a picture of myself when I'm maybe about five, actually, right over me on my desk right here. I've also heard a strategy that I like of if you are in a conflict with someone—I heard this in terms of romantic partnerships, but I think it could be any relationship. A helpful tool can be for you to each look at a picture of each other when you were children because a lot of times we do default back to our thought patterns, our behaviors, what worked for us as children. So even though we don't like to admit it, when we are highly activated or stressed, a lot of us are really acting like kids in adult bodies. And so, if you are in a conflict with someone, it can be helpful to remember your kid is speaking to their kid, and I think it can just introduce some gentleness into that interaction.

Deshna Nagar: I'm definitely going to try that with my partner.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, I like that too.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: So that's obviously like a one-on-one type of community interaction, which community can be as big or as small as we make it. But I would love us to just spend a few minutes before we wrap up talking about other thoughts on community interventions for emotional wellness. What comes up for you two when we're talking about that?

Christina Lightner: What comes to mind for me for community emotional wellness is at the College of Nursing we had a bulletin board that we—we call it Our Mental Health Bulletin Board. And we had sticky, and we put pens and pencils or whatever with the sticky notes and asked people to post a sticky note on what they do for their mental health. And we had the bulletin boards across five of our campuses that have nursing programs. And so, we had 339 sticky note responses. So, it was really interesting how many people we had involved in putting a sticky note on the board.

Deshna Nagar: Another simple thing to do could be to work towards reducing the stigma in your community. And how you could do that is have more conversations around mental health, check in with the people around you, and more importantly, be conscious of the impact you have on others. The words you use, your behaviors, your actions.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I really like that. And I also think we can—you have to obviously assess how safe you feel in a given situation, but I think we can also lead by example sometimes. Where when somebody asks us how we're doing, be real with them. Like, yeah, I'm kind of having—I'm feeling a little stressed about this because that can help us open up conversations that could actually be really helpful for not just us, but the person we're interacting with. If we can be honest about maybe something that we're going through, maybe that gives them the open they needed to share something that they're going through. For me, one of the things that comes up in terms of community wellness is just thinking about ways to share kindness. I know there's research around this and around when we show kindness to other people and the positive benefits that can have for us. And a couple ideas I like are one time I checked out a library book, and in the middle of it was a Post-it note, and it had that quote from—I think it was from the help, where it was like, you're kind. You're important. I can't think of the rest of it. It was like basically a positive affirmation on this Post-it note in the middle of this book, and it just put a smile on my face. It made me feel really good. It was completely unexpected, and it was such a simple thing for that person who left it to have done. Another one I know is a little bit controversial because of different sustainability practices, but I think can be done in responsible ways—and I think there's guidelines online for how to do it responsibly—is the idea of painted rocks. So, I looked into this a little bit because it's something I knew about anecdotally, but it was actually it's like a formal project that was started in 2015 by someone named Megan Murphy, who founded this Kindness Rocks project. But basically, as people will paint rocks with, messages or just pretty pictures, leave them around, and then you find them. And I've both painted rocks, and left them, and found them. It's an act of kindness, and it's also a reminder to ourselves and to the person who finds it that we're all in this together. And so, I think that sense of connection can also be really powerful to nurturing our emotional wellness.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, and I agree. It does give you that sense of connection. I've also been a finder and a painter of the rocks, so definitely love that and highly recommend it.

Deshna Nagar: I came across one when I actually was having a bad day, and I just saw a really sweet message on there, and I just started bawling my eyes out. So yeah, really small things like those really do help.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: That's it for this episode of *12 Degrees*. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss any of the upcoming discussions that will help you promote healthy habits. I'm Lindsey Whissel Fenton.

Christina Lightner: I'm Christina Lightner.

Deshna Nagar: And I'm Deshna Nagar.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Until next time, we wish you good progress in your wellness journey. *12 Degrees* is produced by WPSU in collaboration with the Penn State Ross and Carol Nease College of Nursing. This podcast is intended for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or mental health condition. Please consult your physician or other qualified health care provider immediately if you are experiencing any suicidal thoughts. If you're in crisis, help is available for free 24/7 in the US by calling or texting the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. More information is available at [988Lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

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