

10 - Choose Love Compassion in Action! Empathy Plus Action!

Original Air Date: 12/23/20

Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Twice a month, we will come to you with a 10-minute professional development inspiration that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to use today.

Don't forget to subscribe to this podcast to get notifications about future episodes.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: We are on our final episode of the most relevant and perfect timed podcast. So, if you have not heard the first three, Over Courage, Gratitude, and Forgiveness, please go back and listen to those because Scarlett is our very special guest this month.

We have uploaded one each month, and she is sharing her story of surviving and thriving one of the country's worst tragedies, which is Sandy Hook. While she also weaves in her lessons that she's learned along the way and strategies that you can use in your own life to thrive, even in these uncertain times. She will share a powerful formula that can lead you to choosing love in any situation, circumstance, or interaction.

December is the month that the tragedy occurred, and we are blessed to have her here with us.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Scarlett Lewis is an author, speaker, and founder of the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement that offers no-cost social and emotional programming in schools, homes, and communities all over the world. Their mission is to offer a solution to the issues that our kids face in today's world and provide a path towards flourishing.

Scarlett is the mother of Jesse Lewis, who was killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School and left a message on their kitchen chalkboard that inspired the movement, nurturing, healing, love. Jesse is on the presidential shortlist for the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor for saving nine of his classmates' lives before losing his own.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, today's episode with Scarlett is about compassion in action.

And you will know that from the previous three, the courage, gratitude, and forgiveness, she always has something amazing to share with us that has gotten through this time of tragedy. So, Scarlett, what do you want to share with us today about compassion?

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Thank you so much, first and foremost, Stephanie and Tisha, for having me on your podcast. It's a huge honor to be with you and your audience and share the Choose Love Movement with everyone.

So, we've gone through courage and gratitude and forgiveness. Now we're on compassion in action, so vitally important. Here's something interesting about compassion.

When I say survival of the, what do you guys think of?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Survival of the fittest.

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Yes, you think of survival of the fittest. Do you know who said that?

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I do not know.

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Well, actually, most people attribute survival of the fittest to Darwin, who was an evolutionist. But actually, Darwin never said survival of the fittest. Darwin deduced that the species that will evolve successfully will be the ones that are the most sympathetic to one another.

So, we teach survival of the fittest, right? Everybody knows survival of the fittest. But in actuality, it's survival, and he literally said, of the most sympathetic. And a quote by him is, it's not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.

So, he said, survival of the most sympathetic. And by sympathetic, he meant altruistic, generous, and compassionate. So, you had said, maybe the most important of the character values, and it absolutely is.

This makes common sense that Darwin would deduce this in *The Descent of Man*, because we survive as human beings and even thrive through healthy relationships and meaningful connections. And dare I say it? Love! And without these, we not only suffer, but we can die. So, connections and compassion that leads us towards these meaningful connections is so vitally important.

And so, you know, when this, of course, this formula that we're going through in these four sessions is derived from Jesse's chalkboard message of nurturing, healing, love. So nurturing means loving kindness and gratitude. Healing literally means forgiveness.

And love is compassion in action. So, we talk about compassion in action for a reason, because compassion has two components. And a lot of people don't realize this, and this is really important now, especially during the time of COVID and for our essential workers.

Compassion has two components. There is the identifying component, when we identify with the needs of another, or the empathetic component. Empathy, interestingly enough, is actually a painful process.

Empathy lights up the same receptors in our brain as physical pain. So, empathy is a painful process, and our essential workers know that, and that's why some of them are experiencing something called empathy burnout or empathy fatigue. Erroneously called, by the way, compassion burnout and fatigue, because there's no such thing as compassion burnout and fatigue, but there is empathy burnout and fatigue.

Because empathy is a painful process, feeling another's pain, and we can only feel another's pain for so long before we have to turn away. But that's the beautiful thing about truly understanding what compassion is. These two components.

There is the empathetic component, but then there's the action component. And the action component is when we actively do something to help ease another's pain, and that is when all of the nurturing, healing love that we give out actually comes back to us. And the most beautiful thing about all of this, by the way, which is so amazing, is that there are decades of scientific research to back all this up.

It's pretty cool.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: So, compassion is something that we all hear about, we all want to be compassionate, but sometimes our kiddos, even our youngest kiddos, and sometimes even in education, it's real hard to find that compassion in some of the circumstances we're facing today. Can you give us some suggestions when we are in those places that we talked about before, those places that maybe are not so nice, those negative places, what are some suggestions you have for remembering and finding that compassion in those situations?

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: I think that that is an excellent, excellent question.

And by the way, that's where we go back to courage, because we're wired to be defensive as human beings. You say something that hurts my feelings, I mean, I'm wired for survival. I'm literally going to put up my metaphorical dukes.

And that's why we need to practice being present and in the moment. And that's where that empathy comes in, right? Identifying the need of someone else, being in the moment. And that perspective taking too, that comes from compassion, understanding, having the awareness of yourself, that's what you get when you're present and understanding what you're feeling.

And then it's only then that you can thoughtfully respond in that situation with love. So, we have a stimulus that happens in our life, and it could be anything that happens. It could be a difficult conversation.

It could be an accident. It could be COVID. And then we have our response.

And there's a space in between what happens to us. It could be anything and our response. And it's in that space where we need to be present in order to choose, choose love, choose our response.

Because if we're in those situations and we're not present and we react, we can react by how we're wired to react, which is defensive, right? And kind of giving as good as we get. But if we can be present and, in the moment, and act with compassion, we can thoughtfully respond with love. That's kindness, caring, concern, compassion, civility, humility.

When we thoughtfully respond with love, we take our personal power back. When we react with defensiveness or anger or mostly prolonged anger, we give our personal power away. And that doesn't feel good.

We fuel the fire. We are not part of the solution.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: That is amazing because I think you're exactly right.

And I think that we have a lot of teachers, administrators, and even parents that are listening to this podcast right now who are trying to figure out life and how to handle it with compassion right now. We've heard teachers that are really taking it hard from parents at home while they're trying to teach. Is there anything that you can give them any coping mechanisms during this time to just keep continuing to have passion and or to teach other people about compassion?

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Well, absolutely.

I mean, the first thing that I want to say right off the top of my head, and it's the hardest thing to do, is to practice self-compassion. Compassion for yourself, to take time every day to take care of yourself. Because if you don't take care of yourself, you are not going to be able to be present for others and extend that loving kindness to others.

It's really hard to do. There's so much to do. You have a long to-do list.

It's like usually self-compassion goes down to the very end, but really it should be the first thing that you do. Because when we take care of ourselves, we're better able to take care of others. We're better able to manage our emotions in the moment and to work through difficulty and to get to the other side and be models and help other people do the same.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: That's so great. So, a lot of our audience members are exactly educators.

And a lot of that throughout the day is that modeling. So, there are times when we are at our absolute worst and we have to stop and find that compassion. But can you give a way that your Choose Love Movement actually teaches people to do exactly what you've presented throughout these four sessions? Choose to show gratitude, to show kindness, to show all those things that you spoke about.

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Yes, absolutely. And I encourage everyone listening to go onto our website, chooselovemovement.org and take advantage of the tremendous free resources that we have. So, if we put it all together, it all starts with courage because it absolutely takes courage to practice each one of the character values.

And we talked about how to practice courage, which was through brave poses, brave breaths. We have a lot of other ways. If you go onto our website, we have them for students, educators, parents and the community.

And I encourage everybody to go on. Gratitude is really important. And by the way, these things kind of build on each other as a direct path to flourishing.

If you think about what we want for ourselves and our kids, it's to flourish in life. And literally, this is a direct path. So, the courage to be present in difficulty and even pain, which strengthens us to be able to practice gratitude.

And we talked about that in a previous podcast. We do that by shifting our thoughts from lower energy, negative, angry thoughts to grateful thoughts because you can only focus on one thought at a time. So, if you're feeling down, you can think about something that you're grateful for and it helps shift your focus and your lens to abundance from lack.

And that literally neuroscientifically strengthens you to consider forgiveness. And forgiveness for yourself or others really helps us make and find meaning in difficulty that happens in our lives and painful experiences. And then we can move into compassion and action, which is what we're talking about now.

And we do that literally by having the courage to step outside of our busyness, of our distraction, of our social media, of our to-do list, of our own families, of even our own pain and suffering to help someone else. This is such an important concept. And by the way, I didn't really get this before Jesse's murder, but I literally learned it through his brother, JT, who started an organization to help traumatized children right after Jesse's murder.

And literally he's healing himself through raising money to help traumatized kids. I dragged him around from therapist to therapist. Therapy is wonderful.

It's great. It didn't work for JT. But what worked for him was literally getting outside of his own pain and suffering and focusing his efforts on helping other kids that were going through hard times, terrible traumas, helping them and helping them helped himself heal.

It was tremendous to watch. It was such an important lesson for me that we have incorporated into our programming and that I found in my own life too. Every single day I step outside of what's going on in my own life, but even my own pain to help other people.

And I think that that has been a huge component of healing for my life. So, to do that, you think of ways that you can help others. And there are always people that are in need.

And it doesn't have to be grand gestures. It can be writing love, painting loving notes on rocks and putting them around. It could be hiding little yellow ducks in different places.

It can be writing a little note to your neighbor. It can be visiting someone, visiting somebody that's shut in for tea. Actually, not a great time to do that, I guess, with COVID.

But, you know, placing a call, checking in on people. And it's amazing. You think, oh, my gosh, I don't have time to do that.

I've got so much to do. And we do. It's so busy.

But when you make time to practice, because it is a practice, compassion in action, stepping outside of yourself. Here's the amazing thing, and this even gets us into quantum physics.

You literally heal yourself. And it's not why you do it. But that's what you'll experience.

And it's almost miraculous that all of the, I say, the nurturing, healing love that you give out, it comes back to you in incredible ways. And there's so many different ways that you can do this.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Okay, Scarlett, you have said in the last four episodes so many amazing things for everyone to take in.

So, these three takeaways can be about this session, or it can be about your entire experience. What three takeaways do you want to leave our listeners with?

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Okay, so my three takeaways are on compassion. I want everybody to remember, it's so important that compassion has two components.

There's the identifying component, the empathetic component. And then there's the action component. And that's number one.

Number two, I want to remind everybody that we have to have courage. We have to practice courage to step outside of ourselves and do things for others. And that's so healing.

And there is literally decades of research on when we do for others, what that does for us. When I talk to teachers, I have this slide, and it's only a short list of the benefits. But I say take a picture of it because I want you to be aware of the benefits.

Because when we're aware of the benefits of something, we experience them on an exponential level. But I mean literally doing for others releases oxytocin and other feel-good neurochemicals from our brain and mimics a runner's high. It's good for our health and well-being.

It promotes cooperation and relationship skills. It cultivates connection. It's fulfilling.

What you give, you get back. It evokes gratitude. It's contagious.

When people see you doing something for other people, they want to do it. And it creates a ripple effect. It counteracts depression, anger, and anxiety.

It reduces and relieves stress. It increases our self-confidence. It gives us a sense of purpose.

We have better physical, mental, and emotional pain management. And literally studies show a 22% reduction in mortality. So actually, you live longer when you do for other people.

It's so vitally important.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Scarlett, if anybody walks away from here needing more knowledge, I know that you have this amazing website set up with resources for them. But just that right there really covers why you need to continue to choose love.

And I just think that is amazing. Can you give our listeners one final and last challenge that you have for them?

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Absolutely. Yes.

I had one, but I'm going to change it up. I'm going to go back to the very beginning. This is a story that I shared in the first podcast.

And it's how the whole Choose Love movement started. And I got such incredible response from this. People said it changed their lives.

So, this is my challenge for all of your listeners. I would like for you to think about what you think about every day. And change one angry thought into a loving thought.

And by doing that, you'll make yourself feel better. You'll positively impact those around you. And through the ripple effect, you will be helping to create a safer, more peaceful, and loving world.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Scarlett, this has been amazing. You don't have any idea how honored we are to have you here with us. And that you said you would come on our podcast.

So thank you so much.

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: The honor is mine. I'm so thankful.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: And I want people to also go over to your podcast. Do you want to give a shout out to your podcast and what it's called?

Scarlett Lewis Speaker: Yes. Thank you so much.

It's called Choose Love. And it is on Anchor. It's on other places as well.

It's on our website. You can access it there. And I talked to our incredible partners that are all out in the world doing incredible things for schools, homes, and communities.

And each one of them is like a little gem just like these four have been with you ladies. And so, I encourage people to go on if you guys have any suggestions for me. If you want to contact me, you can click on the contact button on the chooselovemovement.org website.

And please take advantage of the incredible resources that we have to offer. We are in over 10,000 schools. We have positively impacted millions of kids and individuals in all 50 states and over 100 countries just within the last four and a half years.

And we need help. So, if anybody listening wants to be an advocate or an ambassador, give us a call. We all have to take responsibility for what's going on in our world and be part of the solution.

And we would love for you to do that through the Choose Love Movement. So, thank you so much.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Thank you, Scarlett.

And as we all go into 2021, every single one of your episodes gives us something to look forward to. So, thank you so much and Happy New Year, everyone, and see you soon.