

Paul Gilbert Interview

Paul Gilbert: [00:00:00] There's a deep yearning within us for connectedness and cooperation and coming together and working together and feeling part of something, you know?

And we need to find ways we can feed that in the human spirit. Cause that's us at our best

Diana Hill: [00:00:14] You're listening to dr paul gilbert on psychologists off the clock

We are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and health.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:00:34] I'm Dr. Debbie Sorenson, practicing in mile

Diana Hill: [00:00:37] Okay. I'm Dr. Diana Hill practicing in seaside, Santa Barbara, California.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:00:42] from coast to coast. I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

Jill Stoddard: [00:00:48] And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of Be Mighty and The Big Book Of Act Metaphors.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:00:54] We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Diana Hill: [00:00:58] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock. mental health professionals. We want to remind you that were sponsored by Praxis Continuing Education. You can really transform your practice and your life with the latest psychological theory and its application through practice. They offer online courses, both on demand courses and. Courses that are alive online. Some of the upcoming courses for the summer include ACT and behavioral analysis. A nine week consultation course, foundations of compassion focused therapy, fundamentals of dialectical behavior therapy. And acceptance commitment therapy with parents. , we have a coupon code for \$50 off the live online courses on our website. If you go to off the clock, psych.com..

Like many people across the country. We here at psychologists off the clock have been distressed and outraged by the current and long standing prejudice and violence against Black Americans. And we want to make a statement that we stand against racism and stand for racial justice. These past few weeks are symptoms of a long history of violence and oppression.

And as psychologists, we are deeply concerned about the physical and mental health consequences of oppression and oppose racism.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:02:18] we have some resources for people who want to do more learning about this topic, which is really essential for everyone. We all have a part to play here that we'll link to on our web page.

Some anti-racism resources and resources on Black mental health and for other people of color as well. And also about talking to children about racism. So check out our website. If you'd like to see some of those.

Diana Hill: [00:02:44] Today we have Dr. Paul Gilbert on the show who is the

founder

of Compassion Focused Therapy. And we recorded this episode about a month ago, and man, a lot has happened and changed since then yet the concepts that he talks about in relationship to compassion are concepts that we can apply and need more than ever right now.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:03:05] Yeah, we were just talking about how we're right now, feeling both charged up and depleted. There's so much happening and we all have so much important work to be doing meaningful work, whether it's racial justice, dealing with the pandemic and. Important work that we're doing in our lives, caring for our kids, whatever the case may be.

I think having compassion both toward ourselves and for others can really sustain us over time, because what we don't want is for everyone to get so depleted that we all just lose steam on doing what's what matters most in the world.

Diana Hill: [00:03:40] So compassion being in compassion focused therapy, this flow, this three directional flow, uh, when we have compassion for others that activates and opens up our brain in certain ways that we can do perspective taking, we can be open-minded.

We can think of new solutions and hear different solutions than our own. And. When we have compassion for ourselves, we also can recharge and we can understand that we all make mistakes and we all have opportunities to, to shift and redirect again and keep on learning and growing And then when we take in compassion that also can help us recharge in our communities, so it really can be the key ingredient to sustaining what needs to be a longterm effort, as well as riding the motivation wave that many of us have right now and taking action when that wave is high.

Paul Gilbert is a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Derby and honorary visiting professor at the University of Queensland.

He has researched evolutionary approaches to psychopathology with a special focus on mood, shame, and self criticism. And as the founder of compassion focused therapy, Dr. Gilbert has written or edited 21 books and over 250 papers and book chapters. In 2006 he established the compassionate mind foundation as an international charity with the mission statement.

To promote wellbeing through the scientific understanding of application of compassion. And you can find that at compassionate mind. Dot. Co. Dot. UK. In March, 2011 he was awarded an OBE by the Queen for services to mental health. Dr. Gilbert is now the director of the Center for Compassion Research and Training at Derby University UK.

And we're very grateful to you to come on the show, taking your time to be with us.

Paul Gilbert: [00:05:28] Thank you very much to have for inviting me. That's great. As a delight. Thank you so much.

Diana Hill: [00:05:33] Yes. So last time we had you on, we talked a lot about your compassionate mind model and we wanted to have you back on because I think your teachings are particularly relevant right now. My colleague Debbie Sorenson wrote me this little note saying that she had heard someone say, we're

all in the same storm, but we're not all in the same boat. I'm wondering if you can talk about the flow of compassion, because I think what's really unique about your work is that you don't just focus on self compassion or compassion for other, but it's really these three components of compassion for self compassion for other and the ability to receive compassion that I think we really need all, all of them right now.

Paul Gilbert: [00:06:16] Yes. Yes. I mean, I think that's a very important point you make. I mean, we are in the same storm, but ultimately we are in the same. Both because ultimately every one of us will die out of Italy. Every one of us is in the cycle of impermanence and we will lose people we love. Ultimately, nobody can escape the realities of aging to cane and time.

So we are, we are all there. How it happens in the course of our death. That's another matter of course, because the virus is killing people on unexpectedly and too early. Basically, so the issue of the flows of compassion then is how compassion really is. Partly focused on this compassion for others.

That's the key thing within the Buddhist tradition, but also, um, that caring and sharing of others was extremely important in a Hunter gatherer history when we were Hunter gatherers. That's how we survived. We can shed for each other. We share knowledge, we shed hunting, we shed food, no small groups, small groups of humans, and we.

There's now realized that we built a brain. We evolved the brain, never a number of millions of years, two, maybe three millions of years, which were very high and into caring and sharing. So caring and sharing. Is absolutely fundamental and we feel at our best and we are immune systems. Our cardiovascular systems are all kinds of, our brain cortex works best when we feel embedded in a caring and sharing network with people as opposed to a selfish or critical or hostile or, um. Rejecting neglect for group of people, then the brain, brain and body doesn't work so well, but the brain works much better and bodies work much better. When we are in this context of caring share, we feel cared for. We feel that we can make a contribution to others. So making a contribution to others is also very, very important.

And there's quite a lot of research now showing that when we feel we can make a contribution to others where we can be compassionate to others, that also has a very powerful impact of a number of physiological processes. So being cared for, receiving the care and, and help and support of others is really good for us physiologically, makes us feel good, but also being compassionate to others and being able to make a contribution.

I'm feeling you're doing something is important and certainly in this country, and I think in yours too, what's been quite extraordinary and very heartwarming is a number of people who volunteered to go out and try to be helpful as best they can. So. Tremendous desires to contribute to help others. So those two things are very, very important.

And sometimes, you know, we get caught up in our own worlds, actually turning outwards thinking, okay, well one of the compassionate things that I need to do is to be aware of how helpful other people will be to me, and also what I can do to help others. That can sometimes bounces out of our tendency to be obsessed with ourselves.

And then of course we have self-compassion, which we can talk about if you want, but those three cycles, that cycle of three, you know, compassion for others, openness to the combustion from others and self compassion, they form a nice little, uh, connected network. And, um, and that's very good for your body and your brain.

Diana Hill: [00:09:39] So I'd love to talk about what gets in the way of that, because you, when you said, we get caught up in ourselves, you kind of put your hands over your face, like this narrowed vision, and what I see in what I've been seeing in my practice is, and even within my own self, is these experiences where. You know, maybe someone in my practices is really struggling because they're trying to manage the kids at home and their work at home and their worries about, you know, groceries and all of those things.

But then they criticize themselves for struggling because it doesn't compare to what the. Tragedy that other people are having, or maybe a therapist that I am talking to is rolling. You know, she's rolling her eyes at the senior who's missing out on her prom, who's spending a whole session about how she's so upset that prom is not happening and she's having a hard time having compassion for her, her client.

So I'm wondering what, what gets in the way of us being compassionate towards ourselves and towards others or maybe minimizing people's experiences.

Paul Gilbert: [00:10:40] Okay. So we'll take the first one, which is.

Compassionate to the South. Right. So the point that you make is a very good one that people sometimes compare, you know, compared to the problems of other people, you know, compared to peoples in the shanty towns of South America or Africa or whatever. My life is great.

You know? So, okay, I'm locked down for a little bit, but you know, the problem with that is that. Yes. It makes a lot of sense, but it doesn't work. I mean, the thing is, if you've got a broken leg, it really doesn't help you to know that somebody else has got two broken legs and a broken elbow. I'm sorry about that, but it doesn't actually take my pain away, right?

So these are, these are important issues, but when we are struggling within our own domain, then we actually have to find ways of dealing with the stress in our own domain. If we start comparing ourselves, then we. Do what we call in validation. We started validating what we feel rather than working what we feel. We're sort of saying, well, we shouldn't really be feeling this because, because once you do that, then you're into trying to suppress your feelings rather than work with them. So the first thing then is be careful of social comparison because. So by validating what you are experiencing, noticing why you're experiencing and working with your experience.

So the example you gave of somebody who's trying to balance working with the children and maybe trying to help them, the home, maybe trying to keep the job going over the internet, uh, in a small, crowded place. What you will be feeling is perfectly natural. A set of stresses. You might be getting frustrated easily.

You might be getting angry easily. You might be getting anxious easily. You might do sometimes put your head in your hands and just cry if he was just sitting on the bed, just cry and cry because the first thing is to recognize that. We are in extraordinarily stressful, frightening circumstances. Not only are we worried

about the virus, but worried about what the virus might be doing to our jobs. And we are trapped. You know, my, one of my research areas, uh, over 20 years was the study of entrapment and the ways in which people felt trapped in relationships or. Trapped in jobs they couldn't get out of or whatever it was, and being physically trapped in the way that we are. It's an incredibly stressful thing for humans because humans are basically Hunter gatherers.

We should be out and about. Our kids are extremely stressed by being confined in these small spaces. This is grossly abnormal living that we're going through.

So unfortunately, through no fault of your own, you will. Be experiencing very strong emotions because your brain will be acting, wanting to get out.

Your brain will be telling you, you're trapped. You got to get out. You've got to do this, you're going to move. You know? So understanding the psychology or Chapman is very important. Understanding not comparing yourself with those, cause that is going to be very helpful. Validating your emotions because they will be quite intense through no fault of your own.

So learning how to be with these very powerful emotions in a way that's compassionate, accepting, allowing, uh, this is, uh, one of the steps towards helping you with these powerful emotions that they will be powerful. And that's absolutely not your fault. And there's nothing abnormal about you not going crazy.

It's just unfortunate that you are in a very, very, very difficult, stressful situation. And, uh. Oh, you know, we just have to find the ways of managing it rather than sort of fighting with those emotions.

Diana Hill: [00:14:13] I feel like I can record that little section of you and play it to myself every night, and it would feel really good to hear because the combination of it, it's not your fault. And, um, and that this is hard is really helpful.

Paul Gilbert: [00:14:29] Yeah. I mean, if you fall over and break a leg, I mean, it's not really your fault that you have pain, and therefore if you need to walk on it, it's going to hurt you. It's just understand that when you, you know, you would say, Oh, you know, I shouldn't be feeling the pain in my leg. Well, no one, I don't feel the baby.

Well, yeah. So the point is that these are extremely unnatural, very unnatural ways for humans to live. You know? That's why we put people in prison because it's a punishment. Right? So. These intra, these entrapped positions are themselves causing us a huge amount of stress. And then not only are you trapped, but for some people that trapped in and they're very lonely.

They don't have any high levels of loneliness, which is even worse. And for other people, coping with children and so forth in these confined spaces where they themselves to choose themselves a highly stressed is very, very difficult. So the first thing is not your fault. Not your fault, and you will, you know, you'll try to suppress it, but it will be tricky.

You will have very strong emotions. So the most important thing is when you get them, try as best you can to, you know, do you breathe in ground your body as best you can. Remind yourself. Is that saying not your thoughts? Very, very tough. What you're going through and just try and do the best you can in that moment to be with the emotion.

But not. Act in a way that's harmful to you or to others. And the other thing is I

think that helps us sometimes is to keep in mind on the future that you will get out again and think of all the things you're going to appreciate that perhaps you didn't before.

This just makes you realize how much we take for granted. Never even think about it. You know? Just don't think about it. Go to cricket matches or sports matches, roll up at airports, jump on airplanes. I mean, just never think about it really, until you can't do it anymore.

And then you suddenly realize, Oh my gosh,

Diana Hill: [00:16:26] Yeah. it reminds me of that feeling of you go out backpacking, that first shower, when you come back, you're like, Oh, it's the best shower in the world. It has that same, you don't know it until you don't do it until you miss it.

Paul Gilbert: [00:16:37] So holding on to these, this future, I think is also extremely important and helpful because otherwise they can just think, Oh.

Diana Hill: [00:16:47] , that's the capacity of the new brain that you've talked about in our previous episode. You talked about the old brain and the new brain, and the new brain has this capacity to do things like fantasize or generate hope or even harness some of the, you know, kind of contain some of the old brains, um, impulses a bit.

And the second part of, it's not your fault that you've, that you've talked about is it, it's not your fault, but. It is your responsibility. And I really liked this article that you've all Noah Harari wrote in time magazine, and it was shared on your compassionate mind listserv. And in it he wrote, he wrote that many blame the Corona virus epidemic on globalization and say, the only way to prevent such outbreaks is to deglobalize the world.

But he says just the opposite. The real antidote to epidemic is not segregation, but rather cooperation.

Paul Gilbert: [00:17:43] Exactly. Exactly.

Diana Hill: [00:17:45] that really points to your work of, of, of our responsibility to cooperate. And when we're in the compassionate kind mind space, we do a better job at cooperating with each other. Can you speak a bit to that?

Paul Gilbert: [00:17:57] Yes, absolutely. Right. That's extremely, that's such an important point that we are an interconnected species now. Okay. And we do have a tendency to form tribes and small groups, and you know, whether it's a football team or whether it's nations and so on, to make these distinctions and boundaries around us.

And that's okay to a degree. But. The most important thing when it comes to health and when it comes to suffering, when it comes to suffering, we need to really think of ourselves as interconnected. And it, as Harari says, it's our abilities to cooperate. So people now are working around the world to try and find a vaccine, and this is a highly cooperative.

All the labs, as far as I know, are cooperating and pulling the data. Um, so. That's the only way we're going to kind of really defeat this virus is to eventually like smallpox. I'm afraid, get a vaccine. Um, and then we will defeat it and get rid of it. So, but that's, that's medical science and that's a highly cooperative and endeavor.

Diana Hill: [00:19:02] We're also cooperating in small ways. When you talk

about, uh, maybe how things will change for us or reflecting on, um, the hope that we have even, I just think about my little community of, we set up a place for the farmers to bring their farm boxes my neighbors all come out in a social distance way and they pick up the little farm box and it's this.

Way that we're learning to cooperate in a, in a different way. The farmer gets to sell their food and we get food brought to our house in a, in a safe way. There's these small little examples of cooperation that I think bring us a lot of joy that may, we may want to continue on after this. We're figuring out, uh, new ways of being with each other new positive ways.

Paul Gilbert: [00:19:44] I think there's a tr that's a terrific examples. Done terrific examples. Yes, absolutely. Brilliant. Um, so yes, I think that's wonderful about how we, many people have a yearning naturally what we begin to realize that although you know the near liberal of dangers to compete and just focused on yourself and becomes rich as you can actually actually.

What's in us is a deep yearning for connectedness, a deep yearning for sharing deep pleasure. Because the way you talk about it, you talk about the real pleasure of seeing people doing this and isn't it amazing? And we're trying to do that and try to make that work. There's a deep yearning within us for connectedness and cooperation and coming together and working together and feeling part of something, you know?

And we need to find ways we can feed that in the human spirit. Cause that's us at Our best. Um, so after this has passed, which hopefully will be as soon as possible. Um, there are real questions about where we just gradually slip back into our own individualistic worlds where we find some way in which we can harness this deep yearning for connectedness that we've sort of lost in the West really.

Diana Hill: [00:20:56] I, I've heard a lot in my practice of, of clients who talk about now a pandemic is not a way to necessarily experience a slowdown, but talking about the appreciate. Of slowing down because of how busy they were and how caught up they were in this competitive world of running around trying to make more money or have their kids involved in more things.

And it was interesting when I was looking back over the compassionate mind, you mentioned this like over a decade ago, you said, quote, our lifestyles are spiritually, mentally and physically exhausting.

Us and we know it, and there's this wake up call that I think people are having of when they're now they're with their families more and they're engaging in what really matters in terms of helping people or health or our elders, that there's sort of a bit of a shift and it's a different way of being for a lot of people moving out of competition.

Paul Gilbert: [00:21:59] I think the point that you made there is really, really important that people discovered this. the thing that all of us struggling with is that we know that. Sake, like going to the gym. We know that people will say, Oh, this is great.

Go to the gym. I feel good, but blah, blah, blah. They do it for a couple of months and then they maybe don't go quite so often, and then, and then within a year, they're not doing it anymore. So one of the things that's. Interesting too. You

know, people like yourself and myself who are interested in compassion is how do you maintain it?

Because the world will try and pull you back. We'll try and pull you back into the shadows again. So gradually, gradually we slipped back into the competitive rat race a little bit. You know, it's a, how do we prevent that? I think that's a question all of us need to think about, cause we know from many other.

Behavioral change regimes, it's getting fit again, or diets or whatever it is. They worked for awhile, but then when the pressures go there, people slip back.

Diana Hill: [00:22:56] can you talk about your three systems model and how that maps onto these components of cooperation? Maybe our threat systems and also this drive to compete .

Paul Gilbert: [00:23:08] We know that there are many ways in which we can think about our emotions.

There are many different types of emotions, but one of the ways we're thinking about emotions is to think about what did they evolve to do? Why? Why did they evolve in the way that they do? And in the. Uh, compassion focused approach.

Okay. And again, I didn't make this up. This is in the science. We suggest there are three different dimensions.

Now, there's always been two positive and negative effect, but we've added a third because of what the science was telling us. So one set of emotions are really there to activate your body, for you to take actions if you're threatened. And depending on the kind of threat it is, you will either experience anger and you'll want to fight, defend yourself, or it will be anxiety and you'll want to run away and get away whatever.

So the fight flight system is very much part of your threat system. The threat system then is primarily an activating system to engage you in behaviors that will protect you and defend you. That's how it's evolved. This slight problem we've got as humans, however, is that we can keep that system stimulated by what we think.

So that system was pretty well for most animals because what's going to threaten them is in the environment. So it's a lion or something like that, and once they run away from the lion, then that's it. They, they're not, nothing's going to stimulate their threat system anymore. But for humans. We can constantly stimulate it by worrying and thinking, you know?

So if we got away from the lion, we can think, yeah, but what about tomorrow?

So we can do all this kind of thinking, which maintains us in threat, threat, threat, threat, retaining straight arousal.

So the way in which we regulate our. Uh, ways which we pay attention to, threat ways we focus on threat, the ways we think about threat, the way we anticipate threat, the way we ruminate on threat. All of that is very important for how that system is working. So that's the threat system.

Diana Hill: [00:25:13] something also about, I think with that system in terms of modern technology is activating some of that system as well. I know in the beginning of the, when the pandemic was really hitting the U S I was checking my phone. I don't know, more than 20 times a day and my threat system was getting activated over and over and over again.

Once I reduced my news consumption to twice a day, it actually helped a lot in

terms of me not going into that threat space all day long, which isn't healthy for me. I was having a hard time caring for my kids. I was blowing up at them. I was not, not in a healthy space. Yeah.

Paul Gilbert: [00:25:50] Yeah. It's a good point you make because the threat system has the fight flight system, so the boat is part of the tresses. If that system is overstimulated, then not only can we be on the short fuse for. The flight, the anxiety, but we can be on a short fuse for the fight. The anger. So the Bo, the, the, the ease of activation goes up because your threat system threat system is, you know, raring away.

And yeah.

Diana Hill: [00:26:17] that dr pores has also talks about freezing, which is, I think another one. Then we tend to do, yeah.

Paul Gilbert: [00:26:22] we can also, we have also have inhibitory defenses, which is where you get into depression and you just closed down. The system gets exhausted and the fight and flight aren't working. Then you can go into depressed States and you just sort of have these collapses. So, so this is very, very, very important.

And I think the point you make about the media. Is very worrying as she goes. Some of the major doing brilliant, fantastic articles in the media. But what the media tends to do is to sensationalized. So they're constantly stimulating, upset in you, upset in you all the time.

we've now got. Immediate who just feeding us threat, threat, threat, threat, threat, threat, threat, not only are you coping with the environment itself, not only are you coping with being trapped in your house now that you came in with all the fears of the virus, but you're also keeping with the media.

It's constantly stimulating your threat system and your grief system. Because you know, I read these stories and you know, they make you cry. Then they really, Oh my goodness. So, but, and it's just overwhelming. It's just overloading. So you have to recognize to do exactly what you did to say, okay, look, yeah, there's a lot of suffering out there and people are dying.

But if I keep engaging with it like that, , I'm just going to be overwhelmed and get burnt out. the next thing that is coming to the other issues about how can you use the positive emotional systems to be helpful to you and that we say there were two, and again, this isn't me, this is in the literature as being one is an activating positive emotion that's associated with excitement and joy and imagining the future.

And. Taking pleasure from your kids and doing things that are enjoyable. Uh, and the other one is what we call it, the soothing system, which is linked to rest and digest. And that system is very important because that links to a different type of physiology, a deceleration of the threat system, a calming of the drive system, the taking, you know, allowing the mind and the body to settle.

That's what it's called, rest and digest. And there are various things you can do. In order to do that. Well, one is exactly as you said. It's just be aware of what is stimulating your threat system unhelpfully because if your threats, it can be stimulated helpfully. Okay? And you need to pay attention to threaten.

Okay, that's important. But a lot of what we're experiencing is unhelpful, unhelpful threats, stimulation, because you can't do anything about it. And it just makes us

feel that. So the second thing then is learning how to. Pay attention to things like
sues you that ground you, that calm you and practicing bringing your mind to
those things.

It might be breathing. I'd be listening to music. It might be meditating or music. It
might be sitting, listening to the sound of the sea. I mean, whatever works for
you, but finding things that allows your attention. To focus on themes that you
find settling helps settle the body rather than stirring up the body.

And that takes it a little bit of practice. Sometimes you could be painting or if you
play an instrument, getting lost in playing an instrument, piano or guitar or
whatever it is, but finding something where your mind can be focused on
something that's nonthreatening to you. It gives you a sense of enjoyment
maybe, but also the sense of calming.

Diana Hill: [00:29:43] Is there a place where the drive and that contentment Soo
soothing systems kind of. Work together because one of the things that actually
has been more helpful for me than taking bubble baths right now has been ways
in which I feel like I'm helping. And, and I'm actually, I'm doing something that's
active.

I feel like I need to do something active, but that's also helping in some way. And
even just reframing for our household, the words of that were under lockdown
and, and shifting it to, we're not under lock time. We're choosing to stay at home
to protect. People were protecting people by staying at home.

It shifted in my mind. Um, it's, it felt like a shift in that three systems model that I
went from threat to more of a soothing and or drive place.

Paul Gilbert: [00:30:34] Yes. I think it's an important point you make, isn't it?
Because that's what we were talking about earlier, finding thing where you can
make a contribution that has a really powerful impact on the organization of your
body and your mind. Yes, absolutely. So. The soothing system and the dry
system can certainly work together when we feel safe to be able to do things,
play when we play, for example, when we're having play with people, having fun
with people, we're both excited, but also we feel safe and content.

So I think the point you're making is an extremely important one, uh, that
sometimes what helps. The threat system is to be doing some or settles the
threat system is to be doing something where we feel we can make a
contribution. Cause that gives us a different kinds of different kinds of positive
effect, different kind of positive emotion.

Diana Hill: [00:31:25] Can we talk about something that is my. One of the things
that activates my threat system is our children and the impact of, uh, this
pandemic. I think there's the, the impact on obviously health and concern about
safety. There's also the longterm impact on the psychology of our children, and
just talk about play and how my little seven year old can't play in the same way
that he used to be able to play with his friends and may not be able to.

For a long time. I'm curious about the impact longterm of this social distancing on
our kids.

Paul Gilbert: [00:32:03] Well, it could have a very positive impact when we think
about trauma. Remember. Well, we're thinking about trauma are things that
threatened the child, like a parent is aggressive or abusive or neglectful. This
isn't, this isn't this kind of trauma, right? Kind of trouble. What's working about is

the experience not being able to do what I want to do, but in the context, like I'm sure with you in the context of a very loving family.

So what is happening here. In these contexts. Um, you know, not so much when, when there's a lot of strife and stress in the family to step in, but in these contexts, children are actually learning to be very attentive to the needs of others. They're learning that the world can be a frightening place. The learning that we need to help each other and the learning that, you know, we are making sacrifices for the benefit of others.

We're learning that we're giving up playing in order to be out with two others. So yes, it's upsetting and difficult. But it's not a trauma in the sense that the child is frightened or it feels in an unsafe environment or, um, or whatever. So it's a reaching out kind of trauma, is it, it's a grieving kind of trauma, more than a sort of fear based kind of trauma at some times.

My, we didn't have any data on this as far as I know. Um. Actually, it can make Jude more empathic. Actually, in the long run, it's unpleasant, but it can make you more impacting. And sometimes you see this, you know, in kids who have grown up with. In families where somebody has mental or whatever it does, it can make you quite an empathic to the needs of others.

I don't know if there's any research going on on that. The trauma where we were worried about is where families are becoming very aggressive and they're taking their frustrations out on the kids and that sort of thing. Over the longterm occasionals. Okay. But over the longterm, so the child is growing up in this tense environment, day in, day out.

That's a worry. That's a serious worry for these children. Um,

Diana Hill: [00:34:02] it's more the threat system of the parent. That we should be worried about the alcohol use going up,

Paul Gilbert: [00:34:08] I think so.

Diana Hill: [00:34:09] violence going up and then that transmitting to

Paul Gilbert: [00:34:12] Yeah. Yeah. But see, the more you validate your child, say, yes, look, this is sad and isn't it? But also think about how wonderful what you're doing, you know, doing this new, realizing the sadness and the life can be like this, and this is what we do. We try to help out other people and sometimes it makes us feel bad and sad because we have to give out things.

We have to lose things. But that's, and helping your child realize, but that's actually got a wonderful thing you're doing. Um, so you're positively valuing their sacrifice. Which is very different from, um, traumatizing. That's a different, that's a different game altogether. Right? So you're not traumatizing them with, right.

You're helping them come to terms of what's actually for the child. A frustrating and very sad situation, but they're not frightened that I think if they're frightened of the virus, and that's another. Thing that we can help them with. Helping them to understand that actually, um, kids are pretty much in vulnerable, not completely, not completely, but pretty much.

And just helping them understand the science a little bit about science.

Diana Hill: [00:35:13] was going to say it's been an incredible science explanation of viruses. Cause if I have some of the most fascinating things to study are viruses, they're, quite sneaky. Aren't they? At least come and take over ourselves the way they do,

borrow our DNA.

Paul Gilbert: [00:35:29] around since, you know, cause they're bits of DNA. So they've been around since the beginning of life. And in fact, viruses are often what causes damage to DNA, which causes mutation, which causes evil. So viruses have played a very major part in. Evolution. In fact, a lot of your DNA is junk because it's virus DNA, like got in.

It doesn't do anything. So if you put it into Google junk virus DNA in the human genome, you'll find extremely interesting.

Diana Hill: [00:35:59] And it was like 7% virus or something. Right. If it's fascinating. Yeah. So what we, what we need to be activating our, uh, fight system for, and our drive is in fighting that virus rather than fighting each other.

Paul Gilbert: [00:36:13] Exactly. Now, the other thing is, I'm kind of interested in, other than know where you're taking is on this, but the, you know, in the medical profession, they've been very keen on getting PPE, personal protective equipment or that stuff to stop the virus getting in. But what they haven't been paying attention to, and I can't quite understand it, is.

What state is that person in if the virus does getting, so we've got a lot of our medical staff working 12 hour shifts, right? High levels of stress. The cortisol is going to be through the roof. We know cortisol has a massive impact on the immune system. We suspect we then know that they're probably not in the most immune, strong or competent position.

So I would also. Be thinking about what I am thinking I have to think about is how can I strengthen my immune system? So should I get it? Then I'm make sure my immune system is a robust way as it can be. So try and do a little exercise in the house, try and be careful with my diet. I'm a little bit of a supplement person cause I believe in that, but I can't obviously suggest that because I'm not qualified.

That's just a personal view. But one of the things we could be doing as well, it's just finding out a little bit about. How does the immune system work and doing things like meditations we know that can help the immune system. Compassion training can help the immune system. Anything I can do to give myself a little bit of an advantage, then I'm going to do that.

So should I get sick? Then I've got an immune system that's likely to deal with it. Where there's, I just stress myself, stress myself, stress myself, probably isn't going to do my immune system a lot of good.

Diana Hill: [00:37:49] Right? And if you do get sick, it's also not your fault because you didn't do a good enough job at your immune system buildings. So we have to be careful about that. The critical get in any way, right? Even healthy people get sick and die from

Paul Gilbert: [00:38:01] Yeah, absolutely. That's the one that was right. But the other thing is to remember that, you know. The focus on the fact that should you get ill, there are these amazing people that are hospitals and wherever you are, some of them are risking their lives because they're just doing these two hour shifts. I mean, they're working themselves into the ground things necessarily. Good thing. But yeah. People will be there to help you, you know? So what I think is, I think of some of the medical staff that have died kind of makes you cry, really, because you think, well, if I got sick, these people would be there doing

everything they could to save me and moving my mind into focusing on these amazing people that will do everything they can to save me.

So it takes me out of my own personal fear into. But I'm in a world rule. These people will do everything they can to save me. That really changes how I feel about this virus.

Diana Hill: [00:38:58] It makes me think of some of your work on archetypes and the heroes, the archetype of the heroes that are out there, and how even Steve Hayes did a writing on this about how we can cultivate our own hero within, and then also appreciate the heroes that are amongst us during this time.

Paul Gilbert: [00:39:15] yes. Yes, extraordinary. And this, this real feeling of, I mean, I think PA, I think it has changed a little bit for me because I would have said six months ago, the feeling that we're there with some of our leaders were really moving into other, she's becoming more and more selfish. The rich are getting richer, and you know, we have a lot of these rich people are still doing fossil fuels and plastics and blah, blah, blah.

But actually. And this is slightly changed in the sense of recognizing there's also a huge, huge swell of individuals who want to create the goods are not self focused, but want to create the good and the questions all of us have to ask as therapists and psychologists. How do we tap into this? How do we tap into the reality that so many of us actually wants to work for the common good, not for the common selfish side, but for the common good and how not to get attracted to the dark side, you know, with tax cuts or whatever it is.

So we support our services. We say, you know, we, we think about how we can work for the benefit of others. So I think is a great challenge for us at this point.

Diana Hill: [00:40:30] Yes. So in closing, I'm wondering if there's just any messaging that you think would be helpful for us to keep our. Our hearts and our mind on that of working for the good of others.

Paul Gilbert: [00:40:45] Yeah. So I think the key thing then is firstly recognizing. The extraordinary stresses that we are under. All right. There's the fear of the virus itself. There's the fear of what's going to happen to the economy. People might be frightened of their own jobs, and then there's the whole psychology of confinement and containment.

So just. Give ourselves a break. We are going to be feeling pretty tense and difficult at times. And so if that side of us gets the better of us, all we can do is as best as we can to kind of try to regulate our behavior as best we can. But don't start criticizing and bashing yourself on that cause that lady make you feel much worse and it'll make it much more likely that you'll get.

You know, stressed again, so you know, really validate your experience, understand why you're having the experiences that you're having. Try and treat those experiences with compassionate understanding as best you can. Then the second thing is to recognize, try as best you can to realize what the threat is.

And we, it's so difficult to realize what the threat is from all the numbers flying around. But I mean, as you were saying, Diane, mostly what we're doing is cleansing down to protect others. Not so much ourselves, but it's to protect others. Because for most of us, no for all of us, but most of us, if we got the virus, we would recover.

And some people had it and they didn't even know they had it. So. This is

important. We are closing. They're mostly mostly to protect other, so focus on that reason. Not. The fear to the South. But that reason for the close now focusing on, we're making sacrifice for the benefit of others. And then also should you get focused on the fact that there are many people out there who will, who will, you know, go, go the last mile to protect you and help you and get you well again.

, so. Hold on to this fact that this is a movement that's helping us realize that although it's very easy to be cynical about humans because we humans could do terrible things, this is an example where we're actually starting to stand up to the plate.

We are showing that we do have this on the sides, and that is like, which is terrific, tremendous, wonderful, and all of us now have to work at how are we going to hang onto this. In the months and years ahead, how are we going to live to the best in us, not the worst in us, and that's a challenge for all of us.

Diana Hill: [00:43:11] Yes. Well, thank you Dr. Gilbert, and for those of you that want to continue to build these capacities for compassion, I think that a great place to start is with your book, the compassionate mind. and for those that want to look more into.

the history of compassion and our tricky brains, um, living like crazy is another good one to read

Paul Gilbert: [00:43:33] I want to say that if you go onto our website, which you mentioned at the beginning, there were lots and lots of practices and exercises that you can download for free, and you can try them out. So you'll hear me going on and off how to breathe. They're all free. Just go and listen to them and if they're helpful to you.

And do your own research as well. Learning certain breathing techniques will help to regulate your body and your sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous is learning how to breathe. Learning postures, learning visualizations, learning how to use music with your meditation, finding meditation, music, and there's lots and lots of these out there on the, on the internet.

Go and have a look and just make it your out of an interest of finding ways that you feel. You can have ground yourself and settle your mind. Okay. Find your own way. There's lots out there, and as I say, if you're interested in the compassionate stuff, then go and have a look at the comparison to my foundation website.

Diana Hill: [00:44:32] That's great. Wonderful. Thank you again for coming on today, and we appreciate all your wisdom and work.

Paul Gilbert: [00:44:37] My pleasure. Thank you for providing me with see you in a couple of years.

Diana Hill: [00:44:40] Thank you for listening to Psychologist Off the Clock. If you enjoy our podcast, you can help us out by leaving a review or contributing on Patreon.

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