

Cultivating Friendships in Adulthood, featuring Adam Dorsay

Adam Dorsay: [00:00:00] We don't regret the things we did try and failed at at the end of our lives, but we do regret leaving opportunities on the table.

, creating friendships is an important opportunity and our health actually depends on it.

Yael Schonbrun: That was Adam Dorsay on psychologists off the clock. we are three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorenson, practicing in Mile High Denver, Colorado. Co-author of Act, Daily Journal, and an upcoming book on act for burnout.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm Dr. Yel Shreen, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the book Work Parent Thrive.

Jill Stoddard: And from coastal New England, I. Dr. Jill Sto, author of Be Mighty, the big book of Act metaphors and the Upcoming Imposter. [00:01:00] No more.

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Yael Schonbrun: so this is Debbie and Yael here. We're gonna be talking about an important topic, cultivating friendships in adulthood. This is a little bit of an unusual episode because Debbie and I are gonna share a little [00:02:00] bit about how we think about some of the issues in cultivating friendships in adulthood.

And then the second half of this episode will be a conversation between me and Adam Dorsay, a clinical psychologist who, specializes in, cultivating friendships in adulthood. And I'm so glad to be talking about cultivating friendships with my friend, Debbie.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, you know, and it is funny that we, we actually didn't know each other when we started collaborating together on the podcast. And it's, it is interesting how I really do consider you a very close friend of mine now. And that's sort of. Grew over the course of time because of having this shared project together, you know, we are in such frequent touch nowadays, both about the podcast, but also about our lives.

Um, and Jill as well

Yael Schonbrun: yes, and what's crazy is I've only met you in real life one time, and I've seen Jill a couple of times in real life, and yet we've become so close. [00:03:00] The three of us were in pretty much daily contact and it, it can sometimes surprise you.

I think how friendships emerge over time in places that you didn't necessarily expect them.

Debbie Sorensen: That's right. And we'll talk a little bit, as the conversation goes on about why it can be more difficult in adulthood and also how to, to cultivate it over the course of time. But I think it's important to just acknowledge like that the friendship that we have is really life enhancing.

Yael Schonbrun: Yes. And what we know from research and Adam talks a bit about some of the specific studies that have been conducted is that having a strong social network is really important for our mental health and for our physical health. There is clear evidence suggesting that the kinds of connections that we cultivate really matter.

Debbie Sorensen: I think it's really pretty obvious that friendship can be a source of fun, right? Like that, you know, sometimes you, well, not so much in our case [00:04:00] because we're mostly long distance friends, but you know, you can go out and have a good time together and have, you know, meet for

Yael Schonbrun: Although we celebrate one another's victories together and it really feels connected even though it's more virtual

Debbie Sorensen: That's very true. That's very true. We still have fun. We still laugh. We enjoy each other's company. It also can just be really helpful for buffering stress, just to have those people you can go to. And certainly, you know, there's so many examples of that, where just having those social networks and having people that you can come to can just help you through a rough time, whether it's.

Someone you can confide in and share about what's happening or just someone you can go, you know, have some fun with.

Yael Schonbrun: That's right. And it's, I. Not to put all of our eggs in our family baskets or our work baskets in terms of where we look for support and fun and connection. This is something I write a lot about in my book about working parenthood, that the more roles we have, the more opportunities we have [00:05:00] to have a positive connecting experience.

So if work isn't going well, or your kids are going through a rough developmental stage, or you're in a fight with a parent, friendships can be a really great place to. Achieve some of that real connection that is so important for humans to have a place not only again, to celebrate your victories, but also to, um, find support.

Debbie Sorensen: You know, Adam talks about that later on in this episode, about how actually sometimes it's almost easier if you happen to have a spouse or a romantic partner, it's, it's easy to put all of your friendship needs in that relationship, but that it's actually, it's almost like too much for a partnership or a marriage.

You need to, to seek some of that else.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, there's actually interesting research on the history of marriage and the, the function that it has served in different ways. Over the course of, you know, how long marriage has been, uh, sort of an institution [00:06:00] and, you know, many decades ago, we didn't actually expect that

much of our partners that was sort of, we married for protection and for economic support and for, social safety.

You know, ever since the 1960s and the cultural revolution, we, we have sort of evolved into this place of expecting so much of our marital partners and friendship is a really great way to reduce the pressure that we put on that one relationship, which helps that relationship to thrive more and helps us to get more of our needs met.

Debbie Sorensen: So that's a good point too, in terms of like, what are some of the challenges to adult friendship? Because I think actually there is that cultural component to it where, you know, people. Are not necessarily in social groups, the way that we used to be. Right. So many people work from home or, you know, work in these settings where they just come in and do their work in the office and see certain people and then leave.

And aren't necessarily in these kind of built in social groups anymore that you are as a kid, or [00:07:00] maybe we lived in more. Before urbanization when people lived in a smaller community and it was just kind of, you know, everybody was going to the same places and doing the same things and it was, it was easier.

And I think to me, the pandemic really. made that more so, right. Like for me personally, I think my friendships took a big hit. I just was not able to get out as much. I was so stressed out, even if it wasn't for the lockdown and just having to be more isolated during that period of time. It was also that I was so maxed out friendship kind of had to go on the back burner for a.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. I definitely felt that during the pandemic, but I think that that's been something that I've contended with for much of my adult life in part, because my work and our work, Debbie really is so solitary. I mean, we meet with people, but. Therapeutic relationships are really one directional as which is appropriate, but it doesn't obviously feel [00:08:00] like a place where you can get your friendship needs met, um, writing as you and I both do is a very solitary activity.

And the rest of my life is really taken up by family. And, and obviously those relationships have wonderful ways that they feel me, but aren't the same thing as friendship. And it's very hard as a working parent to find time. For social activity. And again, the pandemic made that worse.

And I definitely hit a point where I was noticing that I'm working really hard and seeing people all the time, but just feeling really lonely and, you know, recognizing that it was hard to find the energy, to do something about it and hard even to figure out what would be the right way to do something about.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. And I had a number of clients, I think over the last few years who weren't in a partnership who maybe lived alone or, you know, were, were either divorced or you know, living on their own or were, , just not in a relationship and that, that isolation of you know, [00:09:00] working from home maybe, or just having a lot of social events canceled like that, that loneliness, I think became pervasive for a lot of people.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. My own mother. So my father passed away about three years ago, about a year before the pandemic and the pandemic was really hard on her. She was tremendously lonely after he passed away.

And that loneliness. Really ratcheted up during the pandemic, because it was so hard for her to gain access, to social connection, living alone and, and really missing her life partner. Um, and so I think there's lots of circumstances that can really make it especially hard to access social connection. And knowing that how important it is, right, is sort of the situations are, you know, lack of energy, lack of time, lack of easy access.

And yet it can be really critical to overcome many of those obstacles for our wellbeing, for our happiness.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Well, and I, I think some of those kinds of internal barriers are important too, [00:10:00] right? Like. You said I don't have time. And it's like, okay. Yeah, that's kind of true. Right? Probably most people are busy and it is time consuming, but also sometimes we like get in our own way because. Maybe it is important to us, but we deprioritize it because we tell ourselves like, oh, I'm too busy. Or we might get a little self critical, like, well, what if, you know, you put yourself out there socially and you think, oh, maybe no one will like me, or you're afraid of rejection or you're a little bit critical of other people.

Like maybe you don't give people a chance because you go into it looking for reasons why this person might not be someone that you wanna be friends with or get to know, you know, kind of judgemental or critical of people.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And that's where your mind is trying to protect you from things like rejection or vulnerability or, or discomfort. I think Debbie, your

point that these are the internal barriers that we need to [00:11:00] acknowledge and sort of figure out how do we approach them is one of the important things that we do with acceptance and commitment therapy is sort of work with our thoughts and figure out how are they serving us and how are they interfering with the kind of life that we'd like to build and the kind of person that we'd like to be.

So recognizing that your mind is trying to protect you by. You know, you're, you might not like those people, or they're not good enough for you or you don't have time and you have to get your work done, or your kids need you. This is, you know, making time for your friends. Isn't as important as being there for your young children.

Those are thoughts to recognize and to sort of ask, you know, how helpful are they given that I know that friendships are important fuel to keep me going to protect my wellbeing, but also that there are realities, right? That I have finite time energy to give to all the different pockets of my life that are important.

Debbie Sorensen: Can I give a personal example of this? So there was this group of friends that I really liked. They were moms from. Kids [00:12:00] preschool class. And I really liked them and kind of had lost, not really lost touch, but I just didn't see them much after preschool. We weren't all going to the same school. And, um, you know, it was the pandemic.

So a few of them still potted up with each other and saw each other a lot, but I wasn't really seeing them. And I always felt the sense of like, I really like this group of women. I kind of wish I hung out with them more, you know, and they invited me to do something and. Time consuming. It required spending some money to join them for this activity.

And it was terrible timing for me because I was basically, it was a busy period of my life. And I was between two. I was between a trip out of town and then, you know, the start of the school year and one of my kids' birthdays and all that stuff. So my first instinct was like, no, I can't do that. I don't have time. And I'm too busy and there are all these reasons why, but I kind of said to myself, I've been wanting to like reconnect with them and kind of get in with them. [00:13:00] get back in with them socially for a while. Like, this is my chance, so I'm gonna do it anyway.

And it wasn't necessarily the most practical decision, but I kind of was like, I'm gonna prioritize this. and it was fun. It was totally worth it. And I've been doing

more things with them since that happened. So it was worth it from a friendship investment point of view.

Yael Schonbrun: yeah, yeah. That, I think that's such a great example and I'll sort of dovetail on it by saying that I often struggle to make time and. put the resources into nourishing the friendships that are most important to me, because it is really hard on my family. I'm the one with the most flexible schedule and we have three young kids and my husband has a very inflexible schedule.

And so me putting time into my friendships causes Stripe for the rest of my family in a very real way. For a while. I actually had decided, you know, that just needs to be on the back [00:14:00] burner, but over time, recognizing the cost that it had. Um, I came up with a plan and kind of negotiated with my husband and so now every other year.

And so it's not terribly often, I take a trip with my two best girlfriends from college and it is, it's a long weekend away. It is a huge investment of time and often money. Um, but we time it very carefully and it's spaced out enough that it feels doable for my family. So I think that there are ways to.

Negotiate it and to really think about the obstacles, both the internal ones, as well as the practical ones and figure out where and how it fits. I'll give one more example, too, which is, you know, on a day to day basis, I actually recognize that part of where friendship was lacking was that I didn't really have a larger community again, because I sort of in my insular family life or working in my more isolated work.

And so about six months ago, I decided to join a synagogue, which I had really hesitated to do [00:15:00] because I'm not terribly religious, but it felt important to sort of find community. And then I realized that just joining actually wasn't enough. Because I wasn't going enough to make friends.

Right. If I just went around the high holidays that wasn't sufficient to actually build a meaningful connection. And so just recently I joined a committee, which I definitely do not have time for, but it's. So fun and I've actually gotten to know people through participating. And so I think it really does speak to the fact that friendships can only be developed and maintained if we put something into them and there are legitimate opportunity costs.

And so we have to figure out where it's gonna fit in how it's gonna fit in. What's practical, what's reasonable given our constraints. And that's sort of where

values meet committed action, right. Is sort of figuring out how it's gonna work for you.

Debbie Sorensen: Absolutely. I mean, I think it's, it goes back to something we've talked about a number of times on the podcast, which is prioritizing things that are important to you. And if, if [00:16:00] having friendships is important to you, and, you know, you have values about spending time with people, community, um, building those kinds of relationships.

And I think that it's not always easy to do that, but it might be worth prioritizing over something else.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Know, one other challenge that we actually haven't talked about that I think is a really common one. Is social phobia or just anxiety about hanging out with people that you don't know, or, and this comes up for me, anxiety.

After the fact, you hang out with a group of people and then you sort of do this post hoc. In depth analysis of all the ways that you said stupid things came across as unlikeable, were insensitive talk too much. Didn't talk enough. And there's this sort of post mortem analysis that many people with social anxiety engage in.

That That makes it really hard to prioritize out with people because it can feel so uncom.

Debbie Sorensen: Yes, absolutely. I mean, there is [00:17:00] that tendency to. Be in a social situation where you're, you know, you're feeling like some sort of awkward, you know, weirdo or something like that. And, and that fear of like, what if people don't like me and that kind of thing. And I think that there is such a, you know, a willingness required to just kind of. Go ahead and put yourself in that situation anyway, even with all that doubt and self-criticism, um, and, but, you know, that's wired into us, like it's, if you think about what's the function of that social phobia that we might feel, or that social awkwardness that we might feel it's because, you know, we're such social creatures.

We. Want to be attuned to the group and we want to be able to fit in and that kind of thing. And so I think that you can be a little bit compassionate toward yourself. Like, of course you're at this, you know, this party, you're gonna be a little bit on edge [00:18:00] about it because you're, you're doing something that's really important to you.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, it's sort of like the neon sign pointing too. I care about this friendship. I care about developing this relationship. Just speaking to what you're saying, Debbie, I think it. Helpful to be more self-compassionate when we realize that that anxiety is wired into us so that we can protect our social connections. Tracy, Dennis, Towari actually talks about this on our episode about why anxiety is good for you. And. Recognizing that we're sort of built in with what's what psychology researchers are calling a spotlight effect, where we think that people are paying more attention to, to than we are.

And, and we do that in order to try to do our best socially, but that actually most people are more focused on themselves. So that kind of helps too with just lightening up the, the pressure that we might put. One other strategy that I think is helpful in managing some of that social anxiety is to find your people find the people who's, who are willing to talk with you about how awkward you [00:19:00] feel in the postmortem analysis that you do. Debbie, I know you and I sometimes talk about our self consciousness or the BLS that we make, and we kind of giggle about it and feel really connected over it.

And I find that that really helps me. Manage my own anxiety and, and actually use it as a pathway to building more connect.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. People who you can be real about with that kind of thing. And I think it, sometimes it takes a while to determine that, cuz you're not necessarily gonna pick up on that in the first five minutes you meet someone. But if you find people where you can genuinely express some of this, that is. A good indicator.

You know, I think Adam actually talks about this and I think it's really important is that, you know, how do you feel when you you're with this person? And if you're feeling like, I don't know, you're, you're feeling terrible about yourself afterwards, or like you have to really conceal your true self.

Maybe that's maybe those aren't your people, you know, you kind of wanna find people where you can be genuine like that and, [00:20:00] and test the waters and see over time. If that, if that's a possibility.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And much like dating. I think, you know, you gotta put yourself out there and try people out and see if they. You know what you're looking for and if you fit what they're looking for and be willing to, you know, be patient with the process, you know, good friends aren't built overnight.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Well, I think it's kinda nice too, to have a little bit of diversity in your friendships. Like, you know, I have a lot of friends like you Yael, who are. Psychologists or other people in the field of mental health. And it's wonderful. Like we can talk about work and we can have these kind of discussions around this common shared interest we have in this.

But then I also like having some friends, like I have some friends who don't know the first thing about my work, because that's just not what we talk about. Like maybe they know I'm a psychologist, but that's about it. Cuz we just don't talk about it. And it's like, oh, I like having those friends too. It's just a very different type of friendship.

And I think that's kind of nice actually to have. You know, some [00:21:00] different groups of friends that serve different functions. Like these are the friends I can just go out for margaritas with and not talk about work at all. But then I also have other friends where it's like, it's actually really life enhancing to have that work connection.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. One thing that I'll just kind of throw out there is a value of mine is to use friendships to grow. I think it's really lovely to make friends with people who are unlike you, not only in the things that they're interested in, but like different politically or religiously, because it gives you a perspective on the world.

And I mean, if you even think about it from a modeling perspective for your children or, or, you know, other young people, I think it's really important to show. up in the world in a way that suggests that you're not just looking for people who only think the way that you do. Not only because I think it does a disservice for the kind of connections that we can build as a larger community that we live within.

But also because it creates a narrow mindset, it's like only listening to one kind of news and we can end up in an echo chamber of friendship, [00:22:00] just the same way as we can end up in an echo chamber. News media that we consume. And so, you know, there are various ways to do this, but just because somebody has a different background than you doesn't mean that they can't be a good friend.

And in fact, those might be some of the most rewarding and rich friendships that you access.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, and that's where you also need to kind of get to know the person beyond that initial first impression that you have in the first 30 seconds, where. You make a decision about, I'm not gonna be friends with this person or I am, or I'm not because it's like, you need to sort of get to know them a little bit and maybe get past some of that, those differences.

Yeah.

Yael Schonbrun: Right. Being patient again with the process, you know, sometimes too, you might think that somebody's a perfect fit for you. And the further you get into the friendship, you realize that, the time that you spend with them might be more deflating than, than rewarding. And, and so that might not be a good investment of your time and energy.

Debbie Sorensen: Absolutely. Yeah.

Yael Schonbrun: So just. A couple of quick tips that I [00:23:00] have in, in the modern world that we live in for trying to cultivate more friendships is, you know, if one setting like school, your work or your religious center, isn't your friendship garden. Find another one, join a book club or start one, do a volunteer activity.

Or my favorite is start a podcast about something you love to talk about and ask a couple of people who have a similar interest to join you. You might find that that is where your best friendships grow. And I will say, and I say this in my conversation with Adam, that my. The pod, our podcast has been an avenue to grow my friendship with you and Jill and the rest of our teammates, and also to meet other authors whose work I love and, and cultivate friendships with them too.

Debbie Sorensen: I mean to me, I think the bottom line is like, you have to get out there. Right? You have to show. In different communities and whatever that might be for you, whether it's a church or synagogue or, you know, a school or a podcast or book club or a [00:24:00] meetup, you just, you need to get out there and start talking to people, you know, could be something tiny.

And I think that's where like translating that value into small steps, whatever that means for you. But I do think that sometimes even just a little step in the direction of. Reaching out to someone or striking up a conversation or inviting. I mean, to me, the big step is always like, when someone says, Hey, let's go for a walk or let's go out for coffee or something like that.

Um, somebody that you've been around in some capacity and you take that step of asking, it's like, that can feel scary, can feel a little vulnerable. It's outside the comfort zone a little bit, but it's just that pattern of showing up and taking a little bit of risk. Is where the action is, whatever that means for you.

But if you're just sitting home on your couch all day long, like it's definitely not gonna happen.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. Yeah. So take a risk, but take sort of a measured, thoughtful risk. And, you know, if you [00:25:00] go to a community event, you know, and show up and talk to one or one and talk to one person, you know, that that might be a big risk. For you, but sort of a safe enough one to enter into, to feel like, you know, this is worthwhile

Debbie Sorensen: I think it's also important to you to think about what, what older friendships you can. Revisit right. Reinvigorate. Cuz I think sometimes it's like you, you know, I'm, I'm sometimes not great about staying in touch with people. I like love, you know, that people that I care about deeply. Um, but it's just that habit of reaching out and I get a little bit worried.

Well, I haven't talked to them in so long. Will it seem. Will they be mad at me or will it seem strange if I, if I text them out of the blue or if I give them a call or something like that. But I actually think sometimes people, you have a, a long history with, it can be really nice to reconnect with. And there is something about even just, just read an article [00:26:00] in the news recently about this, about just every once in a while, sending a text to someone like, oh, thinking of you, how's it going?

Like those little interactions matter a lot. And sometimes I think you can. Form friendships out of history. Even if you have lost touch with somebody a little bit, you know, it's really nice to do that, to just reconnect.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. Yeah. So, you know, it's like the, the thing is like a girl scout. One is silver in the other school, but you know, there's old friendships and there's new friendships and they, they are both fodder for cultivating connection in

Debbie Sorensen: Make new

Yael Schonbrun: is so important. Yes, that's

Debbie Sorensen: song.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, and I won't paint you all by singing it.

Debbie Sorensen: Oh yeah, definitely not.

Well, if you wanted to work on some skills related to some of this, I'm excited about an episode I have coming out in a couple months. So stay tuned for this, that. Little bit more nuts and bolts about how to [00:27:00] have assertive conversations, right?

How to communicate, how to set boundaries, which sometimes you have to do to, you know, carve out time to have friendships, how to give and receive feedback and kind of how to just effectively communicate. So that conversation was with Dr. Randy Patterson. He wrote the assertiveness workbook. And so beyond the lookout for that, I believe it's gonna be coming out in.

In November in a couple of months.

Yael Schonbrun: So now we're gonna turn it over to my conversation with Adam who offers us all sorts of wisdom, insights, and practical tips for cultivating friendship in adulthood.

Yael Schonbrun: Dr. Adam Dorsay is a licensed psychologist and a certified executive coach working in private practice in California.

He's also the co-creator of project reciprocity, a resiliency program based out of Facebook's headquarters. And in 2021, Adam was a featured TEDx speaker on the topic of friendships in adulthood. So we are very happy to bend his ear today on this important topic. Welcome Adam.

Adam Dorsay: [00:28:00] Oh, it's so great to be with you. Y.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, I have to share with our listeners that Adam and I were connected by another colleague of ours, Susan Pollock, who came on psychologists off the clock to discuss self-compassion for parents. That was in episode 113 Susan connected, Adam and I in the hopes that Adam could help me get the word out about my working parent book.

That's coming out soon. But as we chatted, I realized I kind of wanted to be buddies with this guy. He seems like a person you'd want as a good friend. So I

think he might have some real wisdom that we can all learn from about how to be a good friend.

Adam Dorsay: I am so delighted to be doing this. And you know, what's been so cool about actually having this podcast, uh, that I've created at the outset of COVID has been that I've gotten to meet cool people like you and, uh, yeah, you were just the friend that I was waiting to meet.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, we chatted briefly about this, but I actually feel that podcasting has been this amazing, platform. Not only to get the word out about cool things in psychology, but [00:29:00] to meet people and to develop ongoing relationships. I, that was definitely not why I started it, but it's been this sort of bonus of, uh, not only becoming close friends with my colleagues, but also becoming.

Friends with people that, that come on this show who are passionate about similar kinds of ideas and topics and, and having those relationships extend long past the time that we do an episode. Have you found the same in your podcast?

Adam Dorsay: Unequivocally. And one of the great tips from Malcolm Gladwell in blink was if you wanna get to know someone really quickly know their bookshelf, because you'll know what they aspire to become. And on the podcast, you get to know people's thoughts. And, uh, ideally if they're being authentic on the podcast and , it's, it's my hope that EV most people are, uh, you get to know like, wow, how does this person think?

It's kind of like looking at their bookshelf and in a very. In a very efficient manner. You're able to get to know what does this person [00:30:00] value, which seems to be a very important component of confluence between friends is the values that are shared. So I think part of the reason that you and I connected so well is there are values that if we were to name them together, that we share on a very deep level.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. So we talk a lot about values on this podcast, and it's interesting to think about the way that values can help us but before we sort of dive down that road, I kind of wanted to back up a little bit and talk about the problem of adult friendships and then get your thoughts on why, why do you think so many people struggle to cultivate friendships in adulthood?

Adam Dorsay: So many of us are moving. We are so nomadic relative to our predecessors to even just a few decades prior. We grow up in a place. We go to college in a place. We may work in a place. We may move multiple times. And

with each of these moves, it's almost like copying multiple copies on a copy machine that become over time.

For those of you who remember [00:31:00] what it was like to copy on a copy machine, they become less good in terms of the resolution and.

Yael Schonbrun: machines, spit out paper folks.

Adam Dorsay: You spit out paper. Right. Um, and similarly, um, over time, what can happen is the maintenance can be poor and people may even think, oh my gosh, I feel so embarrassed. I don't even know how to begin to reinvigorate a relationship that I have not attended to for years.

So. Here I am in Silicon valley, working with these really high achieving, amazing, attractive people who, if it wasn't illegal or unethical, I would wanna say, you know, let's go grab a cup of coffee. You're

Yael Schonbrun: Yes, therapists feel that way about our patients all the time.

Adam Dorsay: Totally. And, and, uh, obviously that would be in so many ways, a terrible idea. Uh, That being said, one of the chief complaints that I experience is that, oh my gosh, I, I need [00:32:00] friends and I'm thinking, my gosh, you're so fragile and the vulnerability component of trying, I mean, it's one thing when you're eight years old and you're knocking at your next door neighbor saying, Hey, can you come out and play?

But at 40, it's a lot harder to say, Hey, to somebody at work, you seem really cool. Let's be friends. Uh, or if you meet somebody at a meetup or drop off. Your kid's school. And it's like, wow, this person, there's a vulnerability. And there's the possibility. And the likelihood that if you do it right, you will be rejected at some point.

Uh, statistically, it's not gonna work either. Uh, you'll be outright rejected or you'll come to find that the person who you thought you had a lot in common with actually you don't and you don't wanna be the rejector or the reject E so there's a lot of vulnerability. And it also represents an opportunity cost relative to time.

We don't have a lot of time. And one of the things that we wear is almost a badge of pride is I'm so busy. I don't have time for friends. Well, [00:33:00] actually you gotta make time for friends and maybe do some of the things that

you would ordinarily do and see if you're willing to be vulnerable as Brene brown.

So wisely said all courage. Depends on our willingness to be vulnerable. It is a precursor. It is a prerequisite to courage and courage. As we know is one of the most important virtues we can rock in this lifetime. Otherwise we use our dash between our birth date and our death date. Very poorly. We don't regret the things we did try and failed at at the end of our lives, but we do regret leaving opportunities on the table.

, creating friendships is an important opportunity and our health actually depends on it. We have hard. Statistics. Uh, I'm so thankful to the researcher at Brigham young university who have found that our, one of the biggest predictors in our health is how lonely we are or are not how connected we feel in the blue zones, which are the [00:34:00] places on the planet, uh, such as Okinawa or even Loma Linda, uh, One of the hallmarks of these two places where people lived routinely to be a hundred or more, uh, friendships and connections and relationships are a hallmark of these societies.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, so friendship helps us to be healthier. And so you're arguing that it's a really worthy investment of your resources, your time, your attention, your energy, um, You're pointing to a number of the factors that I think I'm guessing that many people, I know that I, as you were listing them, like, oh yeah, no, that, one's definitely hard for me.

The vulnerability piece, the time piece, the, um, fear that I'm not sure if I like this person. And so I don't wanna be the one to either be rejected or to. For me worse to be the rejector. I actually spoke about this with Zoe chance on the episode where we talked about influences your superpower.

And she, she talks about the [00:35:00] science that really shows that being the rejector is actually more painful many times than being the reject. He, so there's a lot on the line when we reach out to, to build friendships.

Adam Dorsay: Right. And how do we reject a lot of people like to ghost? Um, and one of the things that I've heard too many times to count is that people in a dating process just aren't willing to reject and the pain centers associated with rejection. If you were to look at a functional, uh, MRI or an other, uh, brain imaging device, the pain centers that are hit when we reject or when we're rejected.

Are elicited as if we were in tremendous physical pain and it really hearkens back to centuries, uh, in millennia prior when we were, if we were banished from our society, it almost meant certain deaths. So it kind of evokes that image of like, oh my gosh, I'd rather die than reject or be rejected.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. I mean, it, it makes so much evolutionary sense why it's [00:36:00] so scary and yet it, it is that important to, to do. And so I, I guess I'm. The question sort of pops into my mind of, you know, what do you counsel people as the ideal vision? And of course it's gonna vary from person to person but what, what is the general wisdom here in terms of what kind of friendship circle will serve us? Well over time,

Adam Dorsay: So we hear a lot. Quality over quantity and having one great friend in this life is incredible. And many people may extrapolate from that. Well, my spouse is that person, but as Esther Perel, so wisely says overindexing on the spouse may actually incur harm to that primary romantic relationship. Because the spouse can't be all things to all people.

And we used to have villages where we would have somebody with whom to go play cards and somebody with whom to garden. And now we expect our spouse to serve all of those roles and it's too much wear in town, a spouse. In fact, there's hard research that indicates that [00:37:00] the quality of our marriages will improve with the quality of our relationships.

And notice, I didn't say quantity, but I like thinking of. Our friends as being superheroes with different skills. There are friends with whom you watch sports and probably don't talk about deep emotions, but your shared love of that team is incredible. And there may be people in your book club with whom you share intellectual ideas, but really don't get into the feels as much.

And then there are friends who. Serve multiple purposes and may even be able to have that kind of flexibility to go into the deep fields and may even help you move. But each friend is almost like an unwritten contract. It's like, you know that this is my sports friend and. I'm not probably going to ask for relationship advice here, but we can totally geek out to our shared love of sports.

And there may be people who help you move and they're [00:38:00] incredibly supportive, but maybe you don't talk about, you know, deep. Relationship stuff either. And then there might be somebody with whom you talk about deep relationship stuff who will not help you move. And definitely does not like sports. So, it's kind of like that old Sesame street song, who are the people in your neighborhood?

Uh, there are different people in your neighborhood that serve different purposes. I like thinking of them as each having superhero skills that we appreciate the limits of our friendship, because nobody can do all things. Um, As much as I adore my wife, I'm not going to be able to geek out with her about the golden state warrior.

She just doesn't care. And I need to find somebody else to find my golden state warrior fix. Um, but the things that she does do and the things that my other friends do, uh, are incredible. And I'm so grateful to my friends and their superhero skills.

Yael Schonbrun: I love that as you're mentioning your wife, I'm just thinking. You know, my husband is my absolute best friend in the world, but I can't talk to [00:39:00] him about psychology. It puts him to sleep, which I don't understand at all. And I bet nobody listening to this podcast will, but we talk about other things, not about our careers for the most part, because I'm not very interested in engineering and he is decidedly uninterested in clinical psychology.

Adam Dorsay: Right, but I'm going to guess that you and your husband. Share this there's probably integrity. I know that's a big word with lots of, but that he's dependable. He's probably loyal. He probably is willing to drop something to attend to you in a triage like perspective. He's probably got integrity. He's probably shows that he cares about you and that your agendas are important.

And he probably shows, uh, congeniality probably also kind of fun to be with. And those three traits. Regardless of the limitations of the friendship, uh, tend to be present amongst friends that integrity, the caring, the congeniality, uh, one of my very favorite moments. [00:40:00] In, I, I, I love looking to movies that show great friendship is in, uh, I love you man, starring Paul Rudd and the great Jason Siegel, which is an overlooked film.

And it's so phenomenal, but you see something that is rather gendered. You see Rashida Jones, uh, the fiancée of Paul Rudd, who has a ton of friends and he realizes, oh my God, I have no friends. And there's no book on how to cultivate friendship. And thankfully he bumps into Jason Siegel. Totally embodies those three characteristics.

And of course there's a problem and it gets resolved, but it's like one of it. It's one of my favorite movies. I love parks and recreation. I love seeing Anne Perkins and Leslie. Nope. They've got a great friendship for those of you. Who've seen the show. If you haven't, I'm actually rewatching it with my 13

year old son right now, so that he can not just learn about like Marvel superheroes who don't really reflect.

True human strengths. Although they kind of may rock certain virtues at a high level, but [00:41:00] parks and recreation is a great show. I believe to watch with one's children and hit pause periodically and say what happened just there? Like what, how do you imagine Leslie note felt when Anne was supporting her?

And that's like, that's, that's the most amazing.

Yael Schonbrun: There's like a sub subtext here of like, how is psychologist watches, TV with their child?

Adam Dorsay: And for the listeners out there who may be wondering, like, what's it like for the child of a psychologist? Both of my sons love the fact that interestingly, my wife and I are both psychologists, we are total geeks and my kids actually love the fact that we are psychologists.

So I just needed to put out that disclaimer,

Yael Schonbrun: I love it. My kids on the other hand have a saying that, cuz I mention research too often. They say research shows that psychologist parents are annoying

Adam Dorsay: That's awesome. Research shows that psychologists cite too much research and forget to like, [00:42:00] enter like reality.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I'm sorry. But, um, so I love that you're highlighting some of these values that more generally contribute to healthy, strong relationships, integrity, caring, and congeniality. Um, and so, you know, it's sort of like, those are. Maybe necessary, but not sufficient ingredients to build a friendship, but what other kinds of ways should we think about values in terms of finding the different functions that different friends are gonna.

Adam Dorsay: Yeah. And one of the things you can even ask yourself is to look at your cast of friends and ask yourself what is the value that we share in common? What seems to be the unwritten contract here and really appreciating 'em. Now that. One of the things that I also really endorse is something that I call the driveway test.

How do you feel after an interaction? You will have a felt sense after the, almost like the end of a symphony, there's that quiet in the room after that final

note, how do you feel? [00:43:00] And the composer very intentionally is trying to incur a feeling, uh, and we have. Feelings, I call it the drive away test.

it's been kind of the term I use is like, how do you feel as you're driving away from an interaction? I know many of us interact, uh, via text and other forms of media, but how do you feel at the end of an interaction? Do you feel a little taller, stronger, supported? Do you feel deflated perhaps or like, like UN and a little smaller.

Of course, you're not gonna feel awesome after every interaction with every friend. But if you notice that you're feeling kind of crappy at the end of interactions with some regularity, there may be something to discuss. There may be something that you need to. Unilaterally ascertain in terms of like the quality of the relationship itself, uh, and perhaps your expectations and or how much time you allocate towards that friendship.

Um, [00:44:00] obviously if somebody's going through a really rough patch, a trauma, uh, Transition in life. They may not have the bandwidth to be available for you. And that might be one of those times where the expectations are. I am providing for my friend during this period, with the understanding that at some point it will become a little more reciprocal, but you generally want the upload download ratio to be pretty, pretty, pretty fair.

Um, and you want the drive away test to be rather positive.

Yael Schonbrun: I, I really love sort of pairing that with the idea that not every friend can fulfill every need because you know, there are certain friends who sort of bring you up and certain friends that give you perspective and certain friends that make you laugh. And certain friends who are really good to have a cry with.

And so you're gonna feel really different based on sort of. Kind of friendship you have in, in the way that that friendship kind of fulfills you and, and hopefully that it, that feels bidirectional. I am, as you were talking, I [00:45:00] was just sort of thinking, you know, I have some people in my life who really struggle with friendship who feel like they give too much and don't receive enough.

And this is sort of, uh, a very consistent theme throughout their relational life. And I'm curious how you would advise somebody who has struggled with that specific issue, uh, for a very long time

Adam Dorsay: yeah. So boundaries and assertiveness have been a really important component of modern psychology. And what we found is that when people don't know what their boundaries are and routinely violate them, or when they are not assertive enough and don't speak their truth and ask for what they want. Or even allow themselves to know what they want relationships go poorly.

And oftentimes, even though the control that we have is internal to deal with these things, we can look at the friend and say, oh, they're being bad friends. When in fact we're not being assertive enough or perhaps [00:46:00] as well, ed, as we need to be. And those can be really. Saying no to somebody is really hard, but sometimes saying no to somebody else is the biggest yes.

You can give to yourself. And it can also allow the other person to know you more authentically, because if you say yes, when you mean, no, you're lying, you're lying to you. You're lying to them. And you will engage in something that I call consent and resent. You end up doing something and then often you end up saying to about the other person, oh my God, that person sucks.

I wish they didn't ask me. Well, they, they asked you, you could say. You could say no, uh, you could get in touch with your truth. So it starts with knowing who you are, knowing what you need and being willing to. Assert your truth. Now it doesn't mean that you're not flexible. It doesn't mean that you don't say yes at an inconvenient time when you actually know that your friend really, really needs you.

Uh, one of my favorite episodes in friends is . I believe, I believe it was Ross and Joey, but it could have been [00:47:00] Chandler and Joey, uh, have amazing tickets to go see the Knicks and. I forget who it was. It might have been Rachel. One of, one of their, one of the amazing women in the show just had an awful date and they, they decided to forego their, their tickets and attend to their friend.

And there was no consent and resent on the other side because they knew that a higher principal was at play here. Something horrible had befallen their friend and their next tickets needed to be sacrificed. So I'm not talking. Just like being boundaried and saying, well, I've got next tickets and therefore your need, but it means doing a really good cost benefit analysis amongst really, really close friends.

And I do recommend this as a possible tactic for some people who are willing to go this extra mile. I, I do like being able to say to somebody, you know, Hey, if,

if, if, if there's really great intimacy, I, I was planning on going to the next. One [00:48:00] to 10, if there's that level of honesty and candor, how, how, how badly do you need me tonight?

And, and could this wait until after the next game? And they might say it's kind of like an eight and I'd be like, dang. Okay. Yeah, I it's an eight and I know for a fact, uh, an eight is a pretty high number. I'm gonna I'm I'm gonna do this. They might say, you know what? It's, it's more like a six and I'm like, these are courtside seats.

Um, I really want to go to this game. Um, can we, you know, can we negotiate so that I hang with you after the game? Uh, if they're night people, um, or what have you, or it could even possibly wait till tomorrow, but having the ability to coordinate well with friends and communicate authentically, uh, that's obviously not going to be. Truth for every friendship, cuz some people don't really have that ability to know who, what they're wanting in real time, let alone the ability to express it to another. But that is, that is something that can work for [00:49:00] people who are FAL in this way.

Yael Schonbrun: yeah. The, the advice to sort of be aware of the consent and resent is so wise though, and to be really willing to reflect on that for yourself. What, what am I willing to give in the service of. Being a good friend, which is important to me. And, and what's gonna sort of go over the line and make, drop me into resentment, which is so toxic for relationships.

Adam Dorsay: Yeah. I recently heard from someone who just wrote a great book on friendship called platonic, Maris. Ji Franco. Um, she was talking about the giving tree, which is a book that we tend to love, uh, by shelf Silverstein. It's a great book and it's a beautiful book. And yet it's been questioned by people like Adam Grant, Adam Wharton, who, uh, apparently, and I haven't read his.

His summary, but she cited him as somebody who was questioning the idea of the relationship. It was, it's rather unilateral. The giving tree pretty much gives. And the boy who becomes eventually a man and an old man ultimately just [00:50:00] takes and. That I don't think is a good playbook for friendship. There does need to be reciprocity of some kind.

There's gotta be an upload and a download. Um, if it's just your friend, just venting to you and basically using you as a, uh, a venting post, talking about it and trying to address the issue, uh, which is very difficult to do, uh, or considering as harsh as this may sound investing less time in that friendship.

If there seems to be some recalcitrant on the friends part who is not willing to. Also, they may you say, of course, I'll listen to you. Uh, but they may be deceiving themselves and they may not be super receptive to, uh, feedback. Uh, I was a lot of us deceive ourselves thinking that we're very, very open to feedback and we're not.

And that, that does tend to be an important trait for us. Uh, when we get feedback from a friend and we immediately [00:51:00] blanch, there may be a grain of truth that we need to look at. May be that we're getting a bad reflection, actually. So it's, it's a really important, uh, thing to determine you may, if, if I hear something that seems a little bit Aran, I may check in with my and say, Hey, you know, I heard from one of my friends that I kind of do this and she may say, oh, that's, that's completely bogus.

Or she may say, uh, dude, yeah, he's on something.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. I think receiving feedback as a friend is maybe even harder than receiving it from your partner, because it feels like that isn't where we should be necessarily doing our growth. Like, you know, it's not the most important relationship in our life and yet. This is kind of the whole point of this conversation.

Like friendships are really, really important. And so, you know, all of us can work to grow in the area in the domains of life that feel really valuable to us. And this is certainly one. So being [00:52:00] able to, you know, kind of take a deep breath when something stings a little bit in the feedback zone and, and be reflective on, you know, is this an area where I, I could stand to improve?

I actually am thinking back to a, a very close friend that I've had for gosh, a long, long time now, cuz we met in college and um, I used to struggle. A lot and still due to some extent with reassurance seeking. And I, I have this very vivid memory of her telling me, you know, it's really driving me crazy.

You're asking too much. And it really stung because I really wanted her to sort of bolster me in that way. But it was so important for me to hear her and, and to hear her with the love that she intended it and to really reflect on sort of the, the way that I was. Entering into the relationship and what it was that I was asking of her.

And I think that there are those moments that are painful, but such growth, potential exists inside of them.

Adam Dorsay: right. And sometimes hearing about what we, [00:53:00] you and I would refer to as kind of shadow parts of ourselves, disavowed parts of ourselves that we would rather imagine don't exist. Um, Is really is really important feedback. I remember, uh, early in my career when I considered myself a relatively good public speaker, the very first time I saw myself on video and I actually saw objectively what other people saw.

And I was pretty, I almost had to pick myself off of the floor because there were so many. So many problems with my presentation and I wouldn't have seen them. And a friend can be like that. If they give accurate reflection, of course, accurate reflection is I think a hallmark of good friendship. And one of the times when accurate reflection actually comes in in a really poignant way is in another great movie, Goodwill hunting.

When the Ben Affleck character. Says our friendship has basically run its course, you need to leave. So to the Matt Damon character, you need to go live your best life as a mathematician. I don't want to [00:54:00] see you doing the kind of work that I do. I don't want us to clink glasses for the rest of your life because I know you and I also know that you're a genius and you need to go live your best life.

I don't know what would happen in Goodwill hunting too. If there was one, um, would, would their relationship continue in some other way or would it have run its course. But one of the things that it calls to mind is that we are all in this world, fellow travelers, and that's a, a concept from, uh, one of the great voices in psychology.

Irv Yalom were all fellow travelers with wounds and strengths and. Just trying to make it through this life as well as we possibly can. We all know that there's an expiration date for all of us. None of us knows when that is. There's a vulnerability that accompanies that existential truth. And it was so mindblowing that the Ben Affleck character was able to say to his [00:55:00] friend, your happiness matters more than us clinking glasses on Friday nights at the end of a hard work shift.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. so I, I'm just curious, you know, we're almost out of time, but for folks who may want to build their friendship circles out a bit more, you know, with the appreciation, uh, of how important it really is for wellbeing. What do you typically recommend? I mean, in adulthood we often, right.

We do family and we work and sometimes there's very little time and space to do. Other activities. And so what do you typically recommend for people who

are just feeling maxed out, but who also see the need to kind of build a, a greater, stronger support network friendship network?

Adam Dorsay: Absolutely. Well, given the options that are available today, uh, that weren't available to us just 20 years ago, you can just sit at home. Just chill on Netflix and just binge watch something. Uh, and [00:56:00] oftentimes when we're doing that, we're also on our device. We're also doing other things simultaneously and we actually don't rejuvenate during the weekends as much as we may think we do.

Uh, because we engage in the easy, sometimes the most rejuvenating activities are a little bit harder and they actually do lend themselves to friendship such as me driving an hour to hang out with my buddy. During the entire drive over. I'm just like damnit. I don't wanna drive all the way out here. And then I see Bob and he's driven his hour from, you know, the Northern part of the city.

And it's just like, oh, this is fantastic. And I drive home in the driveway test feeling inches taller and a little bit smarter, cuz Bob is wicked smart and he's so much fun to be with. And it was totally worth it. That incon I'm not suggesting that we should never just binge watch something on Netflix.

And, uh, but I am saying that overriding that can actually lead to greater rejuvenation and [00:57:00] could even lead us towards other. Places where we might make friendship. And it kind of dovetails nicely with one of my favorite hacks. And that is do what you love to do. Like if you're into hiking, maybe go look for a meetup hiking group.

You might not end up with a friend. But, and at least you're gonna get a good hike in, and that will have been rejuvenating. If you've got a dog go to the dog park. Uh, my dog has introduced me to so many people, some of whom have become friends, uh, on, on different levels. Go do stuff that you would want to do in a group setting if possible.

Uh, join a book club, uh, Do something that you'd want to do that would be actually a little Reju would be very rejuvenating actually, and fun. And get yourself out of your comfort zone of just kind of being in that, uh, that binge watching mode that is so attractive on our weekends [00:58:00] and go meet people and be willing to override the awkwardness.

If you meet somebody really cool. Say to them, Hey, you know, let. Do this again, let's go. Let's maybe instead of hiking with a group list, you and me go for hike and see if there's something there. There might.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. So it's, it's being willing to accept that there's some discomfort often at the front end, uh, you know, discomfort in Digging deep and finding the energy and doing something active where we might wanna just kind of sit on our couch. And then also some discomfort that comes with getting to know somebody, right.

That it takes time to get to know people and that the process of doing that, we kinda have to go through it. We can't go around. It can be uncomfortable.

Adam Dorsay: It's interesting too. Robert Sapolsky of Stanford wrote in his book, behave about people who are part of our tribe. And I would even, perhaps I, I, I would tend to think that people with whom were familiar even. Tend to elicit more of [00:59:00] our endogenous oxytocin, which is our feel good hormone, our, our cuddle, our connection hormone, and at the outset of a new relationship, there may be more fear in some cortisol, the stress hormone, uh, and other, other things saying kind of stranger danger, even though there's no stranger danger here, we're just getting to know each other, but it can feel slightly aversive.

And as the two of. Begin to sync up and begin to realize, oh my gosh, wow. There is some confluence here. Uh, more oxytocin, more connection over time can show up. And of course it won't happen every time sometimes you'll realize, oh my gosh, there was a hard stop. This person does not show up when they say they'll show up.

Uh, do a whole bunch of things that, uh, are not consistent with who I wanna become. Uh, and by the way, one of my other favorite axioms is that we become the average of the people of the five people with whom we spend the most time. Like, is this, is this person kind of [01:00:00] contributing to who I hope to become over time?

Uh, That's also a, a meaningful marker, but that familiarity component can only happen as we invest our most precious resource. Our time we can lose our health and get it back. We can lose our money and get it back, but we can't lose our time and get it back. So we need to be very conscientious about how we allocate our most precious resource, our time.

Yael Schonbrun: And what do you suggest is the most important thing in being a good friend?

Adam Dorsay: Hmm. You know, we all, we've all heard the, the Axiom of, you know, in order to get a good friend, be a good friend. And what does that mean?

Um, I believe it goes back to that integrity, caring and congeniality. It's it's showing up on time. It's being honest, being able to hold a secret.

Um, not judging, uh, not saying TMI. And, and, and, and shaming your friends when they sh when they share [01:01:00] perhaps a big share, um, it means showing that you truly care that you have empathy and that you are able to listen, that you have the capacity to really apply your care, um, remembering their birthdays, their important anniversaries, perhaps the death date of a parent.

Um, As Oprah Winfrey brilliance, Lee said, it's, you know, very easy to find someone who will ride in the limo. It's harder to find someone who will ride on the bus with you and you want to be able to be there during the good and the bad, celebrate big with your friends when they, when there's a celebration to be had, uh, and be willing to show up when there's something.

Quite the opposite of a celebration, but perhaps a, a tragedy or a sadness in their life. Um, and that congeniality being willing to, you know, send that kind of funny text or, and, uh, being willing to bring up that friendliness, uh, not everybody can be like Leslie, no on farts and rack who's [01:02:00] queen of congeniality, but we can all, you know, try to. Impart, uh, some positivity because that positivity is contagious and has a long half life.

Yael Schonbrun: Thank you, Adam. This was so lovely to have you on sharing your wisdom on friendship. And I'm so glad that you and I have met each other. And I hope that our friendship will grow too. Where can people go to find out more about you?

Adam Dorsay: , first of all, I am so delighted. It's mutual. Uh, you can find more about me on my podcast. Super psyched. , every week it comes out and I talk about all kinds of topics relating to psychology. Um, you can find me on, I did two TEDx talks, one on men in emotions.

And as you mentioned, one on adult friendship and, uh, my website is Dr. Adam dorsey.com.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm willing to all of that in our show notes. Thank you Adam so much for joining me.

Adam Dorsay: Ugh. It was a blast, Yael. I knew it would be.

Yael Schonbrun: hey psychologist off the clock [01:03:00] listeners. I'm going to guess that if you are listening to this episode, that you love to geek out about books in psychology.

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