

*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:* Together, we explore the twelve areas of wellness that influence how we feel and function.

*Christina Lightner:* We share our own personal experiences and the research-backed strategies we find helpful and give thoughts for how you can adapt them for your life.

*Deshna Nagar:* We want to empower you to make informed choices across the full spectrum of wellness. In this episode, we're going to be looking at the social degree of wellness, and what we can do both at the individual and community level to support it. Christina, what is social wellness?

*Christina Lightner:* Social wellness involves building healthy, nurturing, and supportive relationships that foster a connection with those around us. It includes balancing social activities and maintaining meaningful relationships with friends, family, and the community.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* You just said community, Christina. And in our *12 Degrees* framework of wellness in real life, broadening our understanding of what community means can be a great place to start as we think about our social wellness. One thing that we're hearing more about these days is the importance of weak ties in our social network. So, these are social connections you have that maybe don't rise to the level of an official friendship or relationship, but they're people you see out. Somebody who works at the desk at your gym or a barista at your favorite coffee shop. Those types of things have shown to be really important for our overall health and well-being. And actually, I remember seeing some interesting research about this during COVID that when we talk about a lot of the loneliness and struggles people had during COVID, that people were actually really good at maintaining connection with family and close friends and those deeper relationships. But what was falling off for people were those weak tie Connections. And that struggle that happened during COVID really illustrated how important those weak ties are for our social wellness.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. Those positive social interactions actually boost our oxytocin, that feel good hormone, and reduce cortisol, the stress hormone, which helps improve our overall mood. One of the things that I like to do for social wellness, I like to go through the checkout that has a person as opposed to going through the self-checkout. I do like the self-checkout. It's quicker, and you can get through quicker. There's usually not a line, but I'll purposefully go through the register just so that I can have that interaction with the cashier, especially if I recognize them from a previous visit.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* I've tried to do that too, but I should try to do that more. That's a really good one.

*Deshna Nagar:* That makes me think of this lady at Weis. And I don't know her name, but every time I see her, we check in with each other.

*Christina Lightner:* I love that.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* When you were talking to you about checkout, I'm thinking of another strategy I'm trying to implement and not doing great with, but I'm working on it, is saying goodbye to DoorDash. So, this is a really bad habit I've developed over the past year or so, but I've been thinking of well, one, it's not awesome for my bank account. And we'll talk about financial degree of wellness in another episode. But I've really been realizing how much it does rob me of that opportunity for a weak tie social interaction.

*Christina Lightner:* My initial thought was to incorporate social wellness into your DoorDash experience, as you could make it a point to be there when the DoorDash person delivers and just make small chat with the person and ask them how their day was.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Oh, I like that because there is an option where you can check that they have to hand it to you. So that could be a great way to still nurture that weaker tie, even if it's coming to your home. Good job with the creative thinking. I like that, Christina. I see you.

*Deshna Nagar:* You'd have to give me a pretty hefty tip to talk to customers.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Well, Deshna. Maybe we need to focus on nurturing your social wellness. But for real. That sounds like something I would say. And I was going to say, it's because I'm an introvert, but I don't want to contribute to negative stereotypes about introverts. So, this actually might be a good place to touch on introversion and extroversion.

*Deshna Nagar:* True. There are so many misconceptions about introversion and extroversion. People tend to think of them as rigid categories. You're either an introvert who is shy and awkward, or you're an extrovert who thrives in crowds. In reality, it's a spectrum and most people fall somewhere in between.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Where do you fall, Deshna?

*Deshna Nagar:* That's a good question that I was thinking about yesterday. I think I flip-flop between the two because sometimes I like to hang out with the people I love to recharge, and sometimes I just need to be locked up in my room, reading a book or watching Netflix.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* What about you, Christina?

*Christina Lightner:* I tend to think of myself as an introvert, but I do also have those moments of extroversion, especially around people that I'm comfortable with. How about you, Lindsey?

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* I'm definitely an introvert, but I'm an introvert who's very often mistaken for an extrovert. So, I think often, there's like, as Deshna mentioned, stereotype of this introvert who just is shy and can't talk to people. And I think of it as more of it's about where you draw your energy from. And so, I definitely need pretty copious amounts of alone time to feel properly energized. I feel like anecdotally, this is true for a lot of introverts out there. I don't know if there's research behind it, but it's not so much that we don't like talking to people. It's that introverts tend to hate small talk. And that's definitely me. But sitting down and having a real heart to heart with someone, I don't know if I'd go as far as to say it's energizing, but it's definitely not depleting to me, the same way as chatting small talk or going to a party. I think there's a sensory input component to it too, where I get a lot of sensory overload. So, I also

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have to factor that into socializing. So as far as tips go, I'd say, if you're trying to engage an introvert, try to take the conversation beyond the surface level, and you may get a better result. And also, be mindful of the environment and what else sensory-wise may be going on.

*Deshna Nagar:* Yeah. There's so many layers to it. Like you said, Lindsey, do you prefer deep conversations in a smaller group, or do you enjoy the energy of a larger gathering? Does external stimulation, like loud environments, leave you feeling drained or does it excite you? Do you feel anxious meeting new people, or does it come naturally? It's all about how you manage your energy, and that self-awareness can be a real game changer.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. And for some people, they could be ambiverts. So, you were talking about the spectrum. So, some people exhibit qualities of both. They may enjoy social interactions but also need that quiet time to recharge. So, one social wellness tip we can offer is to start paying attention to what works best for you. Then once you start to develop that self-awareness, you can work to shape your social interactions as best as you can to align with your unique needs. So, if a friend invites you to a concert and you get overwhelmed by noise, instead of saying no or saying yes and then being miserable, you could offer an alternative like, I really appreciate you inviting me. The concert is going to be a no, but could we make a plan to go to lunch on Saturday instead.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Yeah. And I'm really glad you mentioned self-awareness. I know for me it's meant setting parameters around how often I'll do things. And so, I would be like, OK. At max, I can do two weekdays a week and one weekend, day or evening. There's a point of diminishing returns too, where if your battery is so drained, you're not showing up as your best self. You're not able to engage with people the way you would like to, and so I think just paying attention to where your battery is and starting to learn yourself and what you can do to sustain it at a more steady level. So as counterintuitive as it might seem, the foundation of nurturing your social wellness degree actually begins with nurturing and attending to yourself.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. I'm glad you bring that up. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for wellness. So, whether we identify as introvert, extrovert, or ambivert, the key is to finding those social activities that align well with your comfort level and bring you joy.

*Deshna Nagar:* I also like, Lindsey, how you mapped that out for yourself, and you took out the time to sit with it. I think that's maybe what I need to do too so I don't flip-flop and have a better understanding of where I lie on the spectrum.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Yeah. And we talked before about boundaries. So, I like that you've set boundaries around your social wellness.

*Deshna Nagar:* I think some of this is also trying not to take things personally, like, if a friend declines an invitation, be mindful of the stories you tell yourself about that because there's a good chance that it has nothing to do with how they feel about you. They might really want to spend time with you, but maybe they just need some alone time to reboot.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Yeah. A lot of this comes to communication, too. Try to be very clear about I would love to see you. X, Y, and Z happen this week, or I'm just not feeling great. And I want to be able to show up for our time together in a way that feels good. That is an important part of nurturing any relationship.

*Deshna Nagar:* Something that I do to nurture my relationships is whenever I think of someone, I'll just check in with them. So, I often text people saying, hey, you showed up in my dream. Are you doing all right?

*Christina Lightner:* I do something very similar, Deshna. I like to check in with people when I think about them. And then I also have those regular check ins, too.

*Deshna Nagar:* And if we want to turn this into a wellness tip, we could strengthen that intuition and get more in touch with our gut. Mindfulness practices and self-reflection can be a great way to do that. The problem with that also is that sometimes we're operating from a space of fear or anxiety. So, your gut might not always be telling you the right thing. But with practice, the more you do this, your intuition gets stronger, and you can start to trust it more.

*Christina Lightner:* And this reminds me of nursing intuition and how in your first a nurse, it's hard to take that serious and to act on that intuition. But being a nurse and having experience, and when you go through and you ignore those and you're like, oh, my gosh, I shouldn't have ignored that, I should have listened to myself, and then it reinforces. And so over time, you're like, I need to listen to that intuition.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Yeah. These social wellness muscles or intuition muscles can atrophy if we don't exercise them. Something I've been trying to do is a really simple technique I heard on a podcast. It was an interview with Charlie Houpert, who is a charisma coach. And he teaches people how to up their social game. But he introduced this concept of one more sentence. And by that, he meant just in any social interaction, whether you're in an elevator with someone or an Uber at the grocery store, whatever, beyond the typical, like how are you, I'm fine exchange, add just one more sentence. And it could be literally anything. But it's about challenging yourself to extend social interactions. And then you can spark some new connections from it too.

*Deshna Nagar:* I like the idea of saying one more thing, and how I—I do it is slightly different version of that. Instead of asking my friends, how are you, I'll try to use different prompts, like, did anything exciting happen today? Or what was the highlight of your day?

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* I love that. I'm going to start using that, because I tend to use the same check in.

*Christina Lightner:* In my first apartment, my neighbors and I had pooled our money and bought a porch swing, and we'd sit out there every evening, and the one neighbor would always ask us the best and worst parts of our day and thinking about that time with my neighbors brings up something else I've been reflecting on lately. Our living arrangements, because I feel like it's so celebrated to be independent and live alone in our culture, but we're really wired to be social beings, and I'm becoming a big champion of multi-generational living. I think that's how people lived for a really long time, and we've gotten away from it. So, I don't know if that's a hack so much. Is just a reflection that leaning into our biological needs for socialization and communal connection are important.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Yeah. And I think that multi-generational living is coming back.

*Deshna Nagar:* It's a huge part of my culture, so I definitely appreciate that.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Do you miss that, about being home versus being here, Deshna?

*Deshna Nagar:* I do, actually, because even when I'm alone, I like to just know that there's someone else in the house with me, even if we're doing our separate things. So just while I'm working, the sound of my mom may be on her laptop clacking away or just chopping veggies. I feel like that doesn't happen here very often.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* It is nice having somebody in the house, but another way you can still build that connection, even if you don't have someone physically here, is different friends and I at different points have done virtual coworking sessions, where we'll open up a Zoom, not even talk, just like we each sit there on mute, but we'll work side by side, and it does help create that sense of just somebody else being there.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. I really enjoy those working meetings where you're working, you're on the computer, but you're doing your own thing.

*Deshna Nagar:* I'm going to try that.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. Having an accountability buddy can be very helpful. So, creating that buddy system with someone. It can be a friend like we're talking about, or it could be in-person like with a neighbor. So, you could just check in on each other. I know I have a lot of older adult neighbors. I always let them, if you ever need anything, please reach out. And they'll share items from their garden. So we got some tomatoes over the summer, which is always a lot of fun. So, it doesn't have to be big. It can be something small. Just saying hello to your neighbor, as you're walking by or if you're driving by. Stopping for a quick chat.

*Deshna Nagar:* Something that I also really struggle with is giving people my full attention when I'm talking to them, and I'm sure other people struggle with this too. Too often we're so busy mentally drafting our grocery list or planning our next move that we only half hear what the other person is saying. So, another tip is just practice focusing on what the other person is saying and asking thoughtful follow-up questions.

*Christina Lightner:* Deshna, you mentioned about listening, and that's something that I've had to work on in the past, for sure. One of the things that I tend to do is instead of listening attentively, I'll be formulating my response. And so, I have to make sure that I don't do that. And sometimes I'll hurry up and write down a note real quick, because if I don't say something like right now, I often tend to forget to say it. And I also wanted to comment on putting the phone down when somebody is talking to you. I practice doing that, and I need to practice it more with my computer. I work from home a lot. And so, if somebody's talking to me in my home, I do try to lower my computer, and it is a practice that my daughter and I do with our phones. And she'll always say, and she's only 12. So, I'm so glad she's already feeling this way. But she says, I feel like if I'm looking at the phone that I'm not paying attention to you, and I'm not giving you my full self. And we'll talk about digital wellness in a future episode. But she's just amazing that she's already recognized that because it's something that I still struggle with.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Well, and I think that speaks to how interconnected all these degrees are, because we're talking about how digital wellness and social wellness are related. I also want to talk about how physical and emotional wellness are related to your social wellness. So, I know for me, there are periods where if I'm not feeling great about honestly how I look or how I've been taking care of myself, I don't want to go out as much. If I'm in a period where maybe my clothes aren't fitting as great

or I find when I exercise, I just feel generally better, and if I'm in a period where I've been slacking off on that, it makes it just a little bit harder for me to want to go out and do things. And so, I think it's helpful to think about this holistically, as each of these degrees does feed the other, for sure.

*Christina Lightner:* Most definitely.

*Deshna Nagar:* This is a great opportunity to pivot to community social wellness, because these things are not separate. Like, you could nurture your social wellness by spending time with a friend, doing something that also nurtures your physical wellness, like going for a walk or your creative wellness, like doing a craft activity together.

*Christina Lightner:* Also, our emotional wellness plays into this because when we feel stressed, it shuts down our parasympathetic nervous system that wants to connect. So, on an individual level, if you're able to keep your stress under control, you'll be more likely to want to connect. But even if you're feeling stressed, maybe you could use your social time with a friend to do something to de-stress, like spending time in nature or doing some yoga. And it doesn't have to be a formal class. It can just be doing YouTube yoga together in your living room.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* I'm going to take this one step further. If you are struggling to fit social connection or a catch-up time with a friend into these overscheduled, overstimulated lives we lead, what about making your errands, your catch-up time with your friend? If you have to go to Home Depot Saturday morning, invite your friend to Home Depot with you. There is definitely a level of friendship where you can have fun together pretty much no matter what. And why can't that no matter what be picking up a truckload of two by fours? And who knows? Maybe that friend also needs some two by fours or bathroom tile or... I should pick a different example than Home Depot, but that tends to be where I spend my weekends when I actually do leave my house.

*Deshna Nagar:* I definitely like that because I do that with my friend. Every weekend, we go grocery shopping together. I have noticed, though, that when I go grocery shopping with her, I end up spending way more money than I usually do. But it's worth it. She'll just convince me to buy a whole bunch of stuff that I don't need, like chocolates and all and—

*Christina Lightner:* Oh, my gosh. I don't need any help buying chocolate.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Well, the good thing about chocolate is it doesn't really—well, depending on the type, I guess it doesn't go bad. So, you could just keep that stash for who knows how long.

*Deshna Nagar:* That's not how it works with me. I'm going to inhale the whole thing.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* I mean, I would do the same thing. Oh! But if you listen to the episode I did with food science professor at Penn State, you'll actually learn about how that can be good for you.

*Christina Lightner:* Yes. I was so glad to hear how good chocolate is for us, because I definitely eat a lot of chocolate.

*Deshna Nagar:* Me too.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. I've definitely have done errands with other people, and it is a lot of fun. And it's something that I want to incorporate more into my life. So, I'm glad that you both brought that up. I also don't know if this has been an experience for either of you, but sometimes the people that we do spend the most time with are actually the relationships we may need to nurture the most, because it can be easier to take them for granted, and you can get into a rut or a routine. I know this like when I would go visit my parents, we would just get in a routine where we would all just not be talking—I don't know how to describe it. Everyone just be doing their own thing. And I actually, for Christmas one year, bought my parents a—it was like a little box of conversation starters that you could leave on the table. So sometimes I would try those, or I would suggest we all play a game together but just paying attention to are there ways you can enrich your social interactions that you are having on a regular basis. And you don't have to go out and buy one of those. You can Google conversation prompts. There are plenty of them out there.

*Deshna Nagar:* That is definitely relatable. For me, I've gotten into this habit of I'll join like a video call with my mom, and I'll just keep it there, and I'll work on my laptop instead of actually engaging with her and chatting.

*Christina Lightner:* Is your mom far away?

*Deshna Nagar:* She is. Yeah. A whole different country.

*Christina Lightner:* Oh. That sounds hard, Deshna. Maybe we could try to reframe it a little. So earlier, you mentioned how nice it was for you to be at home doing your own thing and just know that your mom was in the house cooking or doing something else in the house. Maybe you're just trying to recreate that from a distance.

*Deshna Nagar:* That's very true. I love that.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Also, we've talked about relationship with self, with others in more personal settings. Let's now shift to looking at how we can nurture social wellness within our communities or at the community level. What's coming up for you two?

*Christina Lightner:* My first thought is our office is closed right now for renovation. And so, one thing that our Dean has done is task the wellness office with creating social events for faculty and staff to interact. They've been all sorts of events and some more structured than others. I know we're in the works of talking about a movie right now. And so, they were talking about how that would be good for some of the introverts in the group. We did a paint your own pottery. We went to the Palmer Art Museum. It's a museum here on campus. And it's free for anybody who wants to go in and take a group. We had a tour of the museum and really brought out a lot of people, and it was very surprising how many people actually came to the museum.

*Deshna Nagar:* Yeah. As you say that, I also think of how important it is to create inclusive spaces. Just keeping everyone in mind that regardless of maybe their identity or ability, they are able to engage and join in.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* I'm so glad you mentioned this, Deshna. And this consideration for other people can come in so many forms. Christina had mentioned the example of having a movie screening, so the introverts might be more comfortable joining in a social activity. I mentioned earlier that I can struggle

with sensory issues and sensory overload, and that can be really common for neurodivergent folks. And of course, this consideration also applies to people's cultural backgrounds and other aspects of their identity that may influence their comfort or even interest in a certain activity. We talked earlier about the importance of communication. So, communication here can be really helpful. I'm thinking like if you notice someone routinely declines a certain type of invitation, approaching them with curiosity around what you've noticed, like, hey, I noticed when I ask you to do whatever the activity is, you tend to not go. Is it just a conflict, or is that just like something that's not of interest to you? And then open the conversation about what may be going on there. It's like, oh. I would love to find things that you enjoy. Could we talk about if it's that you don't like this activity or it doesn't feel good to you, or maybe we could come up with something else, because I would love to spend time with you and just something that comes from a place of curiosity and openness.

*Deshna Nagar:* I definitely agree. So just not operating on assumptions you make but just staying curious about what the other person has to say or their experiences.

*Christina Lightner:* And I like the tip that you offered, Lindsey, and recognizing and then overcoming those barriers through communication. So, recognizing that pattern and then working through it, I think that's a great example of a wellness social hack.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Technology can also be a great tool for creating opportunities for inclusive social connection, and really, connection in general. For example, someone who struggles with social anxiety or again, sensory issues might find connecting via technology more palatable than connecting in-person. I also wanted to mention tools that exist for making those Connections. So about 2 and 1/2 years ago, I moved to Coastal Connecticut from Central Pennsylvania, where I had lived for 12 or 13 years. I still miss my community and my friends, but I will say I love where I live right now. But I moved here, and I work remotely, so I didn't know anybody. So, I had to be incredibly intentional about making friends and making connections. And I kind of had to force myself to get out there. So, for me, this is not an endorsement, this is just what I used. I used Bumble BFF. So, if anyone doesn't know the dating app, Bumble, has a setting where you can basically find friends on it. And I would say probably, 90% of my friends in my new community came from Bumble BFF. So again, not an endorsement, but I've had great luck with it. There's also things like meetup, where people will arrange activities, and you can sign up for them. There's hikes, there's book clubs, things like that. And then there was one I learned about pretty recently called Timeleft. This is more if you are in a major city or bigger city area, but they basically pair you with five strangers for dinner. So, they have these standing appointment times that they have dinner, and I have never done it. But I think you fill out a personality thing, and they'll try to match you with people like you. So those are just some tools I'm familiar with. There are a lot more. One last one I'll mention. It's a little bit more, I don't know, off the beaten path, but is death cafes. So those are public gatherings, where people talk about more existential issues—life, death, things like that. Grief can be a part of it. But you don't have to be someone who's grieving to go to them. It's just people who want to come together and engage in that discussion. So, there are all kinds of things that you could try out.

*Deshna Nagar:* I like the idea of finding friends online. I'm also wondering, though, Lindsey, have you ever had a bad experience with a friend you found online?

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* I honestly haven't. Let me think.

*Deshna Nagar:* Hmm. That's surprising.



*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* No. I really haven't. I think there are people I didn't connect as well with but no. I truly haven't. Yeah. I think at most there were people I maybe hung out with once or twice, and then it just naturally concluded and there was no bitterness or anything. It was just like we didn't click, or our lives or lifestyles didn't align. But by and large, it's been very positive for me. I don't know if that's everyone's experience, but I've had a great experience.

*Christina Lightner:* Have you ever tried any of those apps, Deshna?

*Deshna Nagar:* I have not, which is why I asked the question. I was like, that sounds really interesting. Also just having dinner with strangers.

*Christina Lightner:* I didn't realize that any of that was even an option, like the dating app and putting it on a friend setting. I've always been one to avoid the online making friends just because I'm afraid of—like the question you asked, did you ever have a negative experience? And so, I'm glad to hear, Lindsey, that your experience has been a good one.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* And I would say, too, especially like Deshna, as you're at the point where you're getting ready to graduate and potentially relocate, I feel like when you're in college, you have so much built in identity around you of like this is my major. These are, I don't know, the clubs or activities I do. A lot of times you have built-in friends, but as you graduate and move out and move away, you might find yourself having to be more proactive in making those connections and redefining yourself. So, I don't know. I just encourage people to be open and try things. You never know.

*Deshna Nagar:* Yeah. Definitely going to try it.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* If I can ask, you came here, I'm not sure when, from another country?

*Deshna Nagar:* Yeah.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* What was that shift like?

*Deshna Nagar:* It was really stressful actually at first because everything—I wouldn't say everything. I don't want to speak in absolutes. But it was a huge shift from what I'm used to. But I found really kind people in my cohort. And that made the biggest difference ever. They were very inclusive and very curious about my culture, my experiences, and very respectful. And that made all the difference for me. So, I really appreciate them.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Did you have to, I don't know, go out of your way and be the first one to say hi, or how did you go about connecting with those folks?

*Deshna Nagar:* So, the first friend I made, I remember, I've never done this before. I don't know what came over me, but I just walked up to her, and I was like, oh, my God. I love your energy. Can I have your number? And she responded back with the exact same energy. And we've been best friends now for two years.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Oh. I love that. I remember hearing an interview, I think it was Reese Witherspoon saying, when she first moved to LA, there was a girl about her age across the hall and her mom said, you guys are the same age. Maybe she moved here and doesn't know anybody either. You should knock on the door and ask her to do something. And I think she literally just knocked on the door and said, I just moved here. I don't know anybody. And then to your point, they became best friends.

*Deshna Nagar:* I should start doing that too. Just knocking on people's doors, like, hey, I'm new here. Do you want to be best friends with me?

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Well, again, use that intuition. There may not be situations that are in your best interest to do that but be discerning and sure.

*Deshna Nagar:* Fair. But yeah. Do what Lindsey said. And you, I am wondering, how do you make new friends? How does that happen?

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. It's been stale for me. So, I haven't made any new friends for a while. I know I have the same friends, and we all tend to do the same things, and our kids hang out together, and it's like a comfort thing. So, I need to take some of these wellness tips and integrate them into my life so I can make some new friends. How about you, Lindsey? I know you said you use the Bumble BFF app.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* There have been a few ways. Again, I think I've been forced to hobbies and developing new interests can be a great way to find a new friend group. So, a few years ago, I got into rock climbing, and that turned out to be such an amazing community of people. So, trying a new activity or learning something new can be a great way to expand that friend pool. And that can also be a point of connection. So that was one thing when I first moved here, and I was going to the climbing gym where I live now, I would notice other women who were like climbing around a similar level to me. And I would just go up to them and be like, "Hi, do you climb here..." I'm just say that. Like, "Hey, I saw we were working some of the same routes," because in climbing, depending on what type you do, you also need a climbing partner. And so, I'd be like, "Hey, if you ever want to climb together, do you want to exchange numbers?" And I don't know. And a lot of times, it didn't end up panning out just because of our schedules, but it was not because anybody was unfriendly. So maybe I've just been lucky, but I find people are more open than we often assume they'll be.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. A very good point.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* And also challenge your assumptions, because I know there have been people where I didn't perceive them to be the friendliest in the room, but as soon as I initiated a conversation, they smiled and relaxed. And I later either got a sense or they outright said that they were just nervous. And I will keep that in mind and make an extra effort then to go out of my way and be like, OK. Well, I know I would love for somebody to come talk to me right now. And so, I've challenged myself to be the one to step forward first.

*Deshna Nagar:* Just as I listened to that, I get a little nervous. Just thinking about, oh, it's going out of your way and saying hi to someone, and then they don't respond.

*Christina Lightner:* That's definitely happened to me.

*Deshna Nagar:* Really?

*Christina Lightner:* It has.

*Deshna Nagar:* Oh. Oh. How do you deal with that?

*Christina Lightner:* I just keep smiling mostly and tell myself, maybe they didn't hear me or maybe they're having a bad day and try not to take it personally.

*Deshna Nagar:* That makes me think of this exercise that I do of like I tell myself six alternative stories for why something happened. So, what you did just there. Oh, maybe they didn't hear me or maybe this, maybe that. That's what I think of. That really helps.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. I like that. I'm going to try that.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* I try to flip the like when I've been in that situation of...I still think of this, oh, my gosh. There was this one time I was—I forget what store I was in, but I had a really bad headache, and it was like a really bubbly salesperson. And I feel like I was so short with that person, and it was really because I was just trying to get out of the store, so I could go lie down and my head was just throbbing. And so sometimes if I'm in a reverse situation, where I feel like someone was short with me, like what you said, Deshna. I'm like, well, maybe they had a headache, or maybe they're hungry because I definitely get hungry. Never fault someone else. Well, so going back, like Deshna, you said, you couldn't imagine doing that. What if your challenge to yourself wasn't to go up and be the first one to say, hi, but it was just, OK. I'm going to make eye contact and at least smile at someone in the room.

*Deshna Nagar:* I do that already.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Same. I like to see, when you smile, if they'll smile back.

*Deshna Nagar:* Yeah. And I mean, in my experience, more often than not, they do smile back. It's really nice.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Yeah. And even the way you frame that, it's almost like a game. So maybe play a little game with yourself, like I'm going to get five smiles at this networking event.

*Deshna Nagar:* I like that.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. Me too. Those small steps really do matter. So, taking that initiative to be the first one to say hi or to say that one more thing is very, very important. And some people might have social anxiety or that fear of rejection. I think we all have that a little bit where we're fearful of not being accepted.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* And even if someone doesn't respond positively to my attempt to break the ice, I'll try to high five myself or challenging myself to try.

*Christina Lightner:* Most definitely. Not every social interaction is going to be perfect, and that's OK. Those small steps really do matter. Even if it feels a bit outside your comfort zone, joining new groups and engaging in new social activities can be those small steps.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Yeah. And I've seen this strategy posted usually in reference not so much to social wellness, but more just enjoying where you live is treat your home town or where you live, or the immediate region like a tourist and go out and go to the things, go to the attractions, look for festivals, things like that, because often, there's a lot more than you might realize, even if you do live in a smaller place. And taking advantage of those opportunities, it's like I was saying with the people you spend the most time with, the place you spend the most time with, it could be easy to get complacent and not pay attention to everything that's offered. So locally, WPSU has a community calendar. A lot of libraries have community calendars, or faith organizations will have community events posted. So just being mindful of opportunities to nurture those connections within your community.

*Christina Lightner:* Yeah. And to take that a step further, if your community doesn't have an events calendar, maybe you could be the one to get it started.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Well, that's a great strategy. So, I feel like we covered a lot. But before we wrap up, any final thoughts.

*Christina Lightner:* I should mention that I feel like you two are my newest friends, so maybe I do make more friends than I think I do.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* Oh, same. [Long pause] Deshna is shading us right now. She's like, "I'm not friends with—"

*Deshna Nagar:* No. I'm just awkward with sweet things. But you're my new friend, too. I've added both of you to the list.

*Lindsey Whissel Fenton:* I'm honored. Well, I think that is a good place to wrap up with our new friends. And we wish you new friends in your future as well. That's it for this episode of *12 Degrees*. To learn more, you can visit [wellness.psu.edu](http://wellness.psu.edu). Also, be sure to and follow this podcast so you don't miss any of the upcoming conversations that will help you adopt 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 on your wellness journey. *12 Degrees* is produced by WPSU in collaboration with the Penn State Ross and Carol Nese 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](http://988lifeline.org).

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