



How to bring self-love and self-compassion into your life  
Laura Lane's interview with David Ekram  
Episode #26, Hope, Strength and Courage Podcast – Full Transcript

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Thank you for tuning into the Hope Strength Courage Podcast. Love and support for parents whose kids are fighting for their lives! A weekly podcast created to support parents and caregivers of children diagnosed with cancer, where you will find resources collected to help you face each day with Hope, Strength and Courage. From interviews with the top experts in their fields: doctors, psychologists, chaplains and inspiring frontline workers in paediatric oncology as they share their best advice, as well as day to day advice collected from other cancer moms and leaders in personal growth and development. From individuals who understand how hard it can be, I hope you will feel better prepared to cope with the day-to-day challenges of caring for your child. Hi, I am Laura Lane, and I am your host. My own daughter Celeste was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 12. In 2015 I wrote about our experiences in the book "Two Mothers One Prayer: Facing your child's cancer with Hope Strength and Courage". Since that time, I have dedicated thousands of hours to share with other parents and caregivers the resources, tools, tips, skills and strategies I learned that helped our family to stay happier, healthier and more hopeful. My goal is to share with you my interviews with experts to support you as you care for a child with cancer.

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This week before I introduce today's interview, I'd like to tell you about the projects I've been working on to better support you as a cancer parent and the sponsor partners who are helping to make it happen. I am most excited to tell you about our partnership with Royal Bank of Canada and Ronald McDonald House Charities South Central Ontario where we are donating of 100 copies and launching our Stronger Daily Planner for the most amazing moms on the planet. Everything you need to stay sane while caring for a child with cancer. A daily, weekly, monthly tracker for all things childhood cancer related. A planner to keep track of diagnosis, treatment plan, symptoms, medications, reactions, food intake, blood count tracker plus everything else you need to keep track of for your family at home. If you would like to learn more, or inquire about how to order your copy or how to sponsor copies for families at your local hospital, please visit our website [STRONGERPLANNER.COM](http://STRONGERPLANNER.COM). This project has been made possible with the funding help of Royal Bank of Canada, Ronald McDonald House Charities South Central Ontario to help us distribute the planners, the design expertise of Mockingbird Design and Impressive Printing in Hamilton Ontario.



Our other exciting news is our 30 min free webinar series “Coping Skills for Cancer Moms” hosted every Friday at 12pm North American Eastern time. I hope you will join me each week as I cover one of seven pillars to living with grace and ease. My goal is to share the valuable skills I learned when our daughter Celeste was diagnosed, give you a short activity to help you apply the skill then open things up for questions, all in less than 30 minutes. If you are struggling right now, this might be just what you need to help you feel loved and supported and give you the strength you need to carry on one more day, one more week, one more month. To learn more please visit my website [LauraLane.ca](http://LauraLane.ca).

Now for today’s episode which features my interview with David Ekram as we discuss how to bring self-love and self-compassion into your life

David does a phenomenal job of covering the huge topic of positive psychology and distilling it down to the a few key topics. This is our longest episode in the Hope Strength Courage podcast series.

I hope you will enjoy this interview as much as I did.

I am pleased to formally introduce you to David Thomas Ekram, M.Ed., CPC, David is a former school administrator and teacher. His 30 years of education experience include being a Founding High School Principal in Beijing, China, where he was teaching a psychology course and was introduced to the exciting field of positive psychology.

In addition, David has held admin/teacher positions in Japan, S. Korea, Europe, and on both coasts of America. He received his B.A. in psychology from SUNY at Stony Brook, and his M.Ed. from Rhode Island College.

Currently, David is a Certified Professional Coach, and leads local support groups, workshops and classes in the areas of self-love, happiness, relationships and spirituality.

His passions and personal experience inspired him to create “The Self-Love & Happiness Club” Meetup group with monthly meetings in New Jersey and New York City, in order to help others learn the art and science behind creating more self-love and joy in one’s life.

Traveling along a “challenging yet fascinating” road through his own life’s journey, David takes his experience, and combined with the latest research, develops programs to help people lead more authentic, courageous and meaningful lives.

David is the Editor-in-Chief of the [Pursuit-of-Happiness.org](http://Pursuit-of-Happiness.org) Newsletter, and teaches workshops on community building.

**Laura:** Welcome, David. It’s wonderful to speak to you today.

**David:** Thank you, Laura. It’s a pleasure to be here. I’m honoured, actually.



**Laura:** That's great, thank you. First off, I'd like to ask you what drew you to the field of positive psychology?

**David:** You touched upon it in the intro, but basically I have a long history of this from the first three or four decades of my life of, you know, of depression, anxiety and all of that and so as a teenager, I guess, I think it's kind of a cliché in a way, where people want to study psychology to help themselves and that's probably what I was doing.

So, you know, I got my degree, like you had mentioned, in psychology and I thought about becoming a child psychologist, what I really wanted to do, but then some family issues came up and I ended up getting my master's degree in education, like you mentioned, teaching emotionally disturbed kids. And, so, throughout my career in education that was really my goal. I always kind of identified with the psychologist of the school, the school psychologist, that kind of thing.

Fast forward, you mentioned I was principal in a high school in Beijing, China and the students knew about my background in psychology and had asked me if I would teach a psychology course. And so, I did. Of course, the first course I taught was all about abnormal psychology, and, you know, mental illness and all that kind of stuff. And after about a month of doing that, one day one of the young ladies in my class, Chinese girl, knocks on my door and kind of shyly comes in and says to me that she's been reading some things that were taking place at Harvard and that there's a class on happiness and she was reading a positive psychology and she kind of looked at me and she said, you know, the whole class is now so depressed after what you taught us, can you teach us about positive psychology now and happiness? And we kind of laughed together. And I said fine, I'll look into it, because I hadn't really heard much about it before then. And so, I looked into it and it was like "wow!". It was exactly what I had been feeling my whole life was missing from the psychology field, looking at what helps people thrive instead of what makes them ill.

And so, again, fast forward a little bit, about three years ago I came back to the States, and I spent about nine months to a year to get my life coaching certification. And during that time, I was taking some positive psychology courses ... and I remember one time sitting, just trying to figure out what I really want to do, and I realized that the field of positive psychology is really grabbing me. And so I just started taking a lot of course work, and studying the research, and reading all kinds of books and that's pretty much what got me to positive psychology, I guess.

**Laura:** Wow. That's an interesting path that you went along to get there yourself. My own daughter, my oldest daughter is in third year psychology at the moment as well. I'll have to make sure to point her towards positive psychology.

**David:** Oh, yeah, absolutely. It's really worthwhile checking out. It really kind of balances things out, too. It really does.



**Laura:** So, what can you tell us about the research on the science of self-love and compassion and happiness and well being?

**David:** Well, do we about twelve hours?

**Laura:** (laughter) Oh, I wish.

**David:** Yeah, I know, I know. There is so much. What I will do – what I will do is probably just touch upon ... I won't even be touching the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. But I'll touch upon some of my favourites and what I've been learning, and what I actually have been working on and teaching in the workshops that I do.

**Laura:** That would be great.

**David:** So, the research began, I would say in earnest, in terms of positive psychology, probably about fifteen, twenty years ago. There's a lot of people now doing some great work.

So let me start with probably the self-love, and self-compassion. I kind of say self-love, and self-compassion in ... for reasons in terms of like, some people when they hear the term 'self-love', they think oh, that's just about somebody being a narcissist or like, you know, the ego is just going wild. And so sometimes I find if I talk about self-compassion, people are a little bit more open to hearing about that, but to me, they're both pretty much the same thing. It's all about just self care, self respect, acceptance.

So, let me start off with one of the people I talk about all the time in my workshops ... his name is David Hamilton, he's a PhD scientist. And he wrote a book called "I Heart Me: The Science of Self-Love" and I love what he writes about. One of the things that I took away from him, and I always want people to recognize, is that, you know, he talks about the three stages of self.

The first stage he calls *I'm not enough*. And it's where people typically feel small; they're insecure; they feel unworthy; no confidence; they're really scared. They need people to like and approve of them. And that's probably like many decades of where I was at for a long, long time in my life.

He said after a while though, people, a lot of people will then move into the second stage. So, you go from *I'm not enough* to *I've had enough*. And he calls this a key transition point. It's accompanied by passion, but also sometimes anger. People just are tired and had enough of feeling bullied or inferior, or scared, giving their power away. It's a very healthy space to be but sometimes it can be a little scary getting to that point.

So, then he goes to the third stage after *I'm not enough* and *I've had enough* to the obvious third stage of *I am enough*. And that is where you have feelings of acceptance and peace, authenticity, honesty; challenges still come up, of course, but we don't waste time trying to get people to like and accept us. And he talks about how it's like, we can go from ... we can jump in all three of those, it's not like a perfect progression. You can be feeling really great



one day and then, of course, obviously, not feeling so great the next, but I really like this and I think it helps people get a perspective of where they are, currently, and where they need to go. So, I really like David Hamilton and next ...

Basically, one of the things I also try to help people realize that in terms of self-compassion and self-love, there are really four main components, as I see it. And again, they're probably more, depending on who you talk to. To me, the four main components are authenticity – you know, it's knowing who you really are deep down. Not so much, not just your favorite colour or flavour of ice cream, but it's really getting in touch with who you are at the core – what your core values are, your strengths, your talents, your spiritual and religious views, things like that. Another main component is being totally honest with ourselves and with others. And I have found with the people that I work with, and my own personal experience, being totally honest with ourselves can be kind of challenging. The third component, I would say, acceptance. Accepting who we are, all aspects of ourselves. Basically, it's really softening our hearts to ourselves and that's really a very important part. And finally, after all of this, it's not only knowing who you are, but having the courage to be who you are. That's probably been my biggest challenge personally, what really got me into the field. You know, it's having the courage to be who you are and not worry about what other people think of you.

Now with all of that, the biggest obstacle, the biggest obstacles to self-love and compassion is our inner critic. And I think we all have inner critics. I would define inner critic basically as, you know, I think everybody knows, it's the internal dialogue that we have about who we are, and how we behave. You know, actually, one of the things I recommend to people who – when I do workshops on the inner critic is to name your inner critic. Put a name to it and you can do that, and it's also easier to face them. Like my inner critic's name is *Tiny*. He taught me that. I didn't make it up, actually.

So, one of the people who I just love, who's one of the leading researchers in the field of self-compassion is a woman by the name of Kristin Neff and ... great book on self-compassion. She's done a lot of work on it. And she talks about how the inner critic, you know, obviously it's taken a lifetime to develop. You know, we've been hearing our whole life about, you know, who we are from other people, so to speak. Our teachers, our parents, you know, our culture, the media. And so, it's a lifetime of habits is the inner critic, and can be worked with, and it can be reduced.

The people I work with, the most confusing thing they find is that the inner critic – it sounds like us. It comes from that place in our heads where our thoughts arise, the voice sounds like us, so it's quite natural for people to think it is us and they think it's like a natural thing. But it's not natural. It's not who we are. And the thing with the inner critic, and again this is my personal experience, is that it can be devastating to our self-worth, our self-esteem, our confidence, our levels of happiness. And even affects all areas of our life including relationships, and our health.



One of the things she talks about, Kristin Neff talks about, the practice of self kindness is a very effective way to reduce negative self talk. And it's not just stopping the constant self judgment, that like I said, we think is normal but also requires us to understand ourselves, especially those parts that we've judged. You know, we need to understand them rather than condemn them. And what she talks about, it's about really actively comforting ourselves, and when we're hearing that inner critic talking in our heads, responding just like we would to a dear friend in need who was being criticized. And basically, it's really about making a peace offering, a peace offering of warmth and gentleness and sympathy from ourselves to ourselves, when the true healing can occur.

So, yeah, those are the people who I really love right now as far as the self-love type of work. Also, I would recommend, I'm not going to talk about her really, but I'd also like to recommend Brene Brown, for any of the people who are listening who aren't familiar with her.

**Laura:** Oh, I just love Brene.

**David:** Yeah, she's fabulous. Her books are, you know, *"The Gifts of Imperfection"*, and *"Daring Greatly"*, especially. I love her work. And in some of the workshops I've done I've spent a lot of time talking about her work as well. But of course, with my limited time, I think I'll move on to happiness if that's OK.

**Laura:** Yeah. Well, I'd love to share with you something that I heard. A French philosopher named Yann Dall'Aglio, he said that love is an expression of tenderness. And when I heard that I thought, oh, if we could love ourselves in that way ... when I think of tenderness, I think of we treat tenderly something that's fragile. And if we acknowledge our own fragility, our own ability to break and treat ourselves tenderly, in that way, love ourselves in that way. I believe that parents whose children are sick, it's very easy for us to see our children in that way and to love them in that way. But we forget to love ourselves that way.

**David:** Yes, mm hmm. That is so true. That's so true, Laura. You know, in my experience in education, being administrative but also being a special education teacher for many, many years, I've dealt with so many parents and while their kids weren't dealing with cancer, per se, you know, they had a lot of mental illness diagnoses, or learning disability diagnoses, and the parents spent so much time working with that, dealing with their kids, trying to help their kids, you're right, that they forget about themselves.

And that's one of the things that I really love to do, I love to work with parents and to help them get in touch with that tender softness for themselves, and it's so important. You're right, it's just so important.

**Laura:** Well, go ahead. Tell us about the happiness and well and being portion and then we'll talk more about your self-love and Happiness club.

**David:** OK. Yeah, sounds good. In happiness one of things that I really talk about and just love, and I know you've interviewed Mark Seton from [thepursuitofhappiness.org](http://thepursuitofhappiness.org) people, and



the work that they've done in terms of distilling a lot of the research down to like the Seven Habits of Happy People, and I just love that, and I tell everybody about that.

And just really quickly, the seven habits are like having quality relationships; you know, consistent caring for yourself and others, you know, exercise, but that also includes nutrition, getting enough sunlight and sleep. You know, the power of being in flow is also very important. Again, spiritual and religious engagement and meaning, using our strengths and virtues, and knowing what they are, and using them daily for a greater goal, something greater than ourselves. And to me, a real big one is the whole positive mindset. I spent a lot of time teaching people ... really what that means, is the areas of optimism, mindfulness and gratitude. Also, I think is really important in the whole happiness field and I think people need to understand is that there are three main factors that influenced my happiness. The research I discovered and just briefly, what they found is that about 50% of our happiness or central well being is actually determined by our genes, by our parents, our grandparents, even our culture. They all strongly influence just how happy we can feel.

Another area of influence is our life circumstances. They're finding that like between 10 and 20% of our life circumstances, in terms of our income, education, marital status, our health, all play a role in how happy we are. And finally, about 30 to 35% of our happiness is actually influenced by the way we think, and the way we act. And that's the area where we have the most control. A lot of work I do with people is in this area, in helping people in terms of how they're thinking and the way they're acting in terms of raising their levels of happiness.

Now the person who is my kind of like happiness guru, and I'm sure most people have probably heard, at least I know other people have talked about him perhaps, and that's Martin Seligman. He's considered like the grandfather of positive psychology. He's written a number of books but the most amazing book I've read recently over the last few years, I should say, is called "Authentic Happiness". And he's done a lot of work in the happiness field. And his latest work has to do with what he calls *perma*. And what he means by that is, happiness comes from these five areas:

P - positive emotions, which is what I mentioned before, such as optimism

E - is engagement with important things that would grow our happiness, so to speak

R – relationships ... and the thing is that it's not just romantic, all kinds of relationships; as long as there's a feeling of being connected, feeling open hearted, you know, you can experience intimacy on all different levels

M – meaning; having a life of purpose and meaning, not just pursuing pleasure and

A – which is I think kind of new to the work of he's been doing is accomplishments, which is really having realistic goals and ambitions and accomplishing things.

These things are all areas that really, you know, help, if you work on these areas, really help increase someone's happiness levels.



And I just want to mention really briefly, one final person who's got probably the most difficult name in the world to pronounce. His name is Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. And he's the flow guy. He's the guy who's done all the research on flow, and the power of flow, and you know that flow in terms of when you're experiencing something or you're engaged in some activity and when time stands still, so to speak; when it just disappears and you're just feeling in this beautiful flow and everything is going right, and it depends on the activity. And this is really also something that's really really important in terms of helping people engage and become like happier. I could go on for ever with this in this area, but I think I'll stop here and let you continue.

**Laura:** That's a great insight. So, tell us more about your self-love and happiness club that you've created.

**David:** OK, sure I'd love to.

**Laura:** And let me preface that question with what are some of the things that you teach there that we could share with parents whose child is sick, who wouldn't have the opportunity to attend?

**David:** Sure, okay, okay. Let me just really briefly tell you how I came upon the self-love and happiness club. It's like I mentioned earlier, I had gotten my coaching certification, and I remember finishing it and sitting on a friend's sofa and I was moaning and groaning. You know, oh, I got my certification. I don't know what to do with it. I know I really want to help people. But I'm not sure how. And my friend, you know she's a great coach herself. She was kinda sort of coached me. And after awhile, and a few questions and all, I realized eventually that I just wanted to help people like themselves more, and just feel better about their lives. Because, again, it comes from all personal experience. You know, I grew up really liking myself very much so. And so, she then asked me if I had ever heard about meetups. And I hadn't heard about meetups, so I looked into it, and it looked like, wow, this is like the perfect place for me to begin. So, I created the self-love and happiness club meetup and that's how that began. So, I've been doing, you know, these meetups for a long time, monthly, on various topics of positive psychology, especially self love and compassion, and the science of happiness. And you mentioned I also do workshops and I've spoken at conferences. And there's so many things in this area, of course, that you can teach ... your question in terms of what I could share with parents whose child is sick.

I think I mentioned earlier, I've worked with a lot of special education parents, and things like that, but nothing in this area.

So, for parents in terms of Kristin Neff, you know, she says, you know, at the end of the day, you're only asked to relax and to breathe, and allow life to be as it is. And to open your heart to yourself, you know. It's something that I would certainly recommend. In terms of doing that while practically, what I would recommend to parents who are open to the idea, is I





would do a lot of breathwork and meditation. I teach a lot of breath work in my workshops, and I teach about meditation, as well.

**Laura:** What is breathwork for someone who's never heard of it before?

**David:** Oh, breathwork. It's various kinds of breathing. If you pay attention to how we breathe, especially when we're under stress, our breathing is very, very shallow. And sometimes we even stop breathing if we're really stressed-out periods of time. And so, what I try to do is bring people's awareness to their breath. And to help them to always remember OK, let's breathe, breathe deeply. Breathing into your belly, you know, slowly and then breathing out. Even doing that three or four times whenever you think about it. It really helps tremendously.

I will often stop a workshop as we're going and "Ok, stop, let's all take a moment to do some breathing". It really does help a lot and there's real science behind it.

Because when you think about it ... the oxygen ... when you're under stress your brain is dumping a lot of chemicals into your body. And one of the nice things about breathing and getting the oxygen into your bloodstream, it reduces the stress hormones that are floating around in there. So, I hope that makes some sense in terms of what I'm saying. But yes, breath is so important.

Also, what I teach – and I really stress this a lot, especially for parents who have a child who is dealing with an illness - really working with the positive mindset of the seven habits; the three things that I mentioned before gratitude and mindfulness and optimism. A little bit of detail about that if you don't mind. You know, gratitude ... there is load of research on gratitude. It is really one of the keys for feeling better about yourself and feeling better about life. Just really briefly, some of the research that's done on gratitude - people who are grateful, their finding, you know, have less frequent negative emotions and more positive emotions. They have stronger feelings of social support, which I would think is really key with the people who are probably listening to the summit. And you feel less stressed and depressed. So, I would definitely recommend really doing it, and I'll talk about this a little later, I think in terms of how parents can specifically deal with gratitude with their child. The other thing, of course, is mindfulness.

And there are two keys to being mindful: being totally present, and then also being able to see the present clearly. And again, when you're dealing with very stressful situations, it's kind of hard ... in my experience, and with a lot of people I've worked with, it's hard to stay in the present moment. You're looking at the past; you're worrying about the future. And research is showing so clearly that being mindful, being able to stay in the present situation is just really, really helpful.

And how do we develop mindfulness and one of the best ways is meditation. And again, meditation doesn't mean that you have to sit on a meditation pillow in a Lotus position and sit there for an hour just saying Om or whatever. There's all different kinds of meditation.



You can do meditation for a minute. Just sitting quietly, paying attention to your breath, there's all kinds of ways. And I love teaching people about meditation. There's a ton of research on it.

There's a guy at Harvard, he's at Harvard MBA, called Neil Pasricha. He's the author of *"The Book of Awesome"*, which is a very, very popular book. But he also wrote a book called *"The Happiness Equation"*, which is amazing. And in that book, he talks about work that's being done at Massachusetts General Hospital. And what they did there in the study, what they did, they looked at brain scans of people before and after participating in a course on mindfulness meditation. And what they discovered is that parts of the brain associated with compassion and self awareness grew during the mindfulness training, while the part associated with stress really shrank. And there's a lot of evidence also to support this.

There's also a recent study coming out of Harvard that found just eight weeks of a meditation practice it rebuilds the brain's grey matter. There's so many things about ... and meditation, I think, for people who are really under stress - for whatever reason - is fabulous. I, to be honest, in my history, I began meditating in 1978 and it's one of the things, one of the main things, I attribute to saving my life. It's really that effective.

And finally, the third thing that I really think parents - I would really recommend parents look into is the whole field of optimism.

And the really cool things about that is that a lot of research has looked at the difference between optimists and pessimists, in terms of what they call the explanatory style. And what that means basically, is how an optimist or a pessimist would explain a positive event or a negative event.

And what they find is that pessimists generally when something happens like a negative event occurs, a pessimist will generally blame themselves. They'll believe that the event will continue and pretty much never stop and that it will affect all aspects of their lives. And research has shown that a pessimistic explanatory style - I think this is kind of intuitive as well - is linked with depression, stress, anxiety.

And optimists, on the other hand, if they experience a negative event, they see it more as temporary. They see it as caused by something outside force, they don't blame themselves. They also see it as only affecting a small part of their life and optimists, really the research on optimism is phenomenal in terms of it's really linked with life longevity, quicker recovery from illness, greater sleep quality. It actually protects against chronic disease, they're finding. And it helps with increasing coping skills.

So those are the things I really stress, and I would also like again, in our brief time, I can only go through a little bit here but these are the things that I think are really relevant to your audience.

**Laura:** Those sound-like incredible tools to teach their children.



**David:** Absolutely. A lot of the research out there, they actually talk about different things you could do, and I might mention that later if we have the time.

**Laura:** OK, great. I think you've covered the positive impact that has on their health, that it's going to increased longevity, those were some of the things you said. I also heard you mention that relationships are key to happiness. What do we need to know about the correlation between relationships and happiness?

**David:** OK. If you don't mind, Laura, just before I go into relationships, I just want to very briefly mention that I would recommend people who are interested to check out the Mayo Clinic's website. They have some really great stuff on there. They're doing a lot of research on the benefits of a positive mindset, as well as the benefits of reducing our negative self talk. And they have some really great stuff on there. They also, on their website, help people identify the negative self talk and give them ideas about how to change it, and how to have more of a positive thought-style. Also, one more thing, it's just that I would recommend also Harvard Medical School's website. And they also have a lot of stuff about positive psychology.

All right, now, to answer your question about relationships, yes. I don't know if Mark mentioned this when you talked to him but the thing that's so cool about relationships and how important they are, is that, you know, a lot of the research is looking at ... when researchers are even studying like, supposedly 'happy' people, like there was a really interesting study came out of the University of Illinois back in early 2000s, when Mark Seligman was part of it, and what they did there is they did some research and they found – they saw that the top 10% of these students were really, really happy. And they said, ok, let's take a look at what makes these top happy people really happy. And they found there was like one characteristic that they shared. And that was that they had strong ties to friends and family. And a commitment – now this is the important part – a commitment to spending time with them. So, this is a lot of research out there that suggests that people who are in relationships, and again, a relationship could be any kind of relationship, it doesn't have to be like romantic, you know, again, a close relationship where there's a heartfelt communication and a feeling of real support. This is what's really really, really important and really, like I said, there's a lot of research out there, that suggests that this could be like the number one factor in elevating one's happiness and sense of well being.

**Laura:** Do you have any suggestions for parents to help them help their child develop strong relationships despite the isolation of their illness? Of course, we want our kids to have lots of friends but how do you do that when you're isolated in hospital or at home?

**David:** Yeah, I can imagine and I'm sure you're aware ... there's a lot of research on the danger of isolating ourselves, you know, for whatever reason. And, of course, when a child's ill, a child's in the hospital, there's a lot of practicalities, of course, with dealing with all of that. And I also know and especially in my experience too that it is very common, that when we're feeling badly, either emotionally or mentally or even physically, it's very common for a



lot of people to isolate themselves. And so, what I recommend for parents is again, it's like these days, there's so many ways to connect with someone. It could be anyone. It could be anybody. It doesn't have to be like a parent, it doesn't have to be a caregiver. It could be another child. I think the key though, is to help someone really break through the resistance.

Now one of the things that I've read about, and you can help me here if this is not your experience, but my understanding is that the research is showing there are a lot of children who are dealing with cancer or some kind of catastrophic illness, and they tend to hold back how they're feeling. They don't want to burden their loved ones, their family, their parents or their siblings, or what have you. And that is something that when you're developing a relationship, or when the child is developing a relationship with someone, it's so important to really get the quality and depth of the relationship going. And to be totally honest, I think of as adults, I think sometimes we also, I know for myself, we tend to shy away from really opening ourselves up because we don't want to burden another person, but I think the research is really showing how important that is, to set the example.

**Laura:** That's a great part of the work of what Brene Brown shares around vulnerability.

**David:** Yes, absolutely. Being vulnerable and modeling the vulnerability is extremely helpful to other people who you're with, and who you're in a relationship with. Yes, Brene does have a lot of great work in that area. You're right.

And the thing is ... if a child is isolated in the hospital for example, you know, the wonderful thing about, you know, the world we live in today is the technology, you know. In terms of where the relationship doesn't have to be in person, necessarily. It could be online or so many ways where a child could be encouraged to develop a relationship with somebody even through Skype or Facebook, you know, various social things.

**Laura:** It's a life saver, I think.

**David:** Yes, I agree. Skype is such a wonderful thing. And even also, not only just doing that, but also the research is finding that if you encourage your child to journal, to write about what's going on for them. It's also very very healing and what really can help bring people close is when you write about these kinds of things and sharing your writing with another. The research is showing that is really really profoundly helpful for healing, and for fostering like really close relationships and it's one of my preferred methods.

One of the things I would also recommend, and I touched upon it before in terms of gratitude and I guess sometimes it might be hard to find things that you're grateful for maybe when you're right in the midst of dealing with problems and things that come up with, you know, cancer diagnosis and all the healing that's going on.

Coming up with a ritual ... and I actually did this with parents with their kids. I helped them create what we call a "gratitude ritual" or "gratitude game" where they'll get together with their child and they'll spend, even a minute or five minutes, maybe in the evening before they go to bed. Okay, let's share, or let's write down, or draw a picture, or do something and



somehow talk about we're grateful for. And research has shown this is extremely helpful. Even in terms of just, in healing but also in terms of sharing and creating relationship.

**Laura:** I have found when I have done those sorts of exercises, that it's so important to remember the little things; sometimes those little things can be that I am grateful that there are sparrows walking around on my porch that I can enjoy seeing them. Those little, tiny moments of gratitude can be just as important as saying the big things – I'm grateful for my spouse, I'm grateful for my child. It can be I'm grateful that the sun is shining today or I'm grateful that I can sit in a sunny window. Even though I can't go outside, but I'm grateful or I'm grateful for the sound of the rain on the roof. Or grateful for the fact that they got my order right, the food that I ordered was good. I sent my child the right thing.

**David:** Absolutely. Or the smile that my child got from that nurse today. Every little thing that happens. You're absolutely right. When I talk about like gratitude rituals, and gratitude games, it's you're right, it could be the littlest things. And the one cool thing about that is let's say for example you do create something ... what I began with is I would spend like a few minutes at night before going to sleep and list a few things I was grateful for. And again, most of the time it was really small things. But what I find happens when you do that over a period of time, you start to become more aware during your day-to-day activities of things to be grateful for. And you recognize them. And you acknowledge them. Wow, that was really, that person let me ahead in line today, that was really nice. I'm really grateful for that. And you start to recognize all the little, small things. And the small things really do add up. Absolutely. Absolutely true.

**Laura:** When you mentioned mindfulness earlier, it reminded me of the fact that mindfulness, how it creates happiness. You can only experience happiness as a **now**, you can't experience happiness yesterday, you can't experience happiness tomorrow. You can only experience it right now. Sometimes if you think of something from the past, but because you're thinking of it now, again. You can't project happiness into the past, and you can't project happiness into the future, you can only feel it right now.

**David:** Absolutely true. One of the things that I've experienced when I work with people – a lot of us have worries. But worries are, you know, are, as you know, are about the future. They're not about the present moment. And if a person's having trouble like stopping worry about something or projecting about something, I would have you, it's like bringing him back to the present moment. OK, tell me what is happening right in this moment? You know, is this thing you're worried about happening right now? And when you bring people's awareness to that, bring your own awareness to that, it really does help quite a bit.

**Laura:** Thank you for that, very much. I was hoping we could cover a little about spirituality and impact; how spiritually impacts our happiness. Should parents be encouraging their child to develop a strong sense of spirituality?

**David:** I'm glad you asked that, Laura. Because that's where my interests right now are really at. How do we integrate our spiritual and religious beliefs and experiences with everything



we've just been talking about? So that's a very exciting area for me right now. And of course, you know, it depends on, as far as parents go, it really depends on their own personal beliefs and experiences. But you know, the research has shown that it also depends on the child's beliefs and experiences and, you know, there's a lot of research on like adults, with adults in terms of how their strong connection to religion or spirituality really helps make them happier. And recently I came across a really very interesting research article it was published I think in 2008, somewhere around there. And it looked at the relationship between spirituality and happiness in children, ages 8 to 12. And how the researchers defined spirituality and religiousness was like, they said spirituality is basically an inner belief system; a person relies on for strength and for comfort, things like that. Whereas religiousness refers to what the adults we would be more inclined to in terms of religious rituals, practices, going to church, those kinds of things. And what they found, very interestingly, is that children's spirituality, what their inner belief system is, but not their religious practice, was strongly linked to their happiness. Children who were more spiritual, we're happier. And the really interesting thing, which really relates to what we've been talking about, in terms of what they found is that the areas of spirituality that helps someone find meaning and value in their life. And that area of spirituality, which really helps people create community or helps them develop more depth in their relationships. These aspects of spirituality were really strong predictors of a child's happiness. And what they found also, I would really recommend for parents, is that helping a child – what they found in terms of relationships we talked about the quality of relationships and helping people and helping children develop stronger relationships – what they have found is, what they recommend in this research article, is that using any kind of strategy that helps enhance a child's meaning in life, for example, having a child volunteer to help others even if a child is sick in the hospital, or in the hospital, being able to get out of bed, and go and speak to someone else, and try to help someone else and really kind of look at that, express any kind of kindness towards others – they're finding that this type of, I guess you could refer to this – you don't have to look at this as spirituality but it really is, from my perspective, spiritual – they're finding those kind of things really do help the child because it really goes along with what the research is showing, it's that inner sense of being open, that inner sense of helping others that really can help enhance a child's well being and their happiness level. So yes, I would strongly, in answer to your question, I would strongly recommend that ... of course, parents doing what works for them, but helping the child develop this inner spiritual sense really does make a big difference in terms of their happiness levels.

**Laura:** It sounds like what you're describing is teaching children how to develop altruism, to give of themselves without expecting anything in return, which creates more love. And I would say that all spirituality boils down to that, to learning to love, and to love others without expecting anything in return.

**David:** Absolutely true. Sometimes I'll talk about spirituality in the workshops. And sometimes you look at people, you can tell by the looks on their faces they just don't want to



hear about anything spiritual. And it's like, these aspects of spirituality can be very secular. You know, you don't have to identify as being a spiritual person or a religious person to do these kinds of acts of kindness. I'm sure we've all have experienced where we've done something little, and something nice for somebody. Just letting somebody cut ahead of us in line and we can see how grateful they are. It makes us feel good. It elevates our feelings of happiness and all. And so, you're having children finding some way where they can, you're right, be altruistic, help others, teaching them this kind of thing. It really will go a long way. It really does.

**Laura:** I know from my experience, my own daughter and the other children that I have met who have cancer, they typically have such a better perspective on life, and seem to be far more caring because of the things that they have endured and suffered themselves, that they are far more sensitive to other people and what's important. My own daughter, after she had finished her high dose chemotherapy and was finally four months later able to go back to school, and the other kids are complaining about petty little things ... for her, her life ... she had been close to death on at least one occasion, and she had gone through major surgeries and all of a sudden these little petty things were nothing compared to the big picture that she now saw. And so, she became-just had a greater perspective of life. And I found that a lot of these children who've been through so much do – they are far more generous, considerate, just have a better sense of what's important in life now, compared to the way we go through life before we've experienced any difficulty.

**David:** Yeah, that definitely makes a lot of sense. I definitely can see that. Yes.

**Laura:** Thank you for everything that you've been sharing with us, David. And the amount of time that you've spent sharing these insights have been terrific. I'd like to close our interview by asking you what is a website that people can visit to learn more about your work and the Pursuit of Happiness Project? About your self-love and happiness club? Where would you like to direct our audience to learn more?

**David:** Okay. It's so interesting that you ask me that because I've just recently ... I had tons and tons of content and webpage on the internet and I took almost everything down, because I really am trying now to integrate my spiritual aspects of everything. And I wanted to rewrite everything. So, if anybody's interested in more information, and if they have questions, I would recommend they write to me with my email address and then I could point them in the right direction. Because maybe by the time they write to me, I will have some stuff up on the internet. So, [david@davidekram.com](mailto:david@davidekram.com). I'd be happy to answer any questions or point them in the right direction. There's a whole lot of great resources out there and I'd be happy to help in any way I can.

**Laura:** Let me spell that out for our audience. That's D-A-V-I-D -@ D-A-V-I-D-E-K-R-A-M.COM. We'll put a link up as well and as soon as your website is available then we'll make sure that we have that link for people.

**David:** I'd be happy to help in any way.





**Laura:** Again, thank you very much, David. I really appreciate all the insights that you have shared, and we look forward to sharing them with our audience.

**David:** And thank you. It's been a pleasure and an honour to be here today.

*[Music begins lightly in the back ground]*

I really appreciated all the content David shared with us from the summary of positive psychology to David Hamilton's three stages of self to the description of Martin Seligman's Perma of Authentic Happiness. He covered so many important topics and ideas from the importance of gratitude, spirituality to breathwork and meditation. If you would like to see the complete listing of all the books that David referenced in this interview, please check out the blog post associated with this episode on my blog at [LauraLane.ca](http://LauraLane.ca).

To learn more about David Ekram please visit his website at [DavidEkram.com](http://DavidEkram.com) or feel free to email David at [David at DavidEkram .com](mailto:David@DavidEkram.com)

This 26<sup>th</sup> episode in the Hope Strength Courage Podcast is our final episode for the series but I invite you to check out all the other episodes if you haven't already. I highly recommend starting at episode #1 for my interview with world renown pediatric surgeon, Dr Bernie Seigel as we discuss how to talk to our children when they are ill.

Before we end our show today, we have one last segment. Over the last few years, I have asked other cancer moms what advice they wish they had known when their child was first diagnosed. I have compiled that information and will be sharing their advice each week. You can download the top 101 pieces of advice that I put together as a mini E-book at [www.twomothersoneprayer.com](http://www.twomothersoneprayer.com)

Today's advice comes from **Richard**:

He recommends having Prayer warriors praying nonstop from all over. Keeping them informed to consistently pray for healing and giving it ALL to God including all the worry and stress.

and the importance of reading passages of healing and ask others to send their favourite scriptures to get you through. Don't forget to add your child's name to Family prayer circles and having elders lay hands on your child during prayers.

Thanks, **Ricahrd**, for sharing that.

If you have advice you have learned along the way that you wish someone had told you weeks, months or years earlier, I invite you to fill out the contact form on our website [www.twomothersoneprayer.com](http://www.twomothersoneprayer.com) and I will be sharing your advice with our listeners on future shows.

*Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule today to listen to the Hope, Strength & Courage podcast. I look forward to sharing more experts and advice with you again next*





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