



Dr. Elise Bialylew, founder of Mindful in May (mindfulinmay.org) and The Mind Life Project (www.mindlifeproject.com) and author of The Happiness Plan, interviews

Amy Saltzman

*Amy Saltzman is a holistic physician, mindfulness coach, scientist, wife, mother, devoted student of transformation, longtime athlete and occasional poet. Her passion is supporting people of all ages in enhancing their wellbeing and discovering the still quiet place within. She's the author of a number of books including *A Still Quiet Place for Teens*, and *A Still Quiet Place for Athletes*.*

Elise: Amy welcome to the program. I'm delighted to have you on board. I've been really interested in the work you're doing here in Australia, so I'm looking forward to the conversation very much. I wondered if we could begin for those listeners that haven't come across your name or your books which include *A Still Quiet Place for Teens*, *A Still Quiet Place for Athletes*, which is the more recent one and *Teaching Mindfulness Skills to Kids and Teens*- I wonder if you

could share a little bit about your background and how you got to teaching mindfulness.

Amy: Yes, that could be a whole book in itself maybe, but I'll try to keep it simple. So when I was in medical school, I was also still cycling competitively and I actually got hit by a car and had an injury, so my leg was in a brace and I wasn't riding three hours a day so it seemed like I had lots of extra time. My sister had been sending me the journal from what was then called the American Holistic Medical Association. She'd been sending it to me intermittently and I then chose to subscribe to it myself but I noticed that I had missed the registration and scholarship requests, and housing for the annual conference . But on the wise advice of my mentor and coach Georgina Lindsey I sent in my stuff anyway, and a woman dropped out so I got her registration and scholarship and housing, and when I went to this first holistic medicine meeting the first thing I went to was a thing for medical students and residents run by Patch Adams. I don't know if in Australia you know who he is but in real life Patch is six foot eight , and he has hair down to his buttocks: he wears a clown suit and runs a health commune. The first session I went to was run by Patch, and an internal medicine doctor woman who had a really big heart, and I felt that I could fit in anywhere on that spectrum that felt true to me. Then at the end of the conference I wrote them a note to let them know what I thought they could do to preserve holism in medical students and

residents, and by June of that year I was asked to be on the board of that association. When I was involved in that association, was just around the time that the Bill Moyers Healing and the Mind series came out and the work of Jon Kabat- Zinn, -and he didn't feel he could say the word "mindfulness" on the east coast of the US in the late 80's or early 90's- so it was called the Stress Reductions Clinic. Then what basically happened is that I pestered Jon so much that he couldn't say no to me in relation to going to study at the Stress Reduction Clinic. So then I talked my residency director into letting me go and do a rotation there and that was really my introduction into mindfulness. Then I came back from being at the stress reduction clinic and started teaching mindfulness to patients with chronic pain and chronic illness. When I became a parent I started teaching mindfulness to parents. When my children were young, and Jason had a moment of distress, and asked me, I started teaching mindfulness to my kids. Then the more I thought about it the more I thought, well why do we need to be forty and get a heart attack and divorce; why can't we learn these skills earlier when we're kids -or in Jason's case when we're three? So then I started teaching kids and teens, and then most recently I've combined my love of mindfulness and my long term love of sports, and I've been teaching athletes and coaches. They all fit together and I still do all of them, and there you go.

Elise: So there are a few things that come out of that story. I think number one is persistence, and don't take no for an answer. Number two is about the wonderful gift of mindfulness practice, which is that it stays with you your whole life and you adapt to whatever's most live for you. So obviously you were moving forwards in your career, then you had kids and that became very present. how old are your kids now?

Amy: My son is 22 and my daughter's 19.

Elise: So then you get more of your time and your life back and it sounds like you're returning to your passion and your focus on sport and athleticism. So can I just ask you as a physician, at that time that you moved into mindfulness, what did you see? What was it that really attracted you and that you felt compelled to follow?

Amy: I think for me first of all I always had a holistic orientation and I was lucky enough to join the American Holistic Medical Association so I had a kind of parallel education, so it didn't get it trained out of me, but that meant seeing a patient as a whole person rather than a diagnosis or an imaging study or a lab value, and treating them within the context of their life. Sometimes as physicians we tell patients with chronic pain and chronic illness, "you need to learn to live with this," but most physicians don't tell patients how. Mindfulness for me is how you live with something that's difficult and challenging and live

with joy and purpose and meaning. So I think for me that's what spoke to me and at that time in the US that's how mindfulness was being used for chronic pain and illness with patients, and then in the last thirty years it's really expanded pretty much into every domain of life that one can think of.

Elise: So before we move on, I'd like to hear your definition of mindfulness. Obviously people have different takes, but how do you explain it?

Amy: The beauty of working with kids and teens is that it really demands that you simplify your teachings because if you get too theoretical all you hear is "blah blah blah." So my definition is - mindfulness is paying attention here and now, doing our best to be in the present moment, and not have our focus in the past or the future. Paying attention here and now with kindness and curiosity -because otherwise we're just usually beating ourselves up- so that we can choose our behaviour. So the whole definition is paying attention here and now with kindness and curiosity so that we can choose our behaviour.

Elise: And so this is not the default position that humans are set to? This is something we need to train ourselves to do?

Amy: Our brains originate from growing up in the jungle or the sub-saharan desert or whatever and our brains were trained to

negative scan, to look for problems. We do need to practise being in the present moment and looking at what is actually happening now instead of what we're making up.

Elise: I think what's fascinating about mindfulness is that this is a practice that we're doing with our minds yet it is a practice that's having an impact on our entire physiology in our bodies. Do you want to say something about that, particularly since you're coming from a background of working as a physician and working with the body; not that we can really separate them. Did you want to share with the listeners how you understand that the practice of sitting and using the mind has an impact on the body as a whole and what type of impact?

Amy: I noticed actually some reluctance to get too scientific, and I prefer to keep it slightly more experiential even though I do think there's science to support this. But for me my sense is that the more we're able to observe our inner and outer experience, the more we can uncouple from the fight or flight response, and when we uncouple from the fight or flight response we can respond more skilfully to what's happening in the moment. When we're in fight or flight and in the peak of the wave of intense emotion, we're in our reptilian brain and we can't take someone else perspective, we can't problem solve, we can't be compassionate, we can't be creative; we're just in survival mode and for me mindfulness uncouples that and gives us more space.

Elise: Thank you, that's a really interesting perspective. I also imagine then the impact that the fight or flight is having on our body over the long term gets a bit more managed or we have more control of that not being on all the time.

Amy: Right, so physiologically there are studies that show that mindfulness reduces salivary cortisol, and salivary cortisol is a response to stress. So we do know that when we practise mindfulness we uncouple that physiological response, and if we're in stress mode all the time, that ripples out into all our physiological systems.

Elise: Yes. So before we got talking formally in the interview I was asking you about - you've spent so many years of your career in different aspects of mindfulness - and I asked you what's most alive for you now. I'd love to dive into that now, how you're applying mindfulness and perhaps even if you wanted to give an anecdote or a practical exercise that illuminates the power of this practice in the context that's most alive for you.

Amy: I'm thinking for a moment....like right now I'm most interested in working with athletes and coaches, and for example one of the things that happens for an athlete or a team is that they make a mistake, and often they're so focussed on, "I cant believe I missed that pass... missed that shot," that they're no longer present in the game. So just something super simple like having a mistake ritual, and

there's all sorts of different ones - and people like to make up their own- like flushing or brushing it off like brushing something off your shoulders, or having some other motion, and it just allows that reset in the moment. It doesn't mean that you're not going to go back and look at what happened later, but in the moment while you're still playing, it's just a simple -and I try to create with athletes hopefully a joyful-something for them so it brings a little lightness and maybe a little humour to it. Then they can reset and keep playing, and they can look at it later. I'm in the process of writing an article about just five things - because the olympics are coming up- five things that we can learn as ordinary humans from olympians, five mindfulness practices, and one of them is this practice of mistake ritual, like having a little sense of humour about it. I have a friend who's a soccer coach that I just did a podcast with and he teaches his kids to say "oopsy" and they're kind of young, and we were talking about kids and parents and soccer. I said, "you know sometimes you also need to teach the parents to say "oopsy" because the parents get so frustrated because the kids didn't pass it or whatever." So ideally when you're looking at athletic competitions, the athletes are practising, the coaches are practising, and if the athletes are young enough so the parents are still involved then the parents are also practising.

Elise: So on the sidelines going (doing brush off action)

Amy: Exactly.

Elise: So just to clarify, when you did the flush or the brushing off action, its like a physical gesture which is almost a mantra or representation of this idea of the mistake ritual which is a reminder to yourself that you are resetting, “ok let’s let that mistake go.” Is that what you mean?

Amy: Yes, and for me it has more power if you can share it with a team-mate or you can make eye connection with your coach, or you can share- if the athletes of the age that the parents are still there- and they can look at their mom or dad on the sidelines and go, “ok mum or dad I know that was a miss, I’m trying to reset and I want you to reset.....” and then you move on.

Elise: Ok, but can you just explain overtly how that is mindfulness. What’s the connection? How does that connect to this concept of mindfulness?

Amy: Right. So you’re in the moment, and whatever has happened has happened, and in the moment you can start to tell all these stories, “I missed it, I’m terrible...the coach is going to pull me up...mum and dad are going to be mad..” You can spin in this downward spiral. If you’re so busy thinking all those things, then you’re not ready for the next pass. So it’s just a way to say, “that moment is gone, and I’m in this moment, and in this moment I’m making the choice to be fully

in the game ...not let me thoughts go to the past....like what I did...or go to the future like if they pass it to me I'm going to do the same thing....But I'm in this moment and ready for the next thing..."

Elise: I think it's just such a fabulous practice. It's just brilliant. I have two young kids and as you were talking about it in athletics, my mind just went straight away to tantrums and behavioural difficulties, I get frustrated, and my daughter gets frustrated...I'm going to use that with my kids for sure, "Let's just brush this reactive moment away..." and also in relationships.

Amy: Right. So you can have the "oopsy." When I work with parents I like for them to do the mindfulness out loud. So for me that means if you respond poorly to your child, or to something that happened during your day, it can be like "oopsy....mummy was feeling angry and I snapped...and I'd like to start over.." Then your children learn that they can have their feelings, and acknowledge them and start over. So it's a gift that you can give them.

Elise: So coming back to this area of athletes and coaches, was there anything else that you wanted to add to that? I mean I know that it's a whole body of work, but.....even something that's come up recently that illuminates how this all works?

Amy: Yes.....the struggle I'm having is that I do have a whole book, so it's hard to choose. The mistake ritual does lead itself into self compassion, like being compassionate in your moments of difficulty.

But maybe we can look at one of the other things athletes can teach us, like about team work. Whether you're an athlete in a team, or solo, or not an athlete at all.....we're all in teams. You're family is a team.

And so often going back to this negative scanning, looking at what we did wrong and what our team mates did wrong, and one of the things we can learn to do is positive scan, what we're doing well and what our team mates are doing well. Really acknowledge and express gratitude for what our team mates are doing well and what they're contributing. If you want to take it even further like an advanced practice is to work even harder with the team mates that you find difficult. When you're actually working on a fun team...like if I'm on a team with you and Susie and Elizabeth, it might be that I'm friendly and complimentary with Susie and medium with a Elizabeth and I might be having a really tough time with you, but if I'm a really committed athlete, just as I would work on a physical skill that's a little bit of a weakness, I would work harder to be kind and complimentary to you because I know it's a weakness for me. So when I work with teams, and again you can do this in a business setting, and you can do this in a family setting, I have people do exercises to recognise who's a little harder for you to be kind and

supportive to. Then it's like, if you're really committed to being your best on this team and on having this team function be the best it can, then I need to work harder to be kind and supportive with you, because it doesn't actually come naturally to me. So that's a skill that carries over.

Elise: That reminds me of ...I think it was the Pema Chodron quote about when you have your heart open, even the most difficult people can be your teachers, or something along those lines. Along those lines can I ask you your thoughts , because it's come up in the teaching I've done.... Where's the linelet's say there's a team mate you're having trouble with but let's say objectively, this person has significant issues, and maybe they're a bully, so where's that line of boundary versus compassion? Do you know what I mean?

Amy: Yes...that's a brilliant question. I'm pausing and I'm just going to take what comes. So....and it's not quite the same but it does answer your question. Some would say that doing those practices doesn't mean that we don't have difficult conversations, and that we don't take action, and that we don't set boundaries. It's about the how we do it. This is a very dramatic example and its a super advanced practice....so I wouldn't necessarily recommend it to everyone until they've had the fundamentals underneath them: So, if you hear this and you go "ooh I don't know....I'm not sure....," then practise your fundamentals till you find that this completely is true for you before

you do it. But for example, there is a woman who was a victim of the Larry Nasser sexual abuse in gymnastics in the US, and she has chosen to forgive him, and she speaks really eloquently about it- and she said that didn't mean she wasn't pursuing legal avenues to the full extent possible. I think for me that means that the compassion practice and forgiveness practice have to do with "internally," which means what energy do you want to bring to something? Then there's still the choosing your behaviour part of mindfulness which is "I'm going to come at this with compassion for myself and compassion for the other person but that doesn't mean that I'm not going to have difficult conversations, set boundaries, seek justice. It doesn't mean that at all, it's just about what energy do I want to come at this with. But this is an advanced practice so not necessarily where I would suggest someone begins.

Elise: That's really clear. That's such a clear perspective and I think it's really good to share that because it's aspirational. We start at 'point a' in our inner practice and it's great to have a view of where this can lead to, what it opens up for us. There are so many people listening that may not be athletes or sports people in difficult teams but they might have a difficult colleague at work that's legitimately got serious issues that they need to manage. It might be a family member that you just have to live with and to have that skilful dance

Amy: Actually there are two things in almost all my books where I address this. It's like a formula for having a mindful conversation about difficulty, that you can walk through and prepare. In a lot of the cases that you're talking about here, you might want to get a skilful moderator or something like that if the situation is so intense. But the other thing in my book is that I say is just like - the woman's name in the book is Rachael Denhollander- just as you wouldn't attempt the gymnastic skills that Rachael does, with no training, don't attempt this high degree of mindfulness skill with no training either. Just as in athletics, there's a progression and you need to build up to that high degree of difficulty skill of compassion or forgiveness for someone who has truly caused harm.

Elise: On that note of the beautiful metaphor you've brought in about mindfulness being this training and skill that we develop over time, like a gymnast, a lot of people who start mindfulness do find it frustrating, it doesn't feel good necessarily and it takes patience. So, do you want to say anything from your experience of working with people about what could be expected when someone starts this practice and advice or suggestions to that person

Amy: Yes, often it goes in phases. Often the initial first phase is "Wow where has this been all my life," or "The magazines and the billboards and the internet all tell me I should have a quiet mind and I don't, so either it doesn't work or I'm doing it wrong." So I think my

advice is to hold all of those thoughts lightly and realise they're just thoughts. So the thought "Wow this is the greatest thing ever," is just a thought, and the thought "this is totally not what I expected," is also just a thought. The whole thing is to see if we can just let all those thoughts come and go, without believing them, without taking them personally, and really just give ourselves the time and the space. Usually the typical mindfulness course is about eight weeks. Give yourself the full eight weeks before you assess whether it's valuable or not, and whether it has meaning for you.

Elise: Thank you. I wanted to ask you moving more to kids and teens, because you've done a lot of work in this area and still do, and I am personally alarmed at what's going on in the space of mental health with children and technology, ADHD, anxiety ...Is there anything you'd like to share from your previous work, whether it's research or anecdotes, how this could be helpful to someone suffering from ADHD or anxiety?

Amy: Yes, so I definitely feel that it has its time and place. Often we're quick to medicate or whatever. I think it can be a part of supporting these kids and sometimes it is sufficient in and of itself, and sometimes they do need additional nutritional support or change in their environment or sometimes you need to work with the parents, and sometimes there's a time and place for medication. So I think it's one part but I don't think it's the only one. I have as much difficulty

with people who say “mindfulness in and of itself is totally fine,” as people who say “meds are the only answer.” For me a truly mindful response in supporting a child or teen that’s in my office is “what does this child need in this moment.” Sometimes it is meds, and sometimes I need to work with the parents, and sometimes the child really needs some skills of their own, and sometimes it’s all three. So it’s really responding to *this* child in *this* moment.

Elise: I wonder if you could give an example...again this might be hard because you have so much written in your books about this so where do you begin ...I really recommend the listeners go and seek out your books because they are so useful. If you take a kid, a younger child versus a teenager, maybe a four or five year old and then maybe also a thirteen or fourteen year old, is there a practical exercise that you could share with the listeners just to excite and inspire them.

Amy: Yes, I’ll pick a practice that I use with all ages from three to ninety three. That ought to serve the purpose. In the notes you sent me earlier you said maybe we would do a practice, so I don’t know if you actually want to do it with me .

Elise: Yes, sure.

Amy: For all the listeners if you’re willing you can close your eyes. If not then maybe look at something neutral in front of you like the carpet or the wall..... And bring your attention to the breath....and just

feel the belly expand with the in-breath..... and release with the out-breath..... and in your own time simply bring your attention to your feelings.....whatever you happen to be feeling in this moment.....and sometimes feelings have very ordinary names....happy....sad.....angry....irritated.....and sometimes they have more unusual nameslike stormy or fiery.... or bubbly or empty.....sometimes feelings are big.....sometimes they're small...however you're feeling in this moment is absolutely fine.....and now see if you can use your curiosity to see where your feeling is in your body.....so maybe it's a tension in your head.....or a smile on your face.....a warmth in your heart.....or a tightness in your belly.....and now see if you can notice how the feeling actually feels.....is it big or small....is it cool or warm.....is it jagged or smooth.....is it hard or soft.....is it still or moving.....and now see or imagine if the feeling has a colour...or colours..... and if it doesn't that's fine....and see or imagine if the feeling has a sound or sounds....and again if it doesn't that's fine.....and when you're ready return your attention to the breath.....and take three slow deep breaths in your own time...and open your eyes and we'll continue.....

So that practice....I'd like to be able to have more time and space to stretch it out. But that practice is good to support people of all ages, in having their feelings, being aware of their feelings, without their

feelings having them, without them blurting out something they'll regret, or throwing something, or hitting something, or quitting or giving up or whatever. So yes, in can really work from 3 to 93.

Elise: It's such a beautiful powerful practice and I just want to share -because I think this is such an interesting thing coming back to your metaphor of the gymnastics- that the beauty of this, correct me if I'm wrong is that as we do this more frequently the better we become at tuning in to what we're feeling. So it's not just about becoming more aware of what we're feeling in the moment, but we become more skilful at catching that feeling as it comes up?

Amy: Yes so one of the other things I talk to people about and I alluded to it a little bit before, is that feelings generally have a wave, and for example you had mentioned that with your kids you might sometimes get frustrated. The thing is the more I tune in to the physical sensations of the feeling, then I can notice when I'm getting frustrated with my kids: that tension, maybe the tightening of the jaw, and the slight change in my tone of voice. If I notice it right there then I can be "oh, I'm getting frustrated..." and actually in this moment it has nothing to do with the kids, it might be because of an email before or the drier needs repair. It has nothing to do with the kids really- and I can realise "Oh I'm irritated.." and I can pause, and choose my behaviour. If I just kind of go on and pretend that I'm fine, then I might end up shouting at my kids or something because I haven't

attended to myself or what the real issue is or whatever. And even if it is my kids I can say, “I’m feeling really frustrated right now,” and then say what I want or need or what they need taken care of, something like that.

Elise: When I was first introduced to this practice of bringing mindfulness to feelings and awareness around feelings in the body, I remember distinctly thinking to myself, “what the hell is this person talking about ...what do you mean look for the colour of my feelings...what does it look like.” Can you just share something for the listeners - if they were listening to that and getting really perplexed and wondering, “what the hell is going on here?”

Amy: Yes, so if I had longer usually I’d say “if this doesn’t make any sense to you just breathe and be with your feelings.....you don’t need to worry about the colour...you don’t need to worry about the sound..”

It’s really more about acknowledging the process of the feeling, and if we finish the practice and someone says, “well that’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever done and why bother?” I would say to them, “have you ever had an intense moment where you said or did something you regretted?” And I don’t know a human on the planet who hasn’t had that experience. So then if we attend to our feelings in this way then we are less likely to do that. And then most of them will realiseand I’ll say to them, “It’s unusual, it’s not what we’re taught,” and in a lot

of families it's really not what we're taught. The model is to fly off the handle and maybe not even clean it up later. That's just how you do things. So for a lot of people it's really foreign so it's like, "just try it and let's see what happens." Usually over the period of a course people will start to see for themselves, how it is helpful. I'm not proselytising- "try it, come back and tell me what your experience was, let's talk about it and then we'll go from there." Usually there's something in the interchange and they start to see, "Oh yeah...I'm walking around with all this pent up rage..and I had no idea..and it is costing me, everywhere...and yes it is scary and unusual and difficult for me to look at that....but I'm willing because the price is high." That may be a little dramatic but they start to see that...."Oh even a simple moment of road rage..that costs me .." We can feel it physiologically when we go off in the car, or at the sales person, or whatever. We can feel that that has a physiological effect.

Elise: I'm aware of the time but I could keep going...

Amy: I could talk all day (laughter)

Elise: I was struck by the name of your book- A Still Quiet Place .

Why I was struck by it was because I found there is a big misconception when people begin meditation, that it's about stopping thinking.... So could you just share how you make sense of this idea.

Where is this still quiet place? What is it and how does it relate to mindfulness?

Amy: Yes, so the name came because at that time I was working mostly with children and the way I would introduce them to the still quiet place was....and we can do it togetheryou can feel the in breathand then you can feel the still quiet place between the in breath and the out breath.....and then you can feel the out breath and then you can feel the still quiet place before the in breath. So there's a breathing in...Stillness...breathing out...stillness. That's a very simple way for kids to get in touch with the fact that we all have stillness and quietness and in an adult word that would be pure awareness, but if you say that to an eight year old, it makes no sense. Honestly if you say it to a lot of adults it makes no sense, like “What's pure awareness, what are you talking about?” But they can feel that place of stillness and quietness within them so then I say, “Notice that stillness and quiet is always with you, it's with you when you're breathing in...it's with you when you're still...it's with you when you're breathing out...it's with you when the breath is still...it's with you when you're sad....when you're angry...when your'e happywhen you're dancing...when you're arguing...if you're a parent, when you're cooking...when you're answering emails...It's always there and you can return to it, just by following the breath.”

So that really gives two truths of mindfulness. There is stillness and quietness inside of us that is always there and unperturbed, and that stillness and quietness can hold all of our human experience, our agitated thinking, our angry feelings. So I think one of the difficulties of mindfulness is the myth is it's supposed to be a place of no thought. It's really just reminding people that there is this spaciousness inside of us that can hold all our upset and difficulty. Those are simultaneous, the spaciousness and stillness and quietness, and the difficulty. And if you're having difficulty or intense thoughts and feelings it doesn't mean that you're doing it wrong it's just a matter of whether you can rest in stillness and watch all this intensity as it's happening.

Elise: Connected to that, the idea that there's stillness- I agree with you even when you say to it adults its very esoteric in a way, it's confusing. Then there's the thoughts. How do you introduce people to the fact that they are not their thoughts? Because this is I think one of the most revelatory parts of what opens up in the practice, that we live our whole lives with this little voice in our heads that is "me," and in mindfulness we discover, "Hang on a sec they're just thoughts." Do you want to speak to that?

Amy: Yes, I'm smiling because I have three different ways....so I'm just choosing which one. I'll choose the most playful one I guess. So with kids- and I've done this in a room of three hundred physicians so

it's not just kids: I will literally get them to bring bubbles and blow bubbles, and we talk about what they noticed when they blow bubbles. First thing is that when you're blowing bubbles it's really hard to frown, so just blowing bubbles makes you smile, and you're breathing when you're blowing bubbles. I ask, "Are all the bubbles the same size?" The answer is some are bigger some are smaller. I ask, "Do you ever get clumps of bubbles?" They say "Oh yeah clumps of bubbles.." I ask "are some moving faster and some moving slower?" And then I say,"and what happens to all of them?" And they say,"Oh eventually they all pop." And I ask them if that's anything like what happens in their mind. Then if they still don't get it I ask them, when we have a cartoon and there's talk above the head what do we call that? "Oh a thought bubble." Then I explain that we all have thought bubbles all the time, its just that a lot of the time we take them as absolute truths and we get locked into them. So even going back to the example of the team, I could say,"Well she's mean and she never passes." Then if we invite someone to open it up and say, "Can you look and see," then it's "Oh wait actually she did pass to me, and she gave me that piece of gum." Maybe you realise going back to your example that "Wow she never gives me gum and never passes to me"- and that requires a conversation with the coach or whatever- but that so much of the time we make up these stories that aren't even true. So the first thing to do is check and see if the story is even true.

Elise: That's a great metaphor, the bubbles. I love it. So the message is that we can so often, without questioning or investigating assume that every thought bubble that comes into our head is true, a correct representation of reality. Then we go off and get locked and fixed into that story, and in fact that's not the case.

Amy: That's right, and usually we're collecting evidence. So let's just go back to parenting for a minute and the stories that I hear. I'm working with a family now and the mum's story is that her kids is lazy, and never listens to her, and isn't trying hard enough. Well she is a teenager, she's in school, she's doing reasonably well at school, she's taking tests to get into a private high school, she's swimming competitively, and the mum is grumpy because occasionally she leaves a dish on the table, or leaves a wet swim towel on the floor. And I said, "You really need to take a step back for a full week, and look for where she does follow through, where she is listening to you, and also look at your expectations." I told her, "In our household we have a rule that you can only be working on three things at a time...so what are your three priorities for your daughter?" She said, "School self care and tutoring." We actually broke self care out into eating well staying hydrated, and sleeping well, so the mum got a freebie or two there there. (laughter) I said, "If those are your three priorities, then for now, until she gets through to the end of the semester, and through the travel meets, and through these big deal tests for high school, you

don't get to be on her about the dishes or the wet towels. You need to let that go. And if you want to move the dishes or wet towel above any of those three that's ok but you only get three till the end of semester." When she looked, she did see, "Oh yeah with end of semester pressures she is holding it together, and maybe I can let the towel and bowl go, and maybe the towel and the bowl don't have anything to do with her listening to me, or her respect for me...." Because there's a whole other story going around and about her not respecting or listening or caring, and it just gets worse and worse. Let's just shift the focus here.

Elise: The bubbles are just getting more and more clumped..(laughter)

Amy: Exactly (laughter)

Elise: Have you done the bubble trick with her?

Amy: Not the bubbles but the looking at the thoughts part.

Elise: What I love about that story is that it shows that what you are doing in your room is a mindfulness practice in a way, and coming back to your definition of present moment kindness and curiosity about how things are. So what I want to emphasise to the listeners is that its not just about, "Let's close our eyes and meditate." This is something we can integrate and be active in throughout the day throughout our lives, not just when we meditate, and then it's over.

Amy: The advantage of doing formal practice, the sitting and closing our eyes, is that we do give ourselves time and space to see what we're up to and see our habits. Then for me, that's really helpful but that's not actually the point. The point for me is that we take that wisdom that we gain from the formal practice and we're applying moment to moment in our lives, and that's what matters. How I apply it when I'm stuck in traffic, or when I am frustrated with my child, or I'm telling a story about my husband. For me, it's why I practise, to see how it impacts my moment to moment day to day life.

Elise: I think that's a very beautiful place to end. I just want to say, thank you so much. Your wisdom and clarity have been astounding in this conversation, and I'm sure the listeners will be running off and getting your books which I highly recommend. I wanted to offer the space for you to share anything we haven't covered.

Amy: Yes, well I think I would say for anyone who wants to start a mindfulness practice, it may not seem like it but the teen workbook is a very good place to start, even if you're not a teen. If you're living with children you can walk through that book with your children. I think the only other thing I want to say is that for those of you who are interested in this, and want to bring mindfulness to children or teens, I have a course for teaching adults how to share mindfulness. I also have an online course for athletes and coaches, and if you have a team,

and I'll say an athletic team or work team that you want to share these principles with then I can do it just for your team.

Elise: Great. Thank you so much for all your generous sharing.

Amy: It was a lot of fun. Thank you.