

111: The Intellectual Degree

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 intellectual degree of wellness, and what we can do both at the individual and community level to support it. Christina, help us understand what intellectual wellness is.

Christina Lightner: Intellectual wellness involves the continuous pursuit of knowledge, creativity, and critical thinking. It involves engaging in lifelong learning, problem solving, and activities that challenge the mind.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Maybe it'll be helpful to talk about what intelligence is. So, the theory of multiple intelligences, developed by Howard Gardner, suggests that there are actually eight different ways that people can be smart. And on our website, we can link into the actual definitions of all of those. But basically, the key is to recognize your own strengths, and that will also play into how you nurture this degree for yourself.

Deshna Nagar: So, understanding intelligence is just one piece of the puzzle. It's also important to understand how your brain is constantly changing in response to your experiences. Neuroplasticity is your brain's ability to adapt, rewire, and form new connections throughout your life. And I think another thing that's really important is our own beliefs and thoughts because they can really mold our reality. I was watching a YouTube video by this doctor, and he talked about how if we keep saying something to ourselves repeatedly, it really strengthens that neural pathway. And so, I just sat down one day, and I was like a lot of times I'm telling myself really negative stuff And I've probably really strengthened those neural pathways. So, every time a negative thought comes up, I just actively try to stop it and say, we're not strengthening that, we're going to replace it with something more helpful.

Christina Lightner: I also do the same thing with that positive reframing. And so, whenever those negative thoughts creep in, checking those mentally and saying, OK, how can I reframe this to be positive.

Deshna Nagar: So, I talk to myself sometimes, and that really helps, especially when I'm feeling low. I'll just think of another Deshna sitting in the chair next to me, and it really helps.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I like that tip.

Christina Lightner: And I think the world would definitely be better with two Deshnas.

Christina Lightner: Most definitely. So, talking about mindset, it's very important. But I also want to talk about physical wellness and emotional wellness, and how that ties in to nurturing our intellectual wellness.

Deshna Nagar: Yeah, fueling your brain with the right foods and the right exercise and understanding your brain's rhythm, all of these are crucial.

Christina Lightner: Yeah. I know we talked about sleep in a previous episode, and it's important that we prioritize our sleep. So, when we learn something new, the best way to remember it is to sleep on it. And that's because sleeping helps strengthen memories that we've formed throughout the day and also helps link new memories to earlier ones. The non-rem stages of sleep. They prime the brain for good learning the next day, so if we haven't slept, our ability to learn new things could drop by up to 40%.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah, and not only does sleep prime us for learning or for encoding what we have learned, I think we can also talk about sleep in terms of how we can harness our body's natural rhythms to optimize our learning. I've recently become a kind of chronotype geek. So, a chronotype is your body's natural biological rhythm, and it determines when you feel most alert, and when you need rest. And understanding our chronotype can help us optimize our learning and productivity, because we can align our activities and our schedule as much as we can to our body's natural peak performance times. So, our chronotype is influenced by genetics, and changing or retraining your chronotype is pretty much impossible. But on the other hand, your circadian rhythm, which is what regulates your sleep wake cycle, can be retrained, if needed. You can think about people who work at night and have to adjust that circadian rhythm to be able to fall asleep during the day. There are four chronotypes. The bear is, essentially, a type that follows the sun, so they wake up when the sun rises in the morning, and they fall asleep as the day gets darker. And their peak productivity hours are typically 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. The bear is, incidentally, the most common human chronotype. It's about 55% of the population. People with the lion chronotype tend to wake up early, often around 5:00 AM. They feel most energetic and productive before noon, so lions tend to feel most accomplished when they start that daily to do list, or any learning they want to do as soon as possible. They typically wind down in the early evening and are asleep no later than 10:00 PM. And that is about 15% of people with that chronotype. Then there are wolves. These are the not a morning person people. They also make up about 15% of the population. So, wolves usually wake up later in the day and feel most productive a little later in the day, from about 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. They'll also get bursts of energy in the evening, and their typical bedtime is like midnight or later. And then the rarest chronotype is the dolphin. So that's about 10% of people. And it is the hardest to form a schedule around without really sacrificing sleep quality, because this chronotype gets its name, because Dolphins in the wild remain alert while sleeping, because they're trying to evade predators. So likewise, people with this chronotype tend to be really sensitive to light and noise when they sleep, and they're prone to fragmented sleep patterns. And this is like many are considered to be insomniacs. However, they do have—Dolphins do have a strong productivity window between 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM. Hearing all those, Christina and Deshna I'm curious, what chronotype would you say you are.

Deshna Nagar: I definitely am the lion chronotype. I wake up early and I'm at it. But after 8:00 PM, do not expect anything of me. I'm, essentially, a zombie.

Christina Lightner: So, whenever I look at chronotypes. I don't really fit into any of them, but I don't also feel like I'm a dolphin. So, I feel like the wolf is where I fit in the most. I wouldn't say that I'm not a

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morning person, because when I have to get up early, I'm not a miserable person where I'm like, oh, don't talk to me. So, I don't have all of the characteristics of any of them, but I tend to get bursts of energy in the evening.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah, that's interesting. So, my Oura Ring, my bio tracker that I wear, says I'm a bear, but I actually identify more as a lion because I am an early riser, and I feel on fire, in a good way, in the early morning. So, like 5:30 AM is when I am like, I wake up literally ready to go. Although actually, come to think of it, I think we could invent a new one. I think I'm actually a raccoon or some other crepuscular creature, because I tend to be most active and productive both at dawn and at dusk. So, if I do keep working in the evening, I get a nice little burst, usually around like 7:00 to about 9:00 and then I'll pretty much just pass out when I'm done. So maybe we're both raccoons, Christina.

Christina Lightner: Quite possibly. And I also want to say that understanding your chronotype cannot just help with learning, it can go back to a little bit of our social wellness episode. It can help in collaborative settings, whether it's in a professional setting or a personal setting. It could be a fun conversation piece to talk through what your chronotypes are, and it might help smooth any frustrations and also increase productivity.

Deshna Nagar: It definitely would. I have a friend who wakes up at 2:00 PM. So, half of the day, we cannot talk because she's up later, and then she'll invite me to parties and stuff at 10:00 PM, and I'm like, no, I'm going to be in bed.

Christina Lightner: My daughter, she tends to want to do things later in the evening than I do, so I can totally relate. And she'll be like, hey, do you want to do X, Y, and Z. And I'm just like, oh my goodness, it's 9:00 o'clock at night.

Deshna Nagar: So, we talked about sleep in the physical wellness episode and also movement. That's something that can be applied here too. Did you know that standing and moving around while studying can actually boost your brain power? Research shows that getting on your feet and taking movement breaks has tons of benefits, not just for your body, but for your memory and academic performance too. For example, standing while working on assignments can improve executive functioning, those skills that help you break down tasks. Plus, exercise has been shown to sharpen your thinking and learning, making you more alert, focused, and motivated. It even helps build new brain cells, which means you're better at storing information.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, Deshna I like to do like standing or walking meetings. It also helps during meetings as well. So, it's not just like that formal learning, it's also like the informal meetings that helps you take more in.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I will say, though, I struggle with really deep focus tasks. It's helpful for me to sit and really dive in if I have to write or do something really creative. But I was thinking like, well, I could stand or move for Zoom meetings. So, I think there's always ways we can adapt things to our unique needs.

Deshna Nagar: I feel like if I start standing and working at my laptop, I gradually just float away and go outside and not do any work at all.

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Lindsey Whissel Fenton: OK, so we can't stand Deshna. You and I both have our struggles. What's something else we could do?

Deshna Nagar: Another thing is you choose a keyword to look for in your reading, and when you see the word, you do 10 jumping jacks or five push-ups.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Oh, that's a good idea. And that's just a quick little break to boost your energy too. I like that.

Christina Lightner: Yeah. I love jumping jacks. So anytime I can incorporate jumping jacks, I'm all for it.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Nice. I like squat jumps, personally. That's me.

Christina Lightner: Oh, I like squat jumps too.

Deshna Nagar: I actually do jumping jacks right before each client. So, you'll just find me doing jumping jacks in my room. We talked about negative beliefs and self-talk and how they can be barriers to intellectual wellness. Another one that I've been dealing with is going through burnout and experiencing a lot of brain fog. Or a lot of days I'll feel slow, and I'm just not able to pay attention to what's going on. And I feel pretty bad about myself because of that.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, burnout and brain fog are actually really common challenges, so it's important to recognize that burnout isn't just about being tired, it is a physiological and psychological response to prolonged stress. So, addressing it does require a mix of things like rest, movement, and then those intentional recovery strategies.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: This is sort of counterintuitive, but I remember reading that one strategy for burnout is actually to engage in professional development. So, I remember being a little surprised by that at first, but I've found in my life that it's true. It's a way to re-energize you, because sometimes burnout can come from losing that connection to what drew you to it, or that passion you had, and learning something new in your field, or just connecting with others can help refresh that a little bit.

Deshna Nagar: That is surprising, actually, learning new things. How do you use that when you're going through a burnout?

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I think—that's a good question. Well, what I found is there's a couple of conferences I go to pretty much every year. I think what it is in that context for me, because I always—even if I'm exhausted going into it, I feel really energized coming out of it. And I think it's because you're learning things that are relevant, but maybe not the same things that you've been engaged with that led to your burnout, sort of a new perspective. And honestly, another part of it is probably the social wellness aspect of there are people I see at those conferences that I might only see once a year. And it's always really nourishing, not just to have connection with them, but also to feed off of their energy too. I get really energized by other people's passion. I love being around people who are passionate about what they do. So, I think all of that together can—I wonder if it's just changing a neural network or something. Even if it is related to your work, it's just on a different track.

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Deshna Nagar: So, it makes sense that there's other components to it because I'm thinking about how I have to learn something new every day I'm engaged in classes and that just makes my burnout worse. So.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I think there's also a component when you are choosing to learn something and you don't feel that pressure that you have to learn it for your class. So, I would say it's actually probably not even the learning so much that burns us out, it's the pressure and maybe being forced to learn in a time that doesn't naturally align with where your body is at the moment.

Deshna Nagar: Yeah, that applies to me.

Christina Lightner: I'm like Lindsey, and that I also go to the same conferences every year, and I can't agree more about feeling that energy off of others how that makes you feel. And they definitely help give me that boost and help me remember why I'm doing what I do.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah.

Deshna Nagar: Lindsey in a lot of stuff you talked about, there's this theme of self-awareness and you taking the time to learn what works for you best. And on that note, I am wondering how both of you learn or work best?

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I do my best work in dimly lit spaces, which is counter to everything. You always see things it's like try to work near a brightly lit window or something like that but actually can be anxiety producing for me if it's too bright, which is common among neurodivergent folks. So, a lot of times I will draw the curtains, draw the blinds, and keep the light down. And I read brown noise is really great for focus. So, a lot of times when I'm working, I will put on brown noise, kind of, dark in the room, and that just tends to be my best environment in terms of how I learn. I read a lot and I—for some reason, if I highlight things, I never go back to it but if I put those little sticky tabs on them. So, I buy those in bulk and go through tons of them. And I'm curious to hear, Christina, what works for you in terms of your best learning or working.

Christina Lightner: I learn best with hands on. And while you were talking about light, it made me think about blue light and how we should be avoiding that blue light, especially when it's close to bedtime, because it can suppress our melatonin. And so, I always wear glasses with the blue light blockers. My prescription glasses have blue light blocking.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah, and you can get—I've actually transitioned all my night lights are—you can get these amber lit night lights that are supposed to have less blue light in them or no blue light in them. So, if you have to wake up during the night, for any reason, it won't disrupt your sleep. Deshna what about you? How do you learn best?

Deshna Nagar: I learn best when I'm alone. And so, if I think of actively memorizing stuff that's different, you'll find me pacing around in the house trying to learn and memorize things. But in the class, for instance, I thrive when there's more energy, and I like it when there's more voices and if the professor is engaging.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I think if I'm in a lecture setting, that's true. I'm more thinking if I'm trying to learn something on my own, it's like if I'm just working alone in my office. Another weird thing I do that

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I'm actually curious if we have any other neurodivergent folks out there. I'm curious if this is just a me thing. I've not been able to find research on it. If I'm doing deep-focused work, I have to have my feet up. And the best way I can explain it is that for me, because it is so easy to get up and bounce into another activity that's like this cue to my body that you are in this space doing this thing, and it helps me focus all that energy. But, again, I would love to hear if anybody else has that.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, I'm the opposite. I like to stand and be able to move around a little bit. It tends to help me learn better. But I'm not opposed to trying putting my feet up. That might be good for—during my sitting break.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Again, it could just be me. And our theme is always you have to find what works for you, but it's just absolutely something I've actually tried to stand more, move more. And I'm like, if I'm writing, it's not going to happen. And speaking of writing, I tend to write things down a lot, and I think that's because of the direct connection between our perceptual understanding and our motor execution when we write things down. And this actually is pretty well documented in cognitive psychology. And it reminds me, I think was Christina in our creative episode, you said you're a big doodler.

Christina Lightner: Yeah. I love to doodle during meetings. It really helps me to stay focused. While you may think like, oh, she's not paying attention, she's doodling, it actually helps me to focus and to retain the information better. And there are studies about that as well.

Deshna Nagar: When I think of doodling, I initially thought it was like a mom thing because I had opened my notebooks and there would be a lot of flowers on random pages, and it was just my mom doodling whenever she'd be on call with her friend or someone. So that's funny.

Christina Lightner: Flowers and butterflies are my go-to. Maybe it is a mom thing.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Christina when we were prepping for this episode, I was geeking out on constructivist learning theory, and you mentioned a strategy rooted in this that you find helpful.

Christina Lightner: Yeah. And I actually use this technique with my students where I do learn one, do one, teach one. So just, to give you an example, one of the skills that I get to teach my students is baby baths. So, we get to give the baby their first newborn bath and I'll teach the students how to do it. And sometimes this is either of them just watching me do it, or I might talk them through it and do it with them. And then, essentially, the next step is to do one on their own. And so, they do the bath. And while they're doing the bath, the ultimate goal is to get them to the point where they can teach the family, because it's very important that the family knows how to give the baby a bath once they get home. And so, it kind of brings that full circle where they get to learn the baby bath, do a baby bath, and then teach the family how to do the baby bath.

Deshna Nagar: I like that. I'm wondering if you have a box full of fake babies to do that.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Do you?

Christina Lightner: I do. I do. I have lots of fake babies, yes. And it's one of the feedbacks that I get from my students is they love all of my models.

Deshna Nagar: That would really creep me out.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: OK, so you're not using fake baby models in your learning. What's something else that you do use, Deshna?

Deshna Nagar: I guess another thing that really helps with my learning is just knowing why I'm learning something, and where I'll apply it.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, it definitely helps when we know why we're learning it. It reminds me of when we started getting into algebra in school, and I was like, when am I going to use this. Can I please take business math instead. And they're like, no, you're too smart. You have to take algebra.

And I'm like, are you kidding me? I don't understand this. What do you mean I'm too smart for business math when I have no idea where I'm ever going to use this algebra? I'm sure people do use it, but I just don't see it for me.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: That actually also makes me think of going back to what we said about the stories we tell ourselves. So, my story was always I'm like an English social sciences person, I'm not a math person, and that's always what I thought of myself, but I was going back through my mom's file cabinet, and she kept report cards and things, and I found several, like, little class awards I got in high school for math. And I was like me? And it was so counter to the story I had been telling myself. And it's really opened my eyes again to that like wow, what we say to ourselves really does shape how we see ourselves.

Deshna Nagar: Maybe I just need to tell myself I'm a math genius.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Maybe you should ask your mom if she has a file of your schoolwork, and you might find some surprises in there.

Deshna Nagar: I'm going to do that. I'm thinking about other ways that we could engage in mental stimulation. One that comes to me is just challenging yourself to try new things. And, for me, this is whenever I go to a restaurant, I try to order something new from the menu.

Christina Lightner: I love to do that is one of my most favorite things to do. And I just found a really good Thai restaurant, and I ordered something that I never had before, and it was so delicious. I actually made my family go back two days later.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: And I'm thinking maybe another one. This may or may not be for you, but I had a teacher who used to—every night when we read our assignment, we were supposed to circle three words we didn't know and look them up. And this was in the olden days when we had to actually go to a dictionary and look them up and write down the definition and we couldn't just Google things. And at the time I thought it was so annoying. And just like we're reading already, like, why do we have to do this on top of it. But I actually do employ that now where I think it can be easy to just—we're busy, we're reading something, we don't know what it means. And we have an idea of what a word means, but we never actually follow through on what does it mean. So, I will still do that to this day. Now, I do use Google a lot of the time, but I will, if I see a word I don't know, make a point to look it up so that could be another quick trick.

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Deshna Nagar: I actually used to do that a lot. And it would start with me googling a word, and then five minutes later I'm down a rabbit hole and I'm googling like penguin knees or that butterflies have taste buds on their feet. Did you know that?

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Taste buds on their feet. I don't think I did know that no.

Deshna Nagar: Yeah, that's so weird. It just makes me think of oh, what do my socks taste like.

Christina Lightner: And my daughter—it just reminded me, Deshna, when you were talking, my daughter told me that Wikipedia has a random—it's called wiki roulette. And it just gives you random things that are in Wikipedia. And so, we sat down and played WikiRoulette, and it was so much fun. And just the randomness of things that would come up.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: That is super cool. I didn't know that.

Deshna Nagar: Yeah, I love that. I'm going to try that with my friends.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, bringing in that social wellness.

Deshna Nagar: Yeah.

Christina Lightner: Yeah.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: That sounds like a really fun game. You could totally turn that into a game.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, games can be really important for nurturing our intellectual wellness. My family and I, we do like to do games and puzzles together. And puzzles are also great for anxiety and also help us to combine that social wellness component. And I know Lindsey, I think you were talking about something that you like to do as well.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: So, one game I like to play is called Chronology, and it's really simple. It's just like this box of these cards, but they each have a historic event on it. You each get a base event to put down, so you get one card and then you like—when it's your turn, you draw another card, and you have to determine if it's before or after that Central card. It's just sort of a fun way to learn, and it's really fun to play. And I feel a little bit better playing it because I'm like, oh, I'm learning something.

Christina Lightner: Oh, I'd love that. I'm going to try that. I haven't played that one yet. Have you, Deshna?

Deshna Nagar: No, but I am thinking of Psych, which is very similar. You sort of—so there's multiple people playing and you have a historical figure on your phone. And one person holds it up to their forehead, and all of the other team players will try to make them guess who the historical figure is. And it's just so much fun.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: It's like a person-based charade or something?

Deshna Nagar: Yeah, sort of.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: And you like, bop it a lot?

Christina Lightner: Yeah. So, bop it is super fun. And going back to the theory of multiple intelligences, even games like bop it or twister can nurture our intellectual wellness because they provide that bodily kinesthetic intelligence and so much fun to play. And my daughter and I will go back and forth and see who can get farthest.

Deshna Nagar: I'm also thinking about individuals with intellectual disabilities and how they could engage in intellectual wellness. And one thing that came up for me, and this is something that I know from my training, that incorporating different visuals, audio, movement, and just engaging all of those different senses is a great way to enhance understanding and retention.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, and that makes me think of people who have dementia and their intellectual wellness and how engaging their senses, so like with music, scent, tactile stimulation, that kind of all evoke memories. So, it can be very helpful for those who have dementia. So, family member with dementia may forget people's names, but they might remember the lyrics to a song. So, music can be a very powerful tool. And then using family photo albums and discussions can help strengthen their memory recall. Also encouraging social learning, so encouraging them to read out loud or storytell or have conversations with people.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I do want to get into community wellness, but the last thing I wanted to touch on, and I think is something a lot of folks are struggling with right now in the realm of intellectual wellness is balancing staying informed on the state of the world and taking care of your emotional wellness and all the other components of wellness. And I wanted to share that we actually have another podcast that WPSU produces in collaboration with Penn State, Bellisario college of communications. It's called News Over Noise, and the first episode was with a researcher named Dr. Kirsten Eddy. And she shared the strategy that I actually have used and have found very helpful. So, her suggestion was curating your news. And so, I've started doing that. I sign up for three different newsletters that I get daily, and I find it much less jarring or upsetting than, say, listening to the news.

Deshna Nagar: As you talk about curating your news, I also think about curating your Instagram feed. Because for me, a lot of times news will pop up and it has jarring images, and it will really upset me. So instead of taking an all or nothing approach where you're just like, oh, I'm not going to listen to any news at all, you try to find out what's within your comfort.

Christina Lightner: I love all of these tips, and I love News Over noise. Are you guys getting into a new season.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yeah. We have a new season coming out.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, I can't wait for that to come out.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Yep. Season 3 is in the works.

Christina Lightner: Oh, nice.

Deshna Nagar: I'm going to tune in too.

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Christina Lightner: So, the news and staying informed with what's going on and the communities around us brings us to the community piece. And one thing that I love about intellectual community wellness is the free libraries that are throughout the community. I know we have one where I live, and it's on a walking trail. And my daughter gets so excited to go see what books are in there and is there anything that she can contribute to the box. And she's like, can we put something in the box? And I'm like, yes, absolutely. So, it's so much fun and interactive and helps you get some different perspectives too, because there might be something in there that you wouldn't have even thought of to read. And there it is, and it intrigues you and it gets you learning new things. So, love those little free libraries.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I love those too. I was actually just filming at the Jana Marie foundation, which is a great local org that does work around mental health, especially with young people, and I've never seen this before, but they actually had—it was a little library, but it was also a community wellness box where they had books, but they also had stress balls and some other toys. And I'm thinking, even back to our creative wellness episode, you could do a different spin on that and put in art supplies or things like that. I've seen people do that with food too, but I do love that. I agree with you, Christina. That model is really fun. And they always just make me happy when I see them. I just get a little smile on my face.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, and I love that tip. I'm going to do that. I'm going to tell my daughter, going we're to go over there and put some wellness items in that little library box.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Oh yeah, I love that.

Deshna Nagar: I'm thinking even like a cute note.

Christina Lightner: Oh. Yeah. We were talking in another episode about how you came across the note, and it made you feel really positive and—

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Oh, I'm thinking that would be a great idea because that was an actual library book I checked out. But I feel like maybe those little libraries could be a great way to—you could just leave a note in each book in the little library.

Christina Lightner: I love that.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Or take it to intellectual wellness and you could leave a fun fact, and a random fun—here we go. You could play the Wikipedia roulette, pick your favorite fact, write it on a note, and then write something encouraging at the bottom. And there we've covered multiple domains of wellness.

Deshna Nagar: We just did.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: And you could walk. You could walk to different libraries. And then you're getting your physical wellness too.

Deshna Nagar: Yeah.

Christina Lightner: All about that integration.

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Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Another idea I had that, kind of, goes back to your learn one, do one, teach one, Christina, is doing informal lecture nights with your friends, I think could be fun. Because we all have such complementary skill sets or domains of knowledge. And I was thinking, actually, Christina, in one of her previous episodes, you mentioned, oh, you would love for me to teach you some carpentry skills. And I was like, I'd love for you to teach me how to cook some food I could eat. And so, whatever the domain is, I think that could be a fun way to nurture intellectual wellness. And, again, that social wellness. So maybe you could do like a monthly gathering with your friends where you each sign up to teach something and you kind of do your own little Ted Talks or training. I think it would be fun and interesting. I mean you might actually learn something about a friend that you didn't even know they were into.

Christina Lightner: Oh, most definitely. I'm totally in for learning some carpentry skills, and I'll definitely teach you some simple recipes.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Love it.

Deshna Nagar: So, one that I can think of is also learning new languages that maybe your friend knows, but you don't. I think that's also where to make your space really inclusive, because you're accommodating everyone and providing multilingual learning opportunities.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Learning language, for any reason, is so great for your brain. It can be really fun. And like you said, Deshna can help nurture an environment where people feel included and welcome. And I think that's a great idea.

Christina Lightner: Yeah. And my daughter likes to use Duolingo and different apps. Not that I'm sponsoring Duolingo or anything. She just found another one too. I can't remember the name of it, but she's like, can I use your email to sign up for a new language app. And I'm like, yes, absolutely. And the languages that she picks are so interesting. She'll just pick Greek. She's like learning Greek. And I'm like, oh, that's interesting. What made you decide you wanted to learn that? And she's like, I don't know. I was going through them, and it looked interesting. And since I'm a nurse, I like to try to learn a little bit of each language, like learning how to say hi and things like that. So that's something that I'm working on.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Maybe you could pick a language with your daughter, and you could practice together. So, like to Deshna's suggestion of even if it's not a friend who grew up speaking that language, you could still make that something you do with a friend, because it is really helpful to have somebody to practice with.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, it is. It's a lot of fun. So, we'll play the games on the app together.

Deshna Nagar: I'm thinking about when me and my friends teach each other like our languages, and we do not Cristina, start with a hi or hello like you—

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: You start with the bad words?

Deshna Nagar: We do.

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Christina Lightner: Another thing my daughter just started learning is sign language. And so, she's like teaching me. So, she'll do like the motions of the words, and she'll say, do you know what that means? And she'll make me guess before she tells me what it is. And so, it's like adding that little fun game piece to the learning.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: That's awesome.

Christina Lightner: I only personally know the alphabet, so it's not something that I'm able to help her learn. And that's with lots of things that she learns. She wanted to learn how to crochet. And she was getting upset at me because I couldn't teach her how to do it. And I was like; I don't know how to do it. And she was stuck on a certain stitch, and she could only make a straight line and she's like; can you teach me how to turn. And I was like; I can't teach you. And so, she was looking up videos and tutorials and different guides on how to teach herself how to crochet, and she's amazing at it now. And so, you think, oh, God, that's creative. It's also intellectual.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I think any time you're learning a new skill, I would argue, is good for your intellectual wellness, even if it's not learning a language or book learning or that type of thing is it's still challenging your brain to form those new neural pathways.

Christina Lightner: Yeah, a—

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: And something you said that made me think, Christina, I did martial arts for about 10 years, and there were several times I would see parents start taking it with their kid. And it was really cool because they would say, oh, my kid was asking me for help with this, and I didn't know how to help them. And so, I'm learning. But then they would get really into it too. So, I think that kind of co-learning can be really fun.

Christina Lightner: What type of martial arts did you do?

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I did a style called Shotokan karate. I'll send you some info because I always said if I—I do not have kids, but if I did, I would have them in martial arts, no question. I mean, one, it's great for physical wellness, but it's so good for your focus, your confidence. Oh, I wish I had started younger. I started in my 20s but I loved it. It's the only reason I kind of got out of it is because then I also fell in love with rock climbing, and there's only so many hours in the day, but I think it's fantastic.

Deshna Nagar: Remind me not to mess with you.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: I'm a little rusty, but I did it for a while.

Christina Lightner: So, one other thing I just want to mention is a simple way to nurture our intellectual wellness can be saying yes to opportunities that you might typically not say yes to. So, for me an example is this podcast. And so, this isn't necessarily in my wheelhouse, but it's something that I felt like I wanted to do and wanted to learn more about. And a lot of what we're doing with this podcast is helping to build my intellectual wellness, because I'm now integrating new skills that I haven't even really ever thought about, and I feel like it's going to help with other areas of my work as well. So that's what I've been doing is just learning all I can to become better at this practice.

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Deshna Nagar: Yeah, it has been a great learning experience for me too. And talking about those different types of intelligence, I think interpersonal intelligence and linguistic intelligence, that's the podcast has been helping me with both of those. So, it's fun.

Lindsey Whissel Fenton: Well, that makes me think of one final thought that maybe a good note to end on is the importance of, in any of these degrees, is to celebrate our wins. To celebrate the fact that you both said yes to something that maybe was a little scary, or outside your comfort zone, and you're doing a fantastic job, and it's been so much—it doesn't just benefit you. I'm thinking of how much I'm enjoying doing this with both of you, and that I wouldn't have had that opportunity to grow myself and learn from if you hadn't said yes. So, in the weeds of life, we often don't take moments to just sit back and be like, yeah, I tried something new, I'm doing this new thing. I'm learning something new and just taking a moment to celebrate. When we try something, when we achieve something, when we create something, I do think that's something we often don't take enough time to do is just to celebrate those wins. So, here's to celebrating and growing and learning all the things. That's it for this episode of *12 Degrees*. To learn more can visit 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 Dana Nager.

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.

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