

Season 2 Episode 6: Healthy Relationships Part 1
[intro music Sun Through Shade]

HANNAH: Imagine that it's your first day of class at a new school and you don't know anyone. You look around and see people clustered in groups, talking, laughing, arguing, and studying. You wonder where to sit.

ABBY: You find an empty desk near the window. In the desk next to you, someone else sits down. They are looking around and it seems like they are a little lost too. You make eye contact, and acknowledge each other with a brief nod.

HANNAH: Later at the cafeteria, you see the same person sitting alone at a table. You decide to sit down at the same table and introduce yourself...

ABBY: Relationships are a fundamental part of our lives. Whether it's friends from school, family, significant others, colleagues at work, or acquaintances on social media, our social support networks have a big impact on our health.

HANNAH: A metaanalysis by Holt-Lunstand and colleagues in 2010 published in Plos Medicine found a 50% increased likelihood of survival for participants with stronger social relationships. This finding was consistent across age, sex, and initial health status.

ABBY: For this two-part relationship health series, we spoke with Professor of Psychology and Chair of the Psychology Department at Oberlin College, Nancy Darling and Liza Henry, a social work and public health graduate student with extensive youth work experience, about relationship health and its impact on health and wellbeing.

HANNAH: Before we get started, though, here's a quick quiz. Can you name the other person in these dynamic duos from history and pop culture? We will reveal the answers to these questions at the end of the episode.

Sherlock and ____, Sherlock Holmes

Buzz and ____, Toy Story

Tina Fey and ____

Key and ____

Cleopatra and ____

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Nancy Darling: I am Nancy Darling. I'm a professor of psychology at Oberlin College. I do research on adolescence, mostly on adolescence relationships. So parents

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Nancy: romantic partners, best friends and related adults and I've studied them on all the continents except for Australia. And so I've done it in Europe and North America, South America, Africa, multiple countries and over several decades.

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Hannah: Wow, that's very neat. And how did you become interested in your work?

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Nancy: Is actually weird I when I was in graduate school, I was really interested in parents relationship with their kids.

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00:01:51.630 --> 00:02:05.070

Nancy: And I actually wanted to study infancy, or toddlers, but we were doing survey research and they can't do surveys, so I wound up setting adolescence and it was only later on that I came to really appreciate

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00:02:05.640 --> 00:02:11.490

Nancy: As well. I like that a lesson says people but appreciate it as a developmental phenomenon because it's such a

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00:02:11.910 --> 00:02:23.610

Nancy: pivotal time because they're entering they're going from their family to forming these new relationships, strong relationships, with peers and romantic partners and then they're transitioning into adulthood. So I now.

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00:02:24.240 --> 00:02:29.940

Nancy: Can't imagine studying anything but adolescence, but I got into it because adolescents could do surveys.

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00:02:34.230 --> 00:02:50.100

Abby: Why are healthy relationships and maybe healthy relationships, specifically with adolescents, something that we should be particularly concerned about in public health? And also, what are the potential consequences of ignoring this issue?

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00:02:50.820 --> 00:02:51.540

Nancy: Well, I think.

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00:02:52.950 --> 00:03:03.840

Nancy: I'm a student of Urie Bronfenbrenner, so ecological systems theory. So I find it difficult to think about people as individuals without thinking about them in a social context.

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00:03:04.260 --> 00:03:15.450

Nancy: So, it doesn't make sense to me to think of anybody and certainly not a teenager as them by themselves with that and thinking about their mental health because they're so embedded in a system.

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00:03:16.380 --> 00:03:23.820

Nancy: And they're embedded in their friendships and if you're thinking about mental health, you can think about those as different levels. So

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00:03:25.830 --> 00:03:36.360

Nancy: If I'm upset, depressed, all of those things where I need social support or the other side - we don't talk about it a lot, but being able to be really excited and share your joy with someone else

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00:03:36.750 --> 00:03:48.210

Nancy: is so incredibly important, and so from a positive side of romantic, romantic relationships of healthy relationships, but also as I need support part

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00:03:49.020 --> 00:03:55.080

Nancy: both of those things - being able to bounce ideas off of and your feelings off of

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00:03:56.070 --> 00:04:03.090

Nancy: other people - is just really important because they sort of give you a resonance. It's like, "Is this just me that's feeling like that?"

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00:04:03.480 --> 00:04:17.670

Nancy: Is it just is it everybody that feels like that? Am I all alone?" I think just getting a mirror to find out how to judge what you're feeling now - because if you don't compare it to somebody else, you don't know how unusual it is.

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00:04:18.300 --> 00:04:23.160

Nancy: The other really dumb part of mental health that you don't really think about with relationships is

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00:04:24.030 --> 00:04:29.820

Nancy: - and they've written, they wrote, about this for a long time - when you're by yourself, you're really depressed.

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00:04:30.150 --> 00:04:33.870

Nancy: You got nobody. All you do is you sit and think about everything. You think about what...

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00:04:34.230 --> 00:04:43.800

Nancy: And so when you're alone, one of the best things - you get really depressed - so one of the best things that relationships do is distract you from yourself.

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00:04:44.250 --> 00:04:47.490

Nancy Darling: So there used to be this whole theory that said, "oh,

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00:04:47.910 --> 00:04:57.120

Nancy: I, you know, friends are really good because you can think things through with them and bounce ideas off of them and you really gives you insight into yourself." No! That's not why friends are important.

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00:04:57.330 --> 00:05:00.870

Nancy: Friends are important because they get you to think about everything except for yourself.

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00:05:01.380 --> 00:05:12.690

Nancy: So they get you distracted from, "oh, you know, this awful thing about myself, or 'I'm so wonderful'." They actually just take you away from yourself. And that is in general is really good for your

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00:05:13.140 --> 00:05:28.980

Nancy: mental health. If you look at time diary sort of studies where they ping you, you know, 10 times a day and say, "what do you feel like?" If you're by yourself, you feel lousy. And if you are with somebody else, your mood goes way up. And so I think it's really important from that perspective.

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00:05:30.330 --> 00:05:34.500

Nancy: Um, it's also - so that's just me by myself and just bouncing things -

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00:05:35.070 --> 00:05:44.970

Nancy: but the other reason it's really important to understand mental health is because we're very affected by the people around us. If our friends need social support,

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00:05:45.750 --> 00:05:55.530

Nancy: then providing that social support can be good for us, but it can also be really stressful. So a lot of my stress, for example, comes from stress from

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00:05:55.800 --> 00:06:02.460

Nancy: my kids or from my husband or from my students. So that, from a mental health perspective, that network structure stress

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00:06:03.210 --> 00:06:14.130

Nancy: is really important to understand as well as network support and good things about networks. But so do, things like healthy habits. So if I'm saying, oh,

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00:06:15.030 --> 00:06:26.970

Nancy: If I'm thinking about mindfulness, if I'm thinking about co-rumination, if I've been thinking about drinking to get away from my troubles, if I'm thinking... and all of those things which have a profound influence on individual development;

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00:06:27.750 --> 00:06:33.570

Nancy: we know that you find friends like yourself, like depressed people find other depressed people,

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00:06:34.140 --> 00:06:39.930

Nancy: but also that you make yourself..., you become more like your friends. So if you're hanging out with happy people,

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00:06:40.140 --> 00:06:49.410

Nancy: you tend to get happier, if you're attending if you're hanging out with kids that are getting in trouble, you'll tend to get into trouble. And so there's an echo and sort of reverberation effect.

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00:06:49.800 --> 00:06:58.140

Nancy: Which again, it's another reason why I think it's difficult to think about an individual and mental health, instead of just a community context of health.

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00:07:06.180 --> 00:07:13.770

Hannah: Fascinating, and I know you mentioned just, think at the beginning, you mentioned Bronfenbrenner, I believe.

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00:07:14.970 --> 00:07:27.000

Hannah: Yes! Can you tell us a little bit more about how- like his theory and what that history of research, kind of, I guess, shapes in your own research?

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Nancy: Urie Bronfenbrenner, I think, is one of the great

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00:07:30.060 --> 00:07:48.930

Nancy: developmental psychologist, the last century. And I think he changed the way that we think about developmental psychology. So often developmental psychology in general is criticized for being very focused on - well, actually, his famous quote is, it's the study of children for the um...of

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00:07:50.100 --> 00:07:58.890

Nancy: strange children and strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible period of time. That was what the study was - what developmental psychology was in '72.

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00:08:00.120 --> 00:08:05.490

Nancy: And he really changed it! He says you can't think about the kid. And when you bring them into the lab,

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00:08:06.600 --> 00:08:20.250

Nancy: you're bringing them into a situation where they're in a strange place where they don't know people and you can't...and this idea of ecological validity is that the way they act in the lab is not the same way they act at home.

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00:08:21.270 --> 00:08:29.160

Nancy: If they're interacting with their parents or their best friend, are they, is that the same as the way they interact with a stranger or with an adult person?

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00:08:29.700 --> 00:08:42.990

Nancy: Is it the same as if, as if their parent comes and study them, and they are high school...they have never graduated from high school, they've never been in a college before and now they're in the strange lab. And you think about...

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00:08:44.460 --> 00:08:47.280

Nancy: And they're feeling really uncomfortable and they're feeling judged.

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00:08:48.210 --> 00:08:59.490

Nancy: And that's really different from someone who comes in who's got a PhD and they come in and it's like "oh, this is my place," you know. And so understanding the meaning that people bring to the situation,

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00:09:00.030 --> 00:09:06.690

Nancy: I think, and the importance of understanding cultural context of age, of ethnicity, diversity of social class.

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00:09:07.170 --> 00:09:20.160

Nancy: One of the exercises I do in my classes is we look at the method sections of studies in neuroscience in so- social psychology and cognitive psychology and in developmental psychology.

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00:09:20.520 --> 00:09:30.990

Nancy: So, if you're a neuroscientist, they don't even tell you if it's a man or a woman, but they do tell you if they're left or right handed. If you look at them... they don't tell you what country they're from!

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00:09:31.620 --> 00:09:39.990

Nancy: Country they're from, as if everyone's generic! My um...in social psychology...you'd think...they don't report the country oftentimes.

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00:09:40.320 --> 00:09:47.610

Nancy: They do report the gender. They tell you how much they pay them, but they don't tell you their social class or they often don't tell you their ethnicity.

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00:09:48.510 --> 00:09:57.210

Nancy: If you look at a developmental psychology paper, they tell you they're...they don't tell you how old they are... they say they're college students. Well, are they 45 or are they 17? It doesn't say!

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00:09:57.540 --> 00:10:04.500

Nancy: That seems important to me, I'm a developmentalist. But if you look at developmental psychology papers, they tell you

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00:10:04.950 --> 00:10:10.410

Nancy: the age, the ethnicity, the social class, whether or not the parents are married or not.

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00:10:11.040 --> 00:10:20.460

Nancy: They tell you the country that they're in. They tell you all of those things. And the reason I do is, because Bronfenbrenner and other people said that social context matters.

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00:10:20.940 --> 00:10:29.370

Nancy: It matters what your ethnicity is. It matters what your cultural beliefs are. It matters what the norms are. It matters how you're being treated and where you are.

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00:10:30.030 --> 00:10:39.660

Nancy: And that has fundamentally changed the way that developmental psychology is, and I think it's why it's very different than other disciplines within...um...

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00:10:40.440 --> 00:10:50.160

Nancy: psychology. It's shaped my work. That's one of the reasons I work in Europe, and the Philippines and then I forget, Asia...I always forget Asia.

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00:10:51.210 --> 00:10:53.010

Nancy: When I do my research, but

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00:10:54.120 --> 00:11:05.520

Nancy: one of the things, and this is an example of why I think Bronfenbrenner's approach is so important. We were studying one of the big things I've studied for the last 20 years... is why kids lie to their parents.

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00:11:06.990 --> 00:11:13.500

Nancy: They, lie to their parents everywhere. It's universal, all the time. Every...almost every kid we've ever talked to says they lie to their parents.

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00:11:13.770 --> 00:11:31.140

Nancy: The ones that said they didn't. I swear to god they're lying to us. But they...I really think almost all kids lie. They differ in how much lie. And we were studying that... in we studied it in Miami, Florida, and in the Philippines, which is a former Spanish colony.

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00:11:32.340 --> 00:11:42.870

Nancy: And then in Santiago, Chile, right. So we have three countries that have three three countries or cities, actually, which has strong, strong

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00:11:43.890 --> 00:11:44.550

Hispanic

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00:11:45.840 --> 00:11:46.590

Influences

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00:11:48.300 --> 00:11:56.370

Nancy: And we were comparing...we were we were doing this and we were learning about lying and we had a hypothesis, which was that

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00:11:57.810 --> 00:12:00.900

Nancy: kids would lie to their parents to keep out...to keep from getting into trouble.

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00:12:01.740 --> 00:12:09.960

Nancy: And that in the Philippines, where there was this very strong norm of respect for your parents -there was a really strong norm of

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00:12:10.260 --> 00:12:18.510

Nancy: "you need to be respectful of your parents" -and that conflict disagreeing with your parents was very disrespectful. We said "they're going to have the lowest level of conflict."

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00:12:20.130 --> 00:12:33.840

Nancy: And that Chile would have would be...we thought the kids, the kids in the United States would be the worst because we always think that, and that Chile would be somewhere in-between. And we were looking at this idea of legitimacy of authority, which is this idea of

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00:12:35.160 --> 00:12:43.110

Nancy: "why do you do what your parents say?" It's because they're your parents, honestly. That is the reason you could come up with... but it's really they're, they're parents....

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00:12:43.770 --> 00:12:52.920

Nancy: "I'm the mom, and I said so, and you're going to obey me because I'm your mom." That's...and it's legitimate. So we were studying that. It turned out

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00:12:53.970 --> 00:13:00.150

Nancy: that we got that relationship we thought, which was the highest legitimacy in the Philippines,

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00:13:00.990 --> 00:13:06.270

Nancy: and the least lying in the Philippines, just like we thought; but they had the highest level of conflict.

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00:13:06.840 --> 00:13:13.560

Nancy: Now, it was considered really disrespectful to argue with your parents, but they had the highest level of conflict.

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00:13:14.310 --> 00:13:28.170

Nancy: Well, that's why you want to study people in different contexts, because we'd forgotten really two things. One is you obey your parents and you tell them the truth. If you think they have a right to set rules. That's the legitimacy of authority.

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00:13:29.430 --> 00:13:31.890

Nancy: And you feel like you're obliged to obey.

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00:13:33.600 --> 00:13:44.130

Nancy: Why, because if I... if I disagree with my parents and I feel like I have to obey, like they did in the Philippines, very high, they have three choices: I can shut up and be miserable,

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00:13:45.150 --> 00:14:00.120

Nancy: I can lie to my parents, or I can argue with my parents and hope they'll change their mind. Well, if you think they're legitimate you don't lie. So what you do is you argue, so the Philippines had this very high argument. In Chile,

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00:14:01.320 --> 00:14:08.460

Nancy: um...they disagreed with their parents and they...but they thought their parents...and they...but they thought that they didn't have to obey. So they just lied like rugs.

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00:14:09.090 --> 00:14:21.090

Nancy: So that I mean... they would just like... and we...and that idea... and the United States was somewhere in between... it turned out, identical things were happening in all three countries. It was a universal phenomenon.

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00:14:22.020 --> 00:14:33.900

Nancy: But, we would not have known about this idea of obligation to obey - that was sort of a background thing in literature that no one paid attention to - it turns out that's the guts of lying. It's:

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00:14:34.410 --> 00:14:40.590

Nancy: "I think you have a right to set rule, and it's my job to obey, and therefore I'm going to argue with you. Otherwise, I'll lie."

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00:14:40.830 --> 00:14:47.070

Nancy: We would never have known that if we hadn't studied kids in the Philippines, because it was so important there.

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00:14:47.400 --> 00:14:53.670

Nancy: And that I think is what Bronfenbrenner really brought out is this idea that in developmental psychology, he always said

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00:14:54.180 --> 00:15:02.640

Nancy: anything important, you can't manipulate: you can't assign social class, you can't assign ethnicity, you can assign gender.

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00:15:03.600 --> 00:15:19.530

Nancy: So what you need to do is take care, take... attend to natural experiments, including culture. And by looking at culture, you can find universals, because you see the differences and that gives insight into the process. And that's really... has fundamentally influenced by work.

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00:15:21.660 --> 00:15:22.590

Abby: Thank you for that.

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00:15:23.670 --> 00:15:28.950

Abby: That really helps to put sort of the social, ecological theory into... into context.

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00:15:33.240 --> 00:15:37.830

Abby: Could you share a specific example of how education about

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00:15:37.860 --> 00:15:46.440

Abby: Healthy relationships and can improve the health and well being of young people in the communities that you've worked with throughout your career.

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00:15:47.280 --> 00:15:56.790

Nancy: Well, one of the things this is in some ways as a personal example I could talk, and I will talk about studies where they they really tried to improve relationships but

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00:15:57.570 --> 00:16:09.870

Nancy: You can talk about it in terms of parents, you could talk about it in terms of peer relationships or you can talk about it and romantic relationships. So if you think about, for example, my work on monitoring and lying

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00:16:11.880 --> 00:16:23.790

Nancy: Came out of in many ways work by Jerry Patterson and Tom Dishion at the Oregon social learning lab and they started with this idea that you can't parent well

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00:16:24.450 --> 00:16:40.230

Nancy: And you can't have a good relationship with your parents, unless you they trust each other. Right. So why that's important. And also they know what's going on. And so one of the things they they they really worked at is they studied arm.

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00:16:41.520 --> 00:16:57.210

Nancy: They studied parents who were got into these coercive things have kids, they basically were training their kids to be bad because they would only pay attention to the kids not nobody transcript kids to be bad on purpose. But if you only pay attention to your kids when they're misbehaving.

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00:16:58.560 --> 00:17:06.270

Nancy: And when they're good you ignore them. You got the right, kid. Especially one who's kind of rebellious and wants attention that

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00:17:06.780 --> 00:17:13.950

Nancy: That they get into these course of things where the kids would start being as obnoxious as possible because if I want the table set

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00:17:14.340 --> 00:17:19.650

Nancy: And my kids, giving me a 10 minute argument about it, it's easier for me to set the table.

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00:17:20.250 --> 00:17:29.730

Nancy: And so they were the kids. These are toddlers and preschoolers were training their parents to not withdraw-to not ask them to do stuff.

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00:17:30.120 --> 00:17:41.670

Nancy: And that trained the kids to be as obnoxious as possible and that when you. They want to ask you to do what you wanted, and you didn't want and they didn't want to do it to be really obnoxious.

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00:17:42.090 --> 00:17:56.700

Nancy: So that they give up. And so the kids left school left home and they went to school and then they pulled the same thing with the teachers. And if you're in kindergarten and you're in trouble. The teacher. No one of the other kids want to play with you so they become socially isolated.

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00:17:58.260 --> 00:18:03.330

Nancy: Because none of the good kids will play with them and the teacher, they're in trouble with the teacher.

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00:18:03.870 --> 00:18:20.070

Nancy: And they wind up only playing with the kids who will play with them, which are the other misbehaving kids who train each other to do this more and more often. It's a reinforcing cycle really wonderful work and what they did, as an intervention is they didn't work with the kids.

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00:18:21.090 --> 00:18:22.770

Nancy: They trained the parents.

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00:18:23.820 --> 00:18:32.220

Nancy: They did an intervention, where they train the parents to we reward to pay attention and care when they're doing the right thing. Catch him being good, they always talk about

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00:18:32.610 --> 00:18:43.650

Nancy: And that improve their relationship with their kids. The kids then learned, because if if you're always of noxious, not only do you not get trained to do you don't

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00:18:44.850 --> 00:18:54.600

Nancy: You don't get trained to do to develop good social skills which can carry over parents are really foundational and forming good peer relationship skills.

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00:18:54.930 --> 00:19:08.070

Nancy: And so they weren't learning that because they were always arguing with their parents. And so by training the parents to respond appropriately to good behavior, instead of ignoring it or making fun of the kid when they would be good.

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00:19:09.240 --> 00:19:14.010

Nancy: Suddenly, these kids are. Oh, I can be good. Give me attention for being good. I can be good.

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00:19:14.250 --> 00:19:27.330

Nancy: And that carried over into the school relationship. And they also then got much better peer relationships. So that was a really nice example of YOU'RE TRYING TO AFFECT SCHOOL AND kids and and peer relationships and what you do is you retrain the parents.

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00:19:28.500 --> 00:19:32.790

Nancy: And that was, I think, a really nice example of

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00:19:34.350 --> 00:19:42.330

Nancy: That kind of thing. Um, you can also see it. And I think this is one of the hard things so i would i was using this example this afternoon.

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00:19:43.110 --> 00:19:55.080

Nancy: And it's a personal example, but it's the work actually comes out of Jeff Parker's research, my son just happened to be in a school where Jeff Parker was doing research. So he was doing an intervention to stop bullying.

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00:19:56.970 --> 00:20:07.530

Nancy: And what he did was they have this big thing. And it's a middle school and they were teaching about bullying and what you should do and intervening and all that good stuff.

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00:20:08.520 --> 00:20:16.440

Nancy: It was a great program. But my son and his best friend, Bo, were riding home with me and then the car.

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00:20:17.130 --> 00:20:30.240

Nancy: And Bo started telling me about how he'd been on the bus and they've gone to the pool and this other kid had come over and started making fun of them and turn and putting makeup on them and doing all the stuff clear bullying behavior.

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00:20:31.530 --> 00:20:35.280

Nancy: And I stopped them and I said he was really upset and I stopped them, I said.

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00:20:37.560 --> 00:20:53.370

Nancy: Didn't you guys just do bullying behavior. And he said, Yeah. I said, Well, what are you supposed to do, he says, Well, I'm supposed to tell a teacher. So I said, I said, why don't you do that because oh I never realized I was being bullied.

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00:20:55.680 --> 00:21:10.950

Nancy: Because, and I think this is really important. We were taught. This is the context-we're talking about it and we were developing a social media kind of campaign this afternoon for the Journal of Adolescence and we were talking about cyberbullying and this is the same thing-

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00:21:12.000 --> 00:21:20.490

Nancy: He was thinking bullying. Oh, I'm getting beaten up I'm getting threatened someone's calling me names. That's what bullying is

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00:21:21.030 --> 00:21:33.510

Nancy: being harassed being made uncomfortable being all of the things that were happening to him. He didn't label it as as bullying and I think that can be really important to is just oh...

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00:21:33.870 --> 00:21:45.360

Nancy: "I'm being sexually assaulted," "I'm being teased," "I'm being gaslighted..." having words for those things and being able to label them yourself I think is a really

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00:21:46.530 --> 00:21:59.460

Nancy: empowering thing of, "it's not just me." That's what... "it's not just me. I feel bad. I'm in a relationship and this is what it's supposed to be like." It's like, "Oh, I feel this way because this is a crappy way to be treated."

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00:22:00.870 --> 00:22:11.220

Nancy: And everyone knows that it's a crappy way to be treated. And I think part of the interventions that you can have is not just how to stop it. But even just how to recognize it.

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00:22:12.870 --> 00:22:21.810

Nancy: And they've done. They've done relationship training stuff in Montreal looking at that, when you...one of those things he says, we used to first start a romantic relationship.

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00:22:22.410 --> 00:22:38.010

Nancy: And you know you're 14 years old and stuff and you start dating or you start going out with people and you say well how's the supposed to be. Well, if you have no way to judge what a romantic relationships is supposed to be. You've got friends.

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00:22:39.180 --> 00:22:44.790

Nancy: But all you've learned what romantic relationships supposed to be. It's going to be online pornography.

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00:22:45.990 --> 00:22:54.540

Nancy: Or romance novels, you don't have a lot of context to put in what's ok and not okay. And so I think one of the things that

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00:22:55.260 --> 00:23:04.110

Nancy: That some of this intervention has done is not interfere with bad relationships, but just describe what you deserve. What's a good relationship.

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00:23:04.560 --> 00:23:20.880

Nancy: So you say, oh, that's what I'm looking for. And I think those can be really important interventions. Also, one of the things I know that Ed Smith at Penn State. Did he was doing a lot of work with Planned Parenthood and looking at sexual health. He's, he's a public health worker.

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00:23:22.470 --> 00:23:25.080

Nancy: He has a PhD in in public health.

153

00:23:27.030 --> 00:23:31.650

Nancy: Is they set up a sexual health clinics across from the high school

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00:23:32.730 --> 00:23:38.610

Nancy: The kids wanted that stuff to condoms are always great. But good easy to sell in high school, but

155

00:23:39.210 --> 00:23:53.250

Nancy: What the kids actually wanted is they wanted to talk about relationship qualities. They wanted to know, how do I get a girlfriend. How do I keep this person that I care about how do I make them happy. How do I make myself happy.

156

00:23:53.670 --> 00:23:56.190

Nancy: How do I talk to them about things that are important.

157

00:23:57.180 --> 00:24:09.480

Nancy: I think we spend so much time often looking at their sexual health and their, their substance use and so we forget that. I mean, actually this was a quote from one of our research studies.

158

00:24:10.020 --> 00:24:20.010

Nancy: We were saying we were taught, we started talking about lying. We started studying lying because we were studying romantic relationships and kids lie about the romantic relationships to their parents, that's how we started.

159

00:24:20.760 --> 00:24:32.340

Nancy: But we said, well, "what's going you know what's going on when you talk to your parents?" He goes, "I'm worried about holding her hand, and they're worried about me getting her pregnant."

160

00:24:33.390 --> 00:24:48.300

Nancy: You know, and so they're really different places. So I think we need to just pay attention to what we were nervous about because those kids are still nervous about those things except they've got these standards from pornography, that their looking at.

163

00:24:59.040 --> 00:25:14.580

Hannah: That's a really good lead into this next question about like barriers to health relationship and education, you're talking about. Sometimes we don't really meet people where they're at and sometimes

164

00:25:16.530 --> 00:25:24.390

Hannah: Focusing on the the wrong part of the equation; the more serious or

165

00:25:25.890 --> 00:25:38.400

Hannah: traumatic experiences might overshadow the everyday experiences that a lot of teens have. So can you talk a little bit more about other barriers that you've come up against.

166

00:25:40.410 --> 00:25:54.300

Nancy: This sounds... when we first started studying romantic relationships we had were told explicitly-we were funded by the National Institute of Health- we had to take the words "romantic relationship" out of the grant title.

167

00:25:55.380 --> 00:26:05.220

Nancy: And the reason we had to study the romance. Take that out is because Congress, in their wisdom, had said that "studying puppy love was a waste of taxpayer money."

168

00:26:06.750 --> 00:26:09.330

Nancy: So at the time-and this was, I mean,

169

00:26:10.500 --> 00:26:21.600

Nancy: ...people would. You could study. It's really interesting. They would only study sex because it was a health problem and intercourse specifically intercourse, and STIs is where the only thing that they could study

170

00:26:22.080 --> 00:26:32.640

Nancy: Now, as far as I know, most people's sexual intercourse in teen in adolescence do in fact take place within romantic relationships. So it seems logical that you would stand in them in that contact

171

00:26:33.300 --> 00:26:49.020

Nancy: But they saw that there were used to be an award given out for, it was called the Golden Fleece award for the biggest waste of taxpayer money, Candice Feiring about that for studying romantic relationships because they said puppy love was stupid.

172

00:26:50.130 --> 00:27:03.870

Nancy: And so our grant was about parents, peer,s and romantic relationships, but we'd had a tech romantic relationships out and just put the word relationships and so wouldn't be flagged as a waste of taxpayer pair money.

173

00:27:04.410 --> 00:27:12.540

Nancy: So that is a barrier is not taking it seriously, is that people say, um, you know, relationships, come and go so fast.

174

00:27:12.930 --> 00:27:20.640

Nancy: That they're not really work that well first of all it's actually interesting. You don't know how foundational they're going to be you're learning to be in romantic relationships.

175

00:27:21.150 --> 00:27:25.800

Nancy: People have really good or bad relationships and they, the biggest predictor of

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00:27:26.400 --> 00:27:33.600

Nancy: Depression suicidality and mood changes that are very people say mood changes really fast in adolescence, which it does

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00:27:33.990 --> 00:27:42.750

Nancy: It's not because of hormones. It's because two things. One is, you're in romantic relationships and they you, they tend to be emotionally very volatile.

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00:27:43.470 --> 00:27:50.400

Nancy: And that's one of the major causes of emotional volatility. The other actually is. I just love this fact is it's because

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00:27:50.910 --> 00:28:03.390

Nancy: You go if you asked me if any of us went from math to gym to science class to the cafeteria. We change our moods to and that's what we do to teenagers.

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00:28:04.170 --> 00:28:14.640

Nancy: So, but one barrier is really well. And the other thing I was going to say is, in some relationships last a long time. I am, this is really embarrassing, but this is true. I am married to my first date.

181

00:28:15.450 --> 00:28:21.240

Nancy: I met I started getting them my first week in high school. We are still married. It's been a long time so

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00:28:21.750 --> 00:28:32.430

Nancy: So there's a lot of reasons to study romantic relationship and particularly sexual relationships. I think in adolescence, but people don't take him seriously. And I think that is a real barrier.

183

00:28:32.940 --> 00:28:44.880

Nancy: A second thing that's a barrier is people trivialize the emotions of teenagers, because they say oh there. It's just a face or just teenagers and they don't take it seriously wallets nine years old, your life.

184

00:28:45.660 --> 00:28:48.510

Nancy: The second day of your life. It's nine years to a long time.

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00:28:49.080 --> 00:28:58.080

Nancy: Um, and it doesn't matter if it's to an adult. That may seem trivial. It's really important at that time. And it's just as important to them as things are in your role as

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00:28:58.380 --> 00:29:08.340

Nancy: You know, other things are to you. And I think that that's another barriers that we we don't take teenagers emotion seriously because we trivialize them or we say

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00:29:08.640 --> 00:29:17.160

Nancy: Oh, they're, you know, they're all going to be suicidal or they're all going to be this or they're all going to be that we really stereotype and stigmatize

188

00:29:17.910 --> 00:29:27.030

Nancy: Adolescence for normal emotions in a way that we don't younger kids and we don't older kids. I mean 20 something 30 something

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00:29:27.690 --> 00:29:38.430

Nancy: And I think we we pathologists them as if there's something wrong with them instead of treating them as a. These are normal healthy people having normal healthy relationships. So I think that's a barrier.

190

00:29:39.420 --> 00:29:48.330

Nancy: But because we focus on a developmental risk. Now this is actually interesting because I think because for an adult having a healthy

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00:29:48.870 --> 00:30:00.390

Nancy: romantic relationship is seen as being core to your happiness and drinking the seen as normal. A lot of leisure activities for adults are considered a pathology and adolescence.

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00:30:01.620 --> 00:30:14.790

Nancy: So we study, we talk about romantic relationships in the context of pathology and problems and sexual exploitation. Now, it's not like those things don't happen and they're not important.

193

00:30:15.240 --> 00:30:28.470

Nancy: But we all, I think if we fostered positive relationships and say this is the good stuff here looking for this is how to build a good relationship. And if you're not getting that in your relationship, you should leave and find someone who treats you better

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00:30:29.490 --> 00:30:33.330

Nancy: That, to me, seems really important, but instead we talk about

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00:30:34.230 --> 00:30:46.290

Nancy: Consent instead of saying, whoa consent is important, but it's like, well, did you want to be there in the first place, you know, is this the person that's the relationship you want is this going to help you go to your toward your goals.

196

00:30:46.650 --> 00:31:03.780

Nancy: Or are there other things you want this as part of your relationship. But a big part of teens relationships, especially in early high school and in fact all through high school is hanging out, playing games going to the movies, doing things bowling. I mean, stupid things that are fun.

197

00:31:05.940 --> 00:31:25.560

Nancy: We don't teach people we don't teach kids how to foster a positive relationship either with their mind to partners to or with their other friends, and this is a friend of mine, Linda Caldwell, who I did a lot of work with she studies of all things.

198

00:31:27.120 --> 00:31:34.170

Nancy: She studies leisure. She's in leisure studies. That sounds like an awesome thing to be in. But she's in leisure studies and she said is boredom.

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00:31:35.040 --> 00:31:48.750

Nancy: And I'm which is a big topic right now with covered 19 but it's it but knowing how to fill your time and feel good during your time is actually a real skill.

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00:31:49.230 --> 00:31:55.260

Nancy: And if you don't have that skill you do spend a lot of time waste playing through the internet, you know, as we all do.

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00:31:56.040 --> 00:32:08.220

Nancy: But it was. It's actually interesting. I thought she gave wonderful insight into this idea of boredom prone. So, so what, like when I was this is true. I'm, I'm also when I was when I was a kid.

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00:32:09.240 --> 00:32:15.960

Nancy: We had lots of times that we were bored because we came home from school and our parents or our parents were busy doing stuff and they said

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00:32:16.140 --> 00:32:31.800

Nancy: go outside and play or watch TV or do whatever. Right. So we had to figure out things do. Now, over time, we found things like we liked watching this TV show we liked reading, we developed stupid hobbies, we learned to play kickball stuff like that but we

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00:32:32.850 --> 00:32:50.550

Nancy: Had a lot of leisure time that we had to develop the skill of how to use so we weren't board all the time. And trust me, when, at least for my neighborhood. If you said I'm bored. Your parents said I got a room that you can clean. I bought these chores you could do. So you were really motivated

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00:32:51.570 --> 00:32:58.500

Nancy: Now if you think about that in a different context this cohort of kids on the last several cohorts of kids.

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00:32:59.670 --> 00:33:10.770

Nancy: There in there in daycare where their time is actually very structured. They've got circle time they've got snack time. So they actually are always have someone to structure their time for them.

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00:33:11.190 --> 00:33:21.030

Nancy: And then they're going to school where their time is structured and then they come home and they're an after school care because their parents are working. So they also have their time structured for them.

208

00:33:21.510 --> 00:33:29.400

Nancy: And they've had their time structure for them till they're 13 and now they come home from school and they got nothing to do, because they don't have after school programs anymore.

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00:33:30.210 --> 00:33:42.090

Nancy: So they actually don't have a lot of experience figuring out what they like to do on their own and learning to structure that time, which means when

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00:33:42.870 --> 00:33:51.270

Nancy: you're really lucky if you have a friend because some kids are so incredibly good at finding, "Oh, let's do this," or "let's do this" or "these are fun things to do."

211

00:33:51.930 --> 00:34:00.540

Nancy: But if you don't have a friend like that and means actually you don't have the skills to fill your leisure time so you tend to fall back on easy high

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00:34:01.080 --> 00:34:04.890

Nancy: Easy fast things I can click on this, I can do this. I can you know

213

00:34:05.610 --> 00:34:14.280

Nancy: But that skill. I mean, that filling your leisure with enjoyable activities and finding things to do with friends that you both like

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00:34:14.550 --> 00:34:24.960

Nancy: And then also resolving conflicts because there's always a lot of conflict, all that sort of informal place stuff that Piaget talks about as you learn with unstructured time

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00:34:25.260 --> 00:34:28.650

Nancy: Brofenbrenner talks about that you learn with unstructured time kids have not had a lot of

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00:34:29.100 --> 00:34:42.120

Nancy: Unstructured time in childhood to learn that. And suddenly, their dump their and adolescence when they've got between 2:30 in the afternoon and 6:00 to get in trouble, which is the most likely time you're going to have sex or get involved in delinquency.

217

00:34:42.720 --> 00:34:45.540

Nancy: It's not at night. It's between 2:30 in the afternoon six o'clock.

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00:34:46.770 --> 00:34:52.920

Nancy: And part of it is the skill. So I think teaching kids how those kind of skills.

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00:34:53.550 --> 00:35:01.980

Nancy: To develop hobbies, to learn how to play Dungeons and Dragons to learn how to have good conversations that are fun and everyone's having a good time.

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00:35:02.730 --> 00:35:12.570

Nancy: Those are skills. And I think there are real barriers to teaching that kind of skill we say, Oh, let's give them something to do. It's like they'll they don't need that they need actually

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00:35:12.810 --> 00:35:18.630

Nancy: To learn how to structure their time. They need to be leaders they need to learn how to organize

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00:35:18.900 --> 00:35:25.860

Nancy: And then learn how to make themselves what they like and what they don't like if you don't know what you like and what you don't like.

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00:35:26.160 --> 00:35:35.880

Nancy: And learn how to structure your world so more things you like happen you're gonna have problems with any kind of relationship because you don't know what's good, you just go along with what happens.

224

00:35:40.500 --> 00:35:55.290

Abby: That leads really well into our next question for you as well. I'm, I'm curious to know you talked about um pathologizing healthy relationships during adolescence as sort of a barrier. I'm wondering if we were to,

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00:35:57.810 --> 00:36:06.630

Abby: instead of pathologizing healthy relationships, if we were to focus more on education around that area. What are some key skills that

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00:36:07.590 --> 00:36:15.780

Abby: That we would want all adolescents to build. I know you mentioned knowing what to do with your leisure time and resolving conflict. What are some other things that would help adolescence, as they as they go into their adult lives?

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00:36:19.890 --> 00:36:27.660

Nancy: I think a couple of... this is funny. I haven't really thought about that... a couple things that are really hard for adolescents are entering groups. So sometimes you think

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00:36:28.050 --> 00:36:35.910

Nancy: "Oh, I'm moving into this. I'm like, there's a group of people over there and I want to join them. Well, how do I do that?" That's actually hard, that's a skill.

231

00:36:36.930 --> 00:36:50.340

Nancy: How to make someone else feel welcome. Nobody is more popular than the person who turns to you and said, "Oh, hi. Why don't you come over." Learning how to introduce people and support them.

232

00:36:51.000 --> 00:37:02.520

Nancy: Um, look, this sounds... This is weird. One of...another real hard thing for kids to learn how to do is to be successful. So how do you get 100 on a test and not have everyone hate you.

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00:37:03.150 --> 00:37:08.010

Nancy: So, I mean, you always talk about, oh, I'm going to be embarrassed because I failed this test, but people who get

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00:37:09.000 --> 00:37:20.460

Nancy: A's also get, you know, you get, they get just a lot too. Well, it's really hard to be to be successful gracefully without feeling... without

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00:37:21.090 --> 00:37:27.990

Nancy: Bragging so you can say, "oh, I feel really good. I did this thing. And I'm not. It's not that I think I'm wonderful, but this is something that I'm also proud of."

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00:37:28.290 --> 00:37:36.810

Nancy: And so being successful with grace I think is interesting that you could have discussions about that because that is really important is...

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00:37:37.020 --> 00:37:45.240

Nancy: you want because otherwise you said, "I'm not going to tell anybody that I'm doing well. I'm going to hide my success," which has all sorts of implications, especially

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00:37:45.540 --> 00:37:57.720

Nancy: You have if you have those kinds of things. And there's a really nice work looking at ethnic differences and who's cool and who's not cool. But that's, but that path, but that stigmatizing of

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00:37:58.200 --> 00:38:10.230

Nancy: real success is true in all groups, but looking at that, I think, how do you, how do you succeed gracefully without making it so you succeed and you make other people feel good, too.

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00:38:10.770 --> 00:38:23.430

Nancy: I think those are things that are really good. I think teaching people how to apologize is that a ridiculously undervalued skill because all of us hurt other people's feelings and being able to

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00:38:25.320 --> 00:38:33.960

Nancy: expose yourself enough to say, "I did. I'm really sorry," and not just I'm sorry I hurt your feelings, because that doesn't say you did anything wrong.

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00:38:34.440 --> 00:38:46.290

Nancy: But but saying "I'm, I'm, I hear what you're saying to me, and I'm listening too," but I think learning how to apologize is really important for relationship maintenance.

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00:38:47.040 --> 00:38:59.370

Nancy: On in all types of relationships to your parents to your peers and to your, to your romantic partners. I think all of those things because we all screw up sometimes. So I think that's a really good skill.

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00:39:00.450 --> 00:39:12.570

Nancy: Also, just how to I talked about relationship information. But how do you maintain it. So, for example, what are sounds really dumb. But how many people get their feelings hurt because they

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00:39:12.930 --> 00:39:23.490

Nancy: They text someone and one person says, "oh, I don't need to respond to that text," and the other person says, "oh, I do." So you can't tell if you're being ghosted or not.

246

00:39:24.300 --> 00:39:33.120

Nancy: Those kind of things. Sometimes you are being posted and sometimes you and your best friend just have different ideas about when you need to put a THUMBS UP IN THE THING I mean there's just

247

00:39:33.450 --> 00:39:40.260

Nancy: These really what kind of what are, what is appropriate and not appropriate to do in social media.

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00:39:40.770 --> 00:39:49.770

Nancy: All the different forms of social media from, you know, Tik Tok to Facebook, people don't use anymore, but... but on

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00:39:50.760 --> 00:40:01.290

Nancy: Twitter and Instagram and all that and what's okay to share and not share that idea of maintaining your privacy, but also maintaining your friends privacy.

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00:40:01.770 --> 00:40:09.480

Nancy: Is actually a really important skill, because people get their feelings like I told you that, but I didn't say you could share it on

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00:40:09.990 --> 00:40:22.950

Nancy: Instagram. I didn't say you could tweet about it. I didn't say, you know, I didn't tell it, say, Oh, I got a mass Tweet, tweet or I sent you. I sent you this picture and I didn't send the world this picture and I think that idea of both...

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00:40:23.970 --> 00:40:37.590

Nancy: We talk a lot about protecting our own privacy, which of course we need to do, but intimacy is built on sharing private information and there's this whole... I mean part of our research when we talked about lying is

253

00:40:38.760 --> 00:40:43.800

Nancy: "I tell you something. And I'm trusting you to hold it in confidence.

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00:40:44.640 --> 00:40:52.200

Nancy: And because it's my information I've given it to you. And I didn't say you could give it to the world." And I think those types of skills about

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00:40:52.800 --> 00:41:02.340

Nancy: What is appropriate relationship maintenance in terms of doing and how many people's friendships have ended because they've done something stupid on social media.

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00:41:04.500 --> 00:41:15.960

Nancy: So I think those kind of things are are something that I'd never seen a class and but I think those will make great discussions around trust. How do you build and maintain trust and that's all about trust.

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00:41:19.170 --> 00:41:24.120

Abby: Thank you for that. I think that'll give our listeners a lot to think about. I know it gives me a lot to think about.

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00:41:25.710 --> 00:41:28.260

Abby: Our final question for you today is

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00:41:29.430 --> 00:41:38.280

Abby: How can How can folks, especially our listeners become involved in or support work in advancing healthy relationship education within their own communities.

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00:41:40.350 --> 00:41:56.220

Nancy: There's a lot of different organizations that do that, actually, some groups that do really good work with this is and are really open to this are the most traditional. Churches actually do a lot of work, a lot of youth groups do really, really good work, talking about

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00:41:57.240 --> 00:42:03.810

Nancy: Building relationships and trust and openness, because they tend to foster the positive parts of things. And I think that

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00:42:05.040 --> 00:42:12.840

Nancy: They may not know how to do it. And certainly some of the people that run that you've been running a youth group voluntary and you run a youth group is actually a really

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00:42:13.470 --> 00:42:26.130

Nancy: powerful way to get involved in a lot of kids lives because there are so... can be really core kind of thing. So I think the other another group that is actually really open to this and does work is the Girl Scouts.

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00:42:27.690 --> 00:42:37.650

Nancy: Um, and some, you know, so a lot of times those are there more active in elementary school but elementary school is a wonderful time to learn how to build friendships and fishing like

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00:42:38.010 --> 00:42:45.930

Nancy: This in sixth grade is a big time for Girl Scouts and they have some fantastic programs actually on relationship skills building

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00:42:46.260 --> 00:42:54.600

Nancy: No idea what the Boy Scouts are doing, but I know that the Girl Scouts are doing some really good stuff. So churches and Girl Scouts are actually really good. Big Brothers Big Sisters are always

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00:42:55.410 --> 00:43:02.850

Nancy: A good organization, although those tend to be more one on one. Another group of people that tend to

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00:43:04.320 --> 00:43:17.130

Nancy: Do a lot of this work is actually either health education or gym education in middle schools and high schools. A lot of times they have units and then they, you know, the first thing you think about the sex-ed stuff. But a lot of times

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00:43:17.790 --> 00:43:27.660

Nancy: On you. The people who are trained in that are actually your home ec teachers have often really good training and family life sciences and they actually run those programs. And sometimes the gym teachers.

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00:43:27.990 --> 00:43:35.550

Nancy: And a lot of times they want to have a discussion. But if you're a teacher and you've got 24 people having a couple people in that organization to help

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00:43:36.150 --> 00:43:42.510

Nancy: Can be really good Planned Parenthood actually runs a lot of things on relationships stuff, a lot of those

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00:43:43.350 --> 00:43:56.520

Nancy: women's health organizations. Talk about that. Also, but I usually think of big institutions likes things like Scouts, 4H, of all places, Scouts, churches and schools.

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00:43:57.150 --> 00:44:06.240

Nancy: Often have those, those kind of things. There are also of course crisis intervention second rooms and stuff like that. But they tend to be about crisis and not about

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00:44:07.170 --> 00:44:19.410

Nancy: Oh, let's let's get you in a good relationship. Um, the other thing is if people are in college, there are every single college has lots and lots of different focuses on

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00:44:20.190 --> 00:44:31.380

Nancy: Sexual health and and crisis center. I think it can be really positive to set up a I know at Oberlin when they've set up things on building positive relationships

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00:44:32.310 --> 00:44:44.190

Nancy: those things are so crammed. You know, and not....and like I said, it can be relationships, broadly, it doesn't. I mean, we focus on romantic relationships. But, you know, built in friendships is really important.

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00:44:44.520 --> 00:44:54.450

Nancy: And especially now with so many people go back and forth between, you know, you start being best friends with someone and suddenly you're in... in a romantic relationship, that happens all the time.

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00:44:54.870 --> 00:45:08.280

Nancy: So I think just building good relationship skills, you build them in one context, they work...you build them in one context in friendships, it carries over to romantic... you build it and romantic it carries over to friends. I think you just need to learn to be a good partner.

[outro music Night Air]

HANNAH: Thank you so much, Dr. Darling, for taking the time to speak with us. We hope that this episode has helped our listeners better understand the topic of relationship health from varying points

of view. Please join us for our next relationship health episode, where we will hear from Liza Henry about her work with educational programming that supports healthy relationship development among young people. We will also share the answers to our quiz questions. Thanks for listening.

Resources:

Dr. Nancy Darling Faculty Page - <https://www.oberlin.edu/nancy-darling>

Dr. Nancy Darling's app for people living with chronic pain - <https://1step2life.com/>

Dr. Nancy Darling's posts on Psychology Today -

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/thinking-about-kids>

Overview of Urie Bronfenbrenner's work - <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html>

Dr. Jeff Parker's Lab - <https://uafriendshiplab.wixsite.com/psychology>

Dr. Candice Feiring's study on romantic relationships and adolescent health -

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0bc1/0943217443b03cd89ccc2b25f2dc05152184.pdf>

Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS medicine*, 7(7), e1000316. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>