

The Joy Of Movement With Dr. Kelly McGonigal

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Jill Stoddard: [00:00:50] you're listening to Kelly McGonigal on psychologists off the clock.

hey everyone, it's Jill here and I'm really excited to bring you this episode today where I interviewed Dr. Kelly McGonigal about her new book, the joy of movement. And I think this episode is more timely than ever, where we're all kind of stuck in our homes and it might be difficult to find new and creative ways. To move. So I think it's a great time to talk about this, and I'm here with Diana and I'm curious about your thoughts.

Diana Hill: [00:02:08] Yeah. You know, it's interesting because I think there's people that are in two different camps. There's people that maybe are exercisers and their classes are canceled and they can't get to their gym, or they are used to going to their dance class and they're feeling a lot of loss around their movement.

And then there's people that maybe haven't been moving, and they're like, well, West start now. Right? What I think Kelly offers in this episode is sort of these ideas around not only why movement is so essential for your immune system and for your mental health, but also that it doesn't have to be so structured in that way.

And we can get really creative about it. And then I'm curious if there's ways that you've gotten more creative with, with movement.

Jill Stoddard: [00:02:47] Jill. Yeah, I have. And it's funny cause I'm lucky to have a treadmill in my garage, but funnily enough, I have not been using my treadmill because it's hard to do that with kids being home, of course.

, but what we've been doing is heading out in our backyard, even though it's tiny, playing some catch. My daughter plays softball, she's seven. and softball has been canceled. So we've been playing softball and my son and I recently took my French bulldog for a walk and. We don't usually walk with him cause he's a Frenchie and he gets really tired.

, so he was very confused trying to get into every car thinking that we were going to the vet. Cause that's the only time we ever put his leash and his collar on. So my son and I both got some sun and some fresh air and a lot of giggles. , in addition to movement, and I love the way Kelly talks about, , how movement can

bond people.

It's not just about getting exercise.

Diana Hill: [00:03:44] I think some of us feel like you're French bulldog right now where we're like, try to get in the car. We tried to go about our life the way we usually do, but it's not happening that way. Everything is, everything is different and we're trying to figure out how to do this, and a lot of it is actually moving to online.

Zoom is blowing up. . I just had a client today talking about zoom, making dinner meetings with people of resume or eating together in groups, right. For a dinner party. And I actually think that that's a place where movement can happen as well. One of my, um, favorite yoga studios on the East coast that I, I never get to go to shout out to Kaia Yoga, just put all of their yoga classes online.

So I'm going to go do a yoga class in Greenwich tomorrow morning and those we got to think outside of the box because as Kelly shares brilliantly in this book, movement and movement together is part of our nature as a species and we're, we're meant to move together in groups. It regulates our nervous system.

It activates our immune system. It just makes you feel better and we all could benefit from a little bit of that right

Jill Stoddard: [00:04:44] now. Absolutely. Without a doubt. So before we head into the episode, , we here at psychologists off the clock, wanted to offer some resources that our listeners might find helpful.

Diana Hill: [00:04:57] Yeah, you know, I think just as a reminder that a lot of therapists are offering their services online right now. If you need some mental health support, all three of us have practices that are online. Jill and I are both in California. Debbie is licensed in Colorado and Yael is licensed in Massachusetts. And so you can work online with therapists that are in your state. I also wanted to talk about your book, Jill, because it's such a resource. It's all about stress and anxiety and using ACT principles Be Mighty. That's a great book to pick up right now. If you want to learn some strategies to help you out with your stress and anxiety.

During this time, and then of course for therapists, this is a great time to dig into some of your online learning because right now you're being needed , more than ever. And the Praxis has online training and continuing education or therapists. They offer a two types of high quality online training.

One is live online courses and the other is on demand courses, and you can learn more about them from our website, like on the sponsorship shape page, and there's some discount codes there as well.

Jill Stoddard: [00:06:05] Great. Well thanks everyone and enjoy this episode with Dr. Kelly McGonigal,

hey everyone, it's Jill here and I am beyond thrilled to be interviewing the incredible Dr. Kelly McGonigal about her new book, the joy of movement. Kelly McGonigal is a health psychologist and lecturer at Stanford university who specializes in understanding the mind body connection as a pioneer in the field of science help.

Her mission is to translate insights from psychology and neuroscience into practical strategies that support personal wellbeing and strengthen communities. She is the bestselling author of the willpower instinct and the upside of stress. Through the Stanford center for compassion and altruism. She helped create Stanford compassion cultivation training.

A program now taught around the world that helps individuals strengthen their empathy, compassion, and self-compassion. You might know her from her Ted talk, how to make stress your friend, which is one of the most viewed Ted talks of all time with over 20 million views. Her new book, the joy of movement explores why physical exercise is a powerful antidote to the modern epidemics of depression, anxiety, and loneliness.

And if that's not enough, she's also passionate about animal rescue and adoption and , is trained as a cat adoption counselor and matchmaker. So welcome Kelly. I am so happy to have you here with us today on psychologist's, off the clock.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:07:34] Thank you, and thank you for mentioning my favorite personal credential. The the cat matchmaker.

Jill Stoddard: [00:07:40] Well, it's an important one.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:07:41] I feel, I feel like that's true.

Jill Stoddard: [00:07:45] Well, let's talk about this book. I loved this book, the joy of movement. Um, and I will admit, I've always had what I would consider a slightly complicated relationship with exercise, so I wouldn't normally be drawn to a book about exercise. and I think that's probably because a lot of my exposure to movement has been.

Authority figures sort of shaming me that this is something that I should be doing and that I'm bad if I'm not doing it. And what I loved so much about this book is that it is just the furthest thing from that. And it truly earns its title and being called the joy of movement. And you make the point that the joy of movement is not necessarily about fitness, but it's about.

The joy of movement, that it's simply in the moving. And so we'll talk much more about this idea, but to start and I've totally different place, I'm really curious. , you make it pretty clear in the beginning of the book that you have been a huge movement lover since you were a little girl. Um, I think you said you started working out to VHS tapes, which dates you a little bit,

Kelly McGonigal: [00:08:50] Yes. Jazzercise mid

Jill Stoddard: [00:08:52] Jazzercise at age eight. Um, yeah. Early eighties. Right. And, and I believe if I have this right, this is your sixth book, the joy of movement, is that right?

Kelly McGonigal: [00:09:01] Um, it depends what you count as a book. I have some books that are only available in non-English languages. Um, so I think I have four in the U S that are

Jill Stoddard: [00:09:11] Okay. Well, so somewhere between four and six books. Um, and so this is a question that therapists often ask clients when they first walk in. Why now? Like, why are you coming to therapy now? So why are you writing this book now as opposed like, why wasn't this your very first book given how passionate you clearly are about this topic?

Kelly McGonigal: [00:09:31] You know, every book that I have written has been

because somebody else asked me to write it. So when I was first working in the field of yoga. And people saw the work that I was doing with yoga practices to help with things like pain or, or stress. Um, somebody said, Hey, we see what you're doing. Can you write a book about it?

So I did, when I was teaching the science of willpower at Stanford, and it was a super popular class and it started to get media attention, very sexy topic, willpower. , somebody asked me to write a book or agents started calling and I said, okay, same thing with stress. I had that Ted talk. Um. This is the book I probably always would have wanted to start with.

I actually can remember when I was a graduate student in psychology. I've been very like, so there are always two sides of my personality. I've been teaching, um, group movement, yoga and dance and traditional fitness for 20 years. I started as a graduate student and actually while I was getting my PhD in psychology, I also was, um, secretly doing the.

Track in a master's in dance education through the dance department. My advisor did not even know that I was doing this. And I remember

Jill Stoddard: [00:10:36] your secret life.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:10:37] yeah, there was just two of us, two of us in this class, um, on, uh, strategies and dance education. I remember we were reading something about the relationship between emotions and movement and I was being like super critical cause it really wasn't scientific.

It really wasn't integrating what we know about the mind body relationship from fields like psychology and anthropology and neuroscience. So I remember making some sort of, you know, young 22 year olds, snide comment and, um, the instructor looked at me and said, I think one day you're going to write the book that like really gets at this topic.

And it just sort of stuck with me and I was like, Oh yeah, sure. When I'm, you know, when I'm not busy doing my PhD research. But actually I feel like that's, that's true. That this is the book that I've always wanted to write because movement has always been. My favorite form of do it yourself therapy, I should say, do it together.

Therapy, because I love group movement so much. Um, when you say that I have been a lover of movement since I was a little kid, some people might have a misperception thinking, Oh. You know, doing sports, maybe you were like that fit kid or that kid who could, you know, do flips on the jungle gym bars. I was a kid who was in remedial gym class.

I was the slowest runner. I was so clumsy. I've never played a team sport. So it's not that I was a love of mover in the sense that I had any athletic ability. I mean, I didn't learn how to do a Cartwheel until I was in my twenties because it felt like some sort of milestone I should like, like a meaningful milestone to try to reach. Um, but I was a lover of movement because. Despite feeling humiliated in gym class and on the playground. Um. I found through moving to music, moving rhythmically, moving with intentionality, you know, like an instructor would say, you know this bicep curl, feel your, feel your bicep, feel your muscle, that there was a sensation to it, and that you were synchronizing with both the beat of the music and other people.

Like that's the joy of those original aerobics and calisthenics tapes is we're all

doing this together. And there's often a pop soundtrack in the background. And in Jazzercise, they would encourage you to sing along. And it was ridiculous and it was wonderful. And that was how I found my joy of movement in that it gave me a way of being in my body that felt like I was a good version of myself rather than the humiliation of athletics.

And, um, and also because I have a tendency towards anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. Um, and growing up at a time when kids really were not. Did not get help for that. Um, movement and exercise became a way for me to deal with stress and anxiety very early on. So that's what, what it means for me to be in love with movement is that it's, it's part of how I take care of my mental health.

And it also has given me tremendous access to, to literally, to joy and to community. And thank goodness I finally got to write the book.

Jill Stoddard: [00:13:24] Yes.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:13:24] Nobody asked me. I showed up for myself and for my community.

Jill Stoddard: [00:13:28] Well, and I agree. I think it clearly is the book that you've always been meant to write, but things happen at the time that they're meant to happen. I think. Um, and those, I mean, those stories are so powerful and I'm so glad that you wrote the book. And I think, you know, I'd have to say one of your best talents as a writer is you have this ability to weave science, your own personal experience, the stories of other people you interview into this really. Compelling, um, cohesive narrative. And I learned a ton from reading this book and found the research incredibly fascinating, which is not an easy, you know, that there's, that's no mean feat to be able to make research interesting is not something that everyone is able to do. And some of the findings you discuss are the links between movement and not just joy.

Of course, that's in there. It's the joy of movement, but also the links between movement and human connection. Hope, finding a sense of purpose and even recovery from addiction. And there were, there were even more in there too. It was so interesting. And I'm curious, as you were doing the research for the book, were there any findings that surprised you or that you found particularly exciting or interesting.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:14:43] Yes, I'll, I'll, I'll, let me see if I can give you my top three. But I first, I want to mention, since you're talking about how to communicate science, and I know that, you know, many of us are interested in sharing science with people. Um, you know, whom it might help. I actually teach a class on this at Stanford for graduate students, how to talk about their research, um, how to communicate it, why it's important, why it matters.

And one thing I always think about is that there are certain emotions that I think are intrinsically connected. Two scientific discovery that are contagious. And so when I'm looking for research, I'm looking for the research that gives me a feeling of wonder or all, or as you said, surprise or common humanity, that sense of like, wow, I'm not the only one who's had this experience.

Um, sometimes relief. So I feel like science can create these emotions. And so when I'm reading the literature, I'm looking for. That scientific finding, that study design, uh, that like, that turn of phrase that gives me a feeling of wonder or, or

surprise. And then I try to re sort of capture that and how I explain it.

So let me give you a few examples. Um. One of this is going to be a very recent, and it's almost like a very, it's a small finding, but it perfectly captures to me that emotion of surprise. So anyone who's ever worked out has probably heard people talk about lactic acid, that thing that accumulates as a metabolic byproduct of exercise that you are.

Using energy, uh, and your muscles produce lactate, and people blame it for the burn that you feel when you exercise. And so, you know, if you take an exercise class and most people will be like, you've got to flush that lactic acid out. Um, so there's this thing that has been blamed for muscle soreness.

It's big been called like a villain in the exercise world. And the latest research suggests that. First of all, it's a natural BiPAP byproduct of exercise. It's part of how your body exercises and uses energy, so there's nothing wrong with it, and that when it travels through your bloodstream. After exercise, it actually can cross the blood brain barrier and in your brain it acts to make your brain more resilient to stress.

It has antidepressant. And this, I don't even know if this is in the book, I think I like snuck it in and like a final edit, like it's like half a sentence somewhere in there. Um, but it's an antidepressant, anti-anxiety, um, metabolic byproduct of exercise. And like, that's the kind of finding that I think.

It's almost like what this thing that I thought was just making me feel sore after a workout. It's almost like you can begin to link, even though Lactaid actually probably doesn't cause muscle soreness, but we all think it does. So imagine if when you're feeling tired or sore after a workout, instead of thinking like, I must be really out of shape, or you know, that was so hard that you actually start to link that sensation to.

You know, if I worked out enough to have this feeling, that means my brain is being transformed or what I did as well, that, that, that lactate is making my brain more resilient to stress. So that's one example. Um,

Jill Stoddard: [00:17:42] And that it reminds me too of your, your stress book and your stress Ted talk, where you talk about how the way we appraise stress impacts how much the stress impacts us. That it essentially mitigates the negative effects of stress when we appraise it in a positive way.

And this reminds me of that, that think about the healing powers of. Appraising the difficult parts of movement in a different way and the research that you site allows us to do that. That's really cool.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:18:11] is actually one of the interesting things I should also say with stress. Um, I mean, just to be pragmatic about it, there's no amount of thinking about stress that can get rid of all of the harmful effects of chronic and traumatic stress. I always feel like that's a super important caveat whenever anyone brings up, um, that my work on stress, but the, the, the key thing about stress is we know that when you have a mindset that allows you to.

Recognize the potential positive side effects of an experience or how something can bring out the good that's in. You can bring out your natural strengths. You understand that humans have a capacity to rise to, a challenge, to learn and to grow, to connect with others. You know, the idea is that recognizing that capacity helps you harness it.

And the same is very much true with your mindset towards exercise. When people recognize that exercise is powerful for mental health, that can help people build communities. When you recognize that physical sensations like fatigue or exertion, that you're sweating, that your heart is pounding, that you are becoming breathless and you have to take a break.

Studies show that when people interpret those physical sensations as. I'm amazing. I'm doing this hard thing. I'm tough. Or this is evidence that my heart is getting stronger and this is part of how I get braver in the world. This is how I train myself to show up in the world.

Um,

when people are able to make those sort of appraisals of what you otherwise could just be like, this is hard.

I don't like this. I'm out of shape. .

Why does this have to feel this way?

That it makes people enjoy movement more. It increases their positive memories of it. It changes the stories that they tell about themselves, not related to exercise, but about, you know, their capacity to endure or to engage with life. It brings out the good even more powerfully. So I think that that, that idea of choosing to focus on movement as something that brings out the good in you as opposed to something that corrects. What others or you judge about yourself, which is so often the mindset people bring to movement. I even want to say it, I'm so tired of even like mimicking the sort of phrases that you hear in advertising or in, you know, unintentionally, you know, harmful exercise queuing in a gym. I'm not even, you know what I'm talking about? The stuff that

Jill Stoddard: [00:20:27] yeah. 100%

Kelly McGonigal: [00:20:28] and that, and that mindset basically is, is a huge obstacle to experiencing the joys and the mental health benefits of exercise.

Jill Stoddard: [00:20:36] Yeah. It's certainly not motivating. And you know, you tell so many incredibly inspiring stories throughout the book about people who have overcome barriers and where exercise has been something that's made them feel powerful and like, I can tackle anything, something that I didn't think that I could tackle in the past and just reading it.

You know, reading that take on it rather than some of these other negative things you're talking about, which certainly has been my experience in the past. It motivated me so much, so much more to really want to be out there and find my movement and do it with other

Kelly McGonigal: [00:21:13] Has that translated into action? Have you moved since reading the

Jill Stoddard: [00:21:16] 100%

Kelly McGonigal: [00:21:18] Oh really good. I thought that was actually, that was a risky question to ask you. I didn't want you to

Jill Stoddard: [00:21:22] Yeah. No, no. So, well, I'll, so I'll tell you, I'll tell you my story. You know, this, this is probably related to, well, one of the things I want to talk about is the obstacles that people face to doing this, right? So I'm like, I'll actually, let me, let me quote you to you. So you say quote like highly addictive substances, regular exposure to exercise will over time teach the brain to like

want and need it and quote.

And when I read that, I was thinking, yeah, that totally makes sense, but how do we get there? Right? Like sometimes starting is the hardest part, or someone will make. You know, a new year's resolution and they're all excited and motivated to start, but then they peter out. Um, and that it can be difficult to get going.

And so to, to go back and answer your question, this has always been a challenge for me and the way that I was finally able to make movement a part of my life in a way that I really wanted it to be part of my life was to connect it to a true value of mine, and I used to tell myself, Oh, physical health, I want to be healthy.

And it just wasn't doing the trick. I think it's still sort of felt like a should. And I had this aha moment one morning where my whole family was together. We were sitting on the sofa and I just thought, Oh my gosh, my children cannot grow up with two sedentary parents. I have a husband who looks amazing and looks like he exercises and eats well, but he's just genetically blessed and does not exercise and eat well.

And I thought, you know, they can't grow up with two sedentary parents.

Someone has to model that movement is just a regular part of your life. And that's what it really took. For it to click for me. Um, and so I have been moving for I, that was maybe a year or so ago, but since reading the book, I've started to get more creative.

Like instead of just being on my treadmill and my grudge, which served an excellent purpose because when I had two little kids and taking three naps a day and didn't have time to, you know, go to the gym or take three hours to drive to a yoga class and work out for an hour and a half, it served a great purpose.

And I love my treadmill. It's also where I read and prep for podcasts and feel like I'm killing two birds with one stone. But I've started getting outside. I've started bringing my five year old son and having him bring his scooter. And you know, the joy of just watching him be outside moving makes me being outside, moving so much more exciting.

We go on hikes together and it is like everything is just awe and wonder for him, and that makes me experience it in a new way. Um, and all of that has really **Kelly McGonigal**: [00:23:56] you, did you like the stories in the book? I threw in a few stories here and there about, um, parents and caregivers who are exercising with their children and are there like all those magic moments I think about like the father with his dance parties in his living room with his little girl and dancing and target when you,

Jill Stoddard: [00:24:11] And in target. Yes. And he said, I don't care. Yeah. Yes. I love it.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:24:16] Yeah. So there's so many things in what you just said. I want to highlight, but I want to, because I often feel like people who, um, who are just coming to my work for the first time might have some misperceptions that I want to, to clear up right away, which is, um, sometimes people think that. One of the barriers to movement is going to be the things that are barriers to physical movement in general, such as age injuries, disabilities, neurological disorders, size, the things that that, you know, if you were to think stereotypically who somebody who loves to exercise and is quote unquote good

at it, you might think of a young, stereotypically, physically fit, thin, whatever kind of person.

And I'm, as you know from reading the book, I was very intentional about making the book. You know, 90% of the stories in the book are not people who would fit that stereotype, whether it's the dance class for people with Parkinson's disease, whether it's the woman who started running half marathons in her sixties who identifies as fat and is not doing it to lose weight, but it's doing it because she loves it.

Um. The gym where people have, you know, serious physical disabilities, whether they're in wheelchairs or recovering from stroke and they're boxing and strength training, um, sort of whatever. The idea is that I think a lot of people think I'm not talking about them because they have chronic pain or because whatever the situation is, I really want to emphasize, I'm talking about everybody, every body.

, including people with serious physical and mental health challenges. And even though it may be that, um, you know, for example, there's a story about a woman, . Dealing with the loss of her son in tremendous grief, which is just about any condition you can imagine other than being in a coma. Grief is about the one thing that makes movement and experiencing joy through movement, almost physiologically impossible because of the way that grief hijacks the brain in the body.

And, uh, you know, her story was so powerful to me because of how exercising in nature and also finding the support of a running group. Really allowed her to, you know, using her language, embrace life again. Um, so I just wanted to put that out there because that you asked about what are some of the barriers to getting started?

And I found that a big one is people have been told this isn't for you. Or we have our own fears, our own experiences where we've been led to believe maybe this is not about me. And it is, it's about you and the body that you have and what you're capable of today. And there's a version of it that can bring you joy and hope and meaning.

Um, and community. So that's one of the barriers. And the other thing is that you said that I think is so important, which is to sort of throw out your ideas of what exercise has to look like. And if you think about in terms of movement, and I often define movement as using your body to engage with life.

And if you think about, is there anything that you already love or like, or enjoy that you want more of that you could do. By engaging with life through your body. So if you like being outdoors, if you've noticed that your mind quiets down or you feel more optimistic in nature, which is a very common psychological effect, could you hike, walk, swim, run, play sports, find a, you know, a park.

Can you find a way to be outdoors, garden, you know, do some physical labor outdoors, do some restoration, do some volunteering. , if you love music, music is one of the easiest ways to bring joy into movement while you're giving your brain time to catch up, it seems to take. The, the length of time I kept coming across in the neuroscience research was about six weeks.

That seemed to take about six weeks for your brain to be like this thing that I hate, that so uncomfortable and why am I doing it? To wow, this feels amazing

and I'm so glad I did it. And if you tell me I can't do it tomorrow, I'm going to be cranky because this is something that my body and brain needs, right? So it gets gonna take at least six weeks to get there. Is there a playlist that is going to set off the endorphins and dopamine and adrenaline in your brain because you feel so empowered listening to it? It just brings that out of you. Which music often does that's going to allow you to be on the treadmill. While your brain catches up to enjoying how it feels to exercise. Um, and it doesn't have to be on the treadmill, but you know, anything you can do to music. Is it spending time with your kids or with other people? Movement can often get us closer to things that are already intrinsically enjoyable and movement actually seems to amplify. What is enjoyable about that, whether it's community cooperation, mastery, nature. Um, you know, each chapter in the book sort of tackles one of those core human capacities for joy and what it looks like in movement.

Jill Stoddard: [00:28:57] Yeah, absolutely. the things that you're saying are making me think about other ways. This has shown up for me. Um, so one example, I was at the pool last weekend. I live in Southern California and we had a couple of days of really nice weather and we were at the pool and my kids were begging me to come swimming with them.

And normally I would sit on the sidelines. And not only did I get in the pool with them because it was a way to. Be engaging in movement with these two little humans who I love so much, but my son wanted to throw, you know, the things that sink in the pool and you dive after, which he doesn't know how to do. He can swim, but he can't dive down to the bottom of the deep end. And we, we just played this ridiculous game of him throwing all these syncable and me diving them and getting them, and he was having so much fun that I was willing to do that with him. And of course it ended up being so much fun for me and I was really tired at the end cause I'm a middle aged mom who doesn't usually do a lot of pool diving.

Um, and that was something I think I've just started saying yes to more opportunities for movement. And the other thing this makes me think of is that if I'm exercising to exercise, because I think I should, um. My mind tells me all the time, you should do more. You should do faster. You should do, um, you're only running and you need to be lifting weights.

Like it's all rule governed. Right? And, and I feel like reading the book has helped me too. Let go of those rules that aren't actually helpful and are really just inhibiting and to allow movement to be playful. I mean, there's the joy again, right? The joy and the connection and some of these, um,

Kelly McGonigal: [00:30:41] unless you're training for the Olympics, I don't, you know, I do not take that sort of physical training mindset where you have to do X, Y, and Z to maximize your physical performance or your physical appearance. That's just not how I think about movement. And so I think once you get rid of this idea that you're looking for the thing that burns the most calories or. There's a recommendation that you need to stretch and strength, train and do a robotic exercise and do calming movement and Oh my gosh, it's like who has the time to do all of that? But if instead you think, how, how do I want to feel in the moment and how do I want to feel about myself and what relationships do I want

to strengthen?

Those are some really good questions to ask when you're thinking about what types of movement to prioritize, how do you want to feel when you're doing it? So for me, like the exercise that gives me the most positive feelings while I'm doing it is dancing. It's like an automatic route to joy, no matter how I feel when I start.

How do you want to feel about yourself? You know, for me, doing physically challenging things that were, while I'm doing it, there's a voice in my head the whole time saying, uh, when is this over like core training. But afterwards, I know that that using my strength relieves my anxiety, that I feel brave and better able to face the world so that I might choose that sort of training.

It's actually typically what I do first thing in the morning because I know it alters my personality to do some hardcore training. Um, or what relationships do you want to strengthen? You know, you mentioned swimming. With your son, and one of the things that you'd asked about fascinating scientific findings.

One of my favorite scientific findings that showed up with really every form of movement is that when you exert yourself at a moderate level. You are releasing brain chemicals that make social connection more enjoyable and easier at every level. So eye contact is less threatening, you know, with a stranger, somebody high five or hug will feel more pleasurable in your body.

Play that, you know, sometimes it's hard to get into play, but when you're moving your body, suddenly play is more enjoyable and delightful. Cooperation is more satisfying and it strengthens relationships so that afterward. You feel really close and connected to the person that you moved with. So you know you're doing that with your son.

We do that every time we exercise with anybody or, or not even exercise, but, but move or dance or do some sort of physical project together with somebody. You feel closer to them afterwards. And that can be a way to think about what movement do I want to choose, is to think, what can I do with someone else? And the other thing I just want to point out which. I think is so critical. You know? So I know you know a lot about psychology. One of the things that I've always remembered is that if you want to strengthen a relationship when someone makes an invitation to you about something that is sort of expressing who they are and what they care about.

Like just say yes to it. Allow yourself to be somebody who affirms that and they feel seen by you and celebrated by you movement. This is a big one for people. If you have someone in your life who has subtly been nudging you to join them in an activity, maybe they just want you to see it. Like I can't tell you how many. Um, women. I teach a dance class with women in their sixties, seventies and eighties. How many of them will bring their adult children to class? Even just once. I think they want their kid to see who they are when they are dancing and.

Um, I was talking to another interviewer who really wanted his father to come watch him surf, even though his father could never surf.

He didn't have to serve, but he, he wanted his father like to see who he was when he was in the water on a surfboard. So if somebody in your life is making that sort of bid to play with me, come in the pool, mom, come to this yoga class. I've been going to come cheer me on, and my five K. This is such an amazing

way to strengthen a relationship, to let go of your inhibitions, , to make it a priority.

, because when people are moving and they are telling you this is a movement form that's meaningful to me, they're really telling you who they want to be, who they want this sort of the best version of themselves often, and they're inviting you to see that and celebrate it.

Jill Stoddard: [00:34:45] Yeah, absolutely.

I really liked, um, going back to what you were saying about some of the research and the moving together, there was one finding that specifically looked at music, dancing with other people, and then specifically moving in synchrony. So like these group exercise classes that you do that showed that. Dancing in unison actually led the participants to feel even more bonded than those who danced together, but not in synchrony. And that the dancing and synchrony also increased their ability to tolerate pain.

So this bonding and connection thing is just really incredibly powerful.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:35:27] It is, and there's so many different applications for this. So one thing I think of this as being sort of a big aha for me, um. When I first started teaching I, I was asked to develop a program for people with chronic pain and I ended up spending over a decade working on this movement program that met twice a week and for an hour.

We moved and breathed together and stretch and did some strengthening and people loved this class. I couldn't get people to stop taking this class even if they were recovered from their surgery or whatever. Um, and I remember thinking like, I don't know. We're not, it's not, this is not physical therapy.

We're just moving and breathing. It took me years to figure out that what was probably happening is that we were moving and breathing together. And even if you are doing, you know, relatively gentle movements like lift, lifting an arm on an inhale, lowering the arm as you exhale, when you sense that you're doing that.

As a collective with other people, it increases endorphins and probably other brain chemicals as well. That relief pain, not just in the short term. But are actually teaching the brain and the nervous system how to process physical sensation differently so that you experience less pain in general in life.

And I, I took, I feel so silly that it took me years to realize it was probably the group effect and that we were moving slow enough to breathe together. Rather than like any brilliant stretch that I was coming up with. Um, so you can think about synchrony as like a really powerful way for people who are dealing with difficult physical challenges that, um, that moving together as is often more effective than moving on your own.

You know, like learning your PT exercises and doing them at home. Um, but there's something powerful about the group effect, and that also translates to our ability to feel like we can handle. The challenges in our lives. So there's also a hope effect and part of that's endorphins was probably other stuff as well, that when people move in synchrony with others, they report a greater sense of confidence in their ability to handle challenges.

They report more hope that very difficult problems can be resolved. There's

something about feeling this collective self that makes you feel. Like bigger and more open and more capable and more powerful. I think that's another really interesting side benefit. And so both of these are in addition to the fact that also they make you like other people more and feel a greater sense of belonging. So it's one of the reasons why I continue to teach group movement classes. I teach one to two classes a day, and I think it's the most important work that I do.

Jill Stoddard: [00:37:54] That's so cool. And it makes so much sense to me. I mean, when I had this aha moment about my kids and needing a parent who models movement, I set a goal for myself, I was never a runner. I still don't know that I would consider myself a runner, but I set a goal for myself to run a five K and I did the couch to five K program and I.

Signed up for a race that was actually on mother's day. And my husband and my two kids came and they cheered me on and they were there at the finish line. And I actually, um, I framed my bib and I keep it in my office as, and I've never done a race since then, by the way, but it's this reminder to me that I never thought that this would be possible for me to do.

And it was. It was such an accomplishment. And the other thing that really stuck out to me that was very surprising was when I went to the race that day. They did this whole humongous group warm up, and I didn't know they do this at races where I don't know how many people were there, but it was a lot of people and all of us were on this field together.

Essentially doing kind of like a robotics together to get warmed up for this race. And I mean, it might be the most pumped up and the most close to a bunch of strangers I've ever felt in my life. And very different from running alone on my treadmill in my grudge, which also serves its purpose, but as a very different kind of emotional experience.

And I feel like that high lasted for quite a long time. I mean, it is really a proud moment and I have such strong memories tied to it. And when I see the picture of me holding my kids after I finished the race, even now, you know, several years later, I'm just instantly filled with that. The memory of, of, you know, just how amazing that experience was.

And I think it had less. If I had run a five K by myself, it would have been a completely different experience. So I really relate to that

Kelly McGonigal: [00:39:58] this is something I cannot emphasize enough to people who are trying to figure out how to make movement a part of their lives. We often think that the solution is going to be to find the smallest, most convenient thing we can do because it's easier to do in the moment today. Like I'm going to do the, I'm going to climb the stairs instead of take the elevator once, and we've been given a lot of what I think is poor advice when it comes to movement, about trying to shrink the dose as small as possible, make it as convenient as possible.

Just park your car a little bit farther away. And you'll get like your activity in that way. And then maybe you can look at your step count at the end of the day and feel good that you got more steps in. And when. One of the things that I learned from talking to people and that I've seen over the years is that if you could just allow yourself to imagine that the movement you do could be really meaningful, people choose different activities.

They do invest more time and energy into it. But often in a way that doesn't become a distraction from their lives, but allows them to create these kinds of meaningful moments like you described with your kids in the finish line. That's different than if you were doing like you can do a five K on your treadmill by yourself at the gym when nobody cheering you on and like no photograph to put on your wall.

And I am always encouraging people to think, what if you believe this could be really meaningful? What if you believe this could be a metaphor. About what you're capable of. What if the experience itself could bring joy or community into your life? What if the movement itself could do good for your community?

I give examples in the book like good gym where they combine, um, running or walking with community service projects or green gem where they're out there creating natural environments and city environments for other people to enjoy. there's a lot you can experience through movement that has real meaning to it.

I think that is a much smarter way to approach it. Then the convenience factor, which often seems logically like that's the way to begin.

Jill Stoddard: [00:42:02] Right? And there may be benefit to doing those things. It's not that those things are bad or shouldn't be done, but you don't get the pay off,

Kelly McGonigal: [00:42:09] And you're, you're less likely to stick with it, and when so much more is possible. You know, it almost reminds me of like people who are really excited about the fact that someday we might be able to never eat food and just take a pill. Yeah, there are, if I saw a funny study that said like half of humans would be happy to give up all relationship to food if it became possible to just take a pill once a day that replaced food, and I'm thinking really because of the pleasure in food, because of the relationship you can have to where your food comes from to being able to.

Make the food and share food and how we use food to communicate to other people that we love them. Like what? You'd give all that up for a pill. And I feel that way about movement too, that yeah, it's complicated and we can have a very complex relationship with it. Like you started our conversation saying.

And also there's so much that's linked to our humanity tied into it. I actually believe that movement is one of the reasons I called the book of joy of movement. And my publisher is not really thrilled that I talk about it this way, but I think of it like a trilogy, joy of sex, joy of cooking, joy of movement.

Sex is key to how humans survive. And it's really, uh, it's, it can be a source of pleasure, meaning and connection. So is food and cooking is abs. You have to eat to survive. And also. It's a source of joy and pleasure and meaning and connection. And I think movement is the, it's the trifecta. It's the other thing that is necessary to survive and is just as richly embedded in what it means to be human.

Jill Stoddard: [00:43:39] Yeah. I think you're so right. And you do talk a lot too about, um, kind of the evolutionary, having an evolutionary understanding of why. Movement actually is incredibly rewarding. And you know, the runner's high, which actually turns out to be more of a persistence high, right. That people can get with any type of prolonged

Kelly McGonigal: [00:43:59] Yeah. There's somebody who doesn't run. I

appreciate the fact that you don't need to run to get the

Jill Stoddard: [00:44:04] Right, exactly. Yes. Yes. That you can get it from any kind of persistent movement because not everyone is a runner.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:44:11] Yeah. Or even continuous is another good way to describe it because you can get it in flow yoga or Tai Chi or swimming or dancing, anything where you're just, you just keep moving.

Jill Stoddard: [00:44:21] Yeah. And that we, we really are built to move and we have internal processes that make continuing to move, reinforcing. Like we're meant to do it. We just have to break free from some of these old complicated negative messages and find the joy and connection. And,

Kelly McGonigal: [00:44:41] And this is, this is part of the understanding that your brain is adapted to reward you for the things that help us survive as individuals and that help us survive as communities. So, you know, in my, in my previous work, you mentioned that I work on compassion and empathy. Part of compassion is we actually get a high from being able to help others and feeling like we've made a difference.

And that looks a lot like an exercise high, by the way. And it looks a lot like, um, you know, the high that we get when we'd done, we'd been working on something really difficult and we succeed for the first time that our, the human brain rewards us for doing things that are really important to our survival. , individually and collectively and movement is one of them. And, uh, I like to put sort of the, the exercise high in that same category as the warm glow of compassion. Or the helper's high or the, the thrill of triumph and overcoming obstacles. There are a lot of things that we just intrinsic like, Oh yes. Like our brains celebrates us when we do them, and movement is one of them.

Jill Stoddard: [00:45:45] right. Makes us feel more alive. Yeah. Um, you tell so many wonderful stories about the people that you interviewed for the book, and I think one of my favorites, and I think she's the same person that you mentioned about how she didn't start running half marathons until

Kelly McGonigal: [00:46:02] Nora hatefully.

Jill Stoddard: [00:46:04] was Nora. Yes. Yes.

So she found. Oh my gosh. She found running later in her life, and she talked about how she would almost always, or sometimes anyway, she would often finish last, but really took pride in her perseverance. And you know, a lot of our listeners and myself included, um. Do acceptance and commitment therapy with our clients and in our own lives.

And one of the tenants of acceptance and commitment therapy is that it's more important to focus on values and process and steps and choices rather than on outcomes that aren't always within our control. And I thought this was such a good example of that, that when you're focused on persistence and overcoming obstacles, um, that it, it.

It helps you to persevere and continue and to not give up versus focusing on winning, for example.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:46:57] Well though, do you love that story where there was such a dramatic storm

Jill Stoddard: [00:47:02] right.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:47:04] that she got, she got first because everyone else

dropped out. Um. That first one, her age group cause everyone else dropped out even though she was the last person to cross the finish line.

But everyone else raised was like, there is no way that I can run a half marathon in this kind of crazy weather.

Jill Stoddard: [00:47:20] Yes. That was my absolute favorite part of the whole story is like her persistence ended up really paying off.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:47:26] here's just some highlights for people who haven't read the book about why you and I love this woman so much. Um, one is that she did start later in life. Um, she told me this very moving story about how she grew up before Title Nine, which, um, requires schools to offer athletic opportunities to women as well as men.

And she grew up thinking that because she was a girl, sports weren't for her, races weren't for her. And she also, um, has been fat for I think, most of her life, and she thought that she wasn't allowed to do movement. That like, you know, movement. As I've heard from so many people, movement is what you do to erase your fat, your end, and maybe like do it in secret before.

Uh, you've asked, you lost the weight and then you're allowed to be a part of the movement community. So she had all these stories that lots of people have, and she realized through direct participation that it was for her, starting with walking and then moving up to a fiveK and then moving up to these half marathons, and now she's done like a hundred by now.

Every time I kept fact-checking, it was more than in the past.

Jill Stoddard: [00:48:27] In the book, you said over 200 events, I think in less than 10 years.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:48:31] I think like a hundred I think at the time I wrote it, it was 75 half marathons and it just kept increasing. Every time I checked with her. And you know, she did mention that she often finishes last, and one thing she said was that she doesn't mind because for two reasons, one, she's happy to do it so somebody else doesn't have to finish last, which I think.

Is, you know, you talked about feeling connected to your values and like that's just, it's such a simple idea, but what a, like a kind connected to common humanity idea that like she doesn't mind it and she knows when she finished his last, that she's held the space for every other person who might not have her own capacity for self-compassion.

To not have finished a, and also she mentioned that people cheer the person who comes in last harder than anybody else. I'm like, that's like,

Jill Stoddard: [00:49:18] that's true.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:49:19] story that you have that you'll be rejected in, you're a failure if you come and last, even by paying attention to her direct experience. It's actually the opposite.

Um, that people will celebrate you. So there's anyway, there's so much in her story and how she, she will often try to do an event with other people who are thinking about like doing the first five K how she encourages them and tries to do it with them so they will feel like they belong and aren't alone.

I, you know, and that she's a recovering alcoholic and wanted to include that in her story because it's part of how she stays sober and she talks about it as her drug of choice and there's so much in her story. That highlights so many

elements of, you know, every story that I was looking for was a story that for me, didn't just reveal what was good about exercise or movement.

I, every story that I shared, I thought also revealed what was good about human nature and, and I wanted the book to make people feel a certain way, which is that. Humanity is a like don't despair about human nature, that there's a lot of beautiful things about human beings and who they are and how they show up in the world.

Jill Stoddard: [00:50:27] And I think the book absolutely 100% achieves that.

And I think you said it maybe in the introduction, how after each of these interviews you would have, you would just think to yourself, Oh, I love people,

Kelly McGonigal: [00:50:38] Oh my gosh. Almost every single one. If my husband was home, I would come out and I'd be like, like to my husband, you, you, they said the most incredible thing I, I have like, I play you back this interview. Um, because you know, I mentioned when people invite you to, to move with them, often they're showing you the best version of themselves in a way you might not expect.

And I found that more than any other book I've written. That people, when they were telling me their stories about just why they love swimming or why they love dance classes or why they love rowing. They were telling me about who they were in a really deep and meaningful and beautiful way that that somehow managed to illustrate both who they were as an individual and what people are capable of.

And that's why I would end these interviews sometimes, like, you know, all teary and be like, I just love this person so much.

I fell in love with all my, uh, the people in my book.

Jill Stoddard: [00:51:34] Yeah, I did too. And I mean, Nora was one of my favorites. Your grandparents are definitely probably tied for favorite, and that was, I think when I got teary, was reading your grandparents' story.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:51:45] Yeah. You know, they're, they're a great love story. In my family, I always, it's the. How my grandfather took care of my grandmother to the end of her life. And the story in the book is about how they met and they met at a dance. Um, my, my grandfather had just returned from world war II and my, my grandmother was a, you know, someone who went to the dance halls to meet the returning soldiers.

And, um. They fell in love at first dance to, uh, uh, the Irving Berlin song always, which is about how I'll love you always for the rest of your life. Anyways, there's a lot more to that story, uh, about the role of music and dance in, um, in helping my grandparents over time. But I feel like that, um,

Jill Stoddard: [00:52:29] good one. It got me in the fields and it seems like that's where your, your love of dance might have first been stimulated.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:52:36] Yeah. Right. Hey, and thank goodness my grandfather loved to dance because he was supposed to become a priest, so you

Jill Stoddard: [00:52:43] Oh wow.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:52:45] Praise be that he decided to dance instead of becoming a preacher, I would not exist.

Jill Stoddard: [00:52:50] we would never have this book. So, you know, you talk to so many people who had these, you know, inspiring and triumphant stories about finding the joy of movement. And I assume those are the kinds of interviews that you were looking for. So this, this question may not make sense, but I was curious if you interviewed anyone who's really struggled to incorporate movement, and if there's anything that we can learn from that or like are the people who find and maintain.

A movement practice and find joy in movement. Are they different from those who don't? And like how we can transform people

Kelly McGonigal: [00:53:25] question. They're like all the same stories. I just didn't spend a lot of time on like the before rather than the after. Um, you know, I think about, so almost everyone who's in the, in the book, there would have been another version. About how depression made them think that they, they couldn't begin, or, um, how, uh, I think of one person in particular who had incredible body image issues and that, that.

Her, it was when she started doing martial arts training that a lot of that changed. And then, you know, sort of a gateway into other forms of movement. But I think, you know, everyone I talked to had their own version of that. I have my own challenges with movement as somebody who, um, had lived with chronic pain. And actually it's, it's one of these funny things is movement actually used to be a trigger for my pain and now it's like the thing that actually is most likely to relieve my pain. But it took a while for my nervous system. To figure that out. It's, it's actually, it's incredible to me to think about it that it was a, you know, getting my heart rate up used to reliably be one of the easiest ways to trigger a systemic pain for me.

And now it's the opposite. Um, and I feel like that was the case with a lot of the people that I talked to. They all struggled. Um, I mean, in extreme version, you know, Bernie Salazar, we've talked about the, the guy who has dance parties with his little girl and target, he actually was the winner of the biggest loser. He was one of the winners of the biggest loser, and he had to repair. A massively destructive relationship with movement that was induced by that show.

Jill Stoddard: [00:55:02] Wow.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:55:03] know, he spent quite a bit of time trying to maintain extreme, weight loss, um, with exercise that was basically punishment and it took him, it took him, um, years to recover and find a form of movement that was about joy and strength and enjoying himself and not about punishing himself for having eaten.

You know? So, yeah. So I don't think it's that people are different. And I think that we all have our challenges. Movement is complicated and our culture is complicated. And, uh, I would say that the thing that, the common theme. And all the stories, like including, I think about the woman who started to go to exercise classes after she was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

, and what a challenge that was. , but she had to find the place where music was the thing that drove the experience and the, the music gave her way to experience her body differently. And even having maybe a different relationship to the progression of the disease, um, is finding the thing. That brings out in you either what you want to feel or how you want to feel about yourself.

Jill Stoddard: [00:56:07] Right? That's the pivot point.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:56:09] Yeah.

Jill Stoddard: [00:56:10] Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think another way to overcome any obstacles to movement is certainly to read this book. I mean, it's really, I really mean that. And, and you know, it's a love letter, not only to movement, but to music, to human connection,

Kelly McGonigal: [00:56:27] to nature.

Jill Stoddard: [00:56:28] outdoors. Exactly.

Yeah. And, um, you know, I had almost forgotten how much I love music and what a positive influence it has on mood and having nothing to do with movement. I now play music every morning in our kitchen, and my children have started doing that. If I don't do it, they come down and you know, tell Alexa to play music.

And then of course that means everybody ends up spontaneously dancing, I think. I think you said in the book, musicologist called that groove.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:56:59] Yes, it's the insulin can move to a beat and it's, it is hardwired. Baby show it before, like anything else, even before they can crawl, like literally just out of the womb. Babies will start trying to synchronize. You can try it. If you have a baby, try this out. You know that everyone wants to move to the beat of music.

So I do think that if, if people listening want to get started, find a song you love, put it on, see if there is anyone in your house, animal or human who's willing to move with you. I mean, that's just, it's a perfect way to begin

Jill Stoddard: [00:57:30] It really is. And I've also found on Spotify, and there may be other apps that do this too. Um, my friend Frank actually. Showed me how to do this, that you can search platelets at a certain beat per minute. So if so, I know how fast I run and I can find like 142 beat per minute playlist, and then I have all this really peppy music.

That's the exact tempo for me to do. My most joyful. Jogging, I'll call it jogging. It's not really running my most joyful jogging. Um, and that's made movement that much more enjoyable for me, for me as well. So I think, you know, that there is, I think there's, there's a whole chapter just devoted to

Kelly McGonigal: [00:58:12] Oh yeah. And I actually created playlists based on that science and also the conversations I had with people. Um, one of my playlists on Spotify as songs people want to dance to, and I asked people for. Like, if the song came on, it would make them absolutely want to get up and move. And also I said like, and the song that you think maybe would appeal to a broad range of, of other people as well, ages and backgrounds.

And it's a really fun playlist. It's called songs. People want to dance too. If you look that up on Spotify, you will probably find it. Um, or you can look up my name on Spotify and I have all sorts of playlists, um, related to the book. Um,

Jill Stoddard: [00:58:46] Oh, that I did not know that fun fact. That's like a little Easter egg. I am so excited to check that out. That's so great. Um, well thank you, Kelly. It's been such a joy having you here. We are, and thank you for giving us this gift of a book. I've been telling everybody about it. Um, and no doubt from now on when I see you, I will experience a cooperation hut, which is another thing you talk about in the book after this just super rich conversation.

I really appreciate it and I hope that our listeners. Read the book and have the joy in the fields and everything else as they read it and that it inspires them to find the joy of movement as well. So thank you so much for being here. And where can I or where can our listeners find you? And we'll put, we'll put these in the show notes.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:59:33] I think either just look me up, Kelly mcgonigal.com or on all the social media is Kelly McGonigal, or just look up the joy of movement and you will definitely find me.

Jill Stoddard: [00:59:42] Okay. We will do that. Thank you so much for being here.

Kelly McGonigal: [00:59:45] Great. Thanks.