

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**KAREN FOLEY:** This next session at the Student Hub Live is all about self-care for your studies, and I'm joined by Meg-John Barker. Thank you so much for coming along.

**MEG-JOHN  
BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** You're both a-- you're on the counselling and forensic team in psychology. And we always like applying some of the stuff that we teach to students. So we've just been giving them some ideas on maths bargains.

**MEG-JOHN  
BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah, very important to think about. But now we're going to take some of these aspects around counselling and psychology and think about how we can apply those to ourselves, because so many students are really, really caring about other people. And then you ask what they're doing for themselves, and often, they don't treat themselves like they treat others. And you are also practicing and writing a lot about self-help. So I thought you'd be the best person to come and take us through all this.

**MEG-JOHN  
BARKER:** I'm very happy. And on the module that you're referring to, the new psychology module on counselling and forensic psychology, we've actually embedded self-care in the textbook and the VLE materials to help students think all the way through about how they might engage with it, self-caring. I mean, we partly did that because some of the topics, obviously, in forensic and counselling psychology can be quite tough, especially if you've got a personal or family history of those things. But I think it's important for everybody in whatever module you're taking, even if it's not directly relevant. So yeah, I'm really keen to chat about it with you all.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant.

**MEG-JOHN  
BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** So we've got some widgets that we'd like to have your feedback on, and these are, "I care for myself." So that's a continuum, so let us know where you feel you're positioning yourself on that. There's also a question about whether or not you agree or disagree that you would be kinder to someone else. So if someone came to you and said, I've got this going on, or whatever, would you give them the same advice if they were somebody else? Or would you be kinder if they were another person?

And we've also asked about some of the barriers, so some of the things that might prevent you from taking care of yourself. And we've listed but a couple there, because there's a limit on some of these widgets. But in the chat, you might be able to fill us in on some of the other areas that maybe you find difficult in overcoming, so some of the barriers that are facing you for self-care.

This must be an important thing with self-help. I mean, you can tell people how to do it, but what are some of the barriers then? And how do you promote this idea of self-care? It seems so good. You think, why isn't everyone doing it?

**MEG-JOHN**

**BARKER:**

Oh, no, I mean, there's huge barriers to it, I think. There's the practical barriers around time and money, particularly having enough resources, having enough energy for it, having enough time in the day for it, because it can feel we're adding in an extra thing. And if you're-- I was thinking about the situation a lot of our students are in, having to find the money for the course now, which is not something I had to do when I was studying myself.

With higher course fees, you've also got a lot of people caring for relatives. You've got a lot of people working full time and doing their studies. So it can really feel like a barrier of where do you put it. So that's definitely something I hope we can talk about a bit.

But also, there is a massive barrier internally as well, because we're taught to see self-care as quite self-indulgent or selfish and that idea that we should put others first rather than ourselves. So I think there's often an internal barrier of thinking. Either I shouldn't be doing this, or even I don't deserve it, because most of us have quite a strong inner critic as well that reckons that we should just be able to do all of the things without ever looking after ourselves in any way. Does that make sense?

**KAREN FOLEY:** Absolutely. We asked people if they'd be kinder to someone else, and 91% agreed that they would.

**MEG-JOHN**

**BARKER:**

Yeah, I'm not surprised, because usually, if you think-- it's a good tactic, actually to say, what would I do if a friend was in this situation? But yeah, you get up in the morning, something tough happens, and you're just like, no, I've got to plug on through. I've got to do the next thing. And you know if somebody else was going through that, you'd have said, oh, take a few minutes. Have a cup of coffee. Look after yourself a bit. Yeah, we're mostly our own worst enemy on these things.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Is this a technique you could use in self-help to prompt yourself to think about something that you might say to yourself if you weren't yourself?

**MEG-JOHN**

**BARKER:**

Yeah, I think so. I think thinking what would you say to a friend, that's often a good one. Yeah, absolutely, that's a good self-help tip. And also, I think it's a little bit about having a real think about what self-care would work for you and actually putting it into your day and your week and your month so it becomes a habit, so it's not something that you have to really think about each time, if that makes sense.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

There are all these barriers. I mean, you've mentioned a lot of them. And 30% of our audience have said time is a main factor. But interestingly-- and I would agree with this-- 40% have said it's guilt.

**MEG-JOHN**

**BARKER:**

Yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Self-care, I think 30% have said that they put others first. And indeed, many people are caring for others, either in a caring role or just generally being someone in the household who's managing a lot of other demands and needs. But these two issues are so important.

**MEG-JOHN**

**BARKER:**

Yeah. I mean, I think that one about caring for others, a really useful thing to think is, well, to start noticing when you are more self-caring, how are you with others, because I would argue-- and I think the evidence backs it up-- is that the more self-caring you are, the more you've got to give, basically. So actually, that kind of argument of-- the metaphor is often used online of the oxygen mask. You put your own on first before you put somebody else's. If you're not looking after yourself at all, it's really hard to have the energy to look after other people. And you can end up resentful about it, struggling with those caring tasks.

So it is important. And then it's important to do the self-care in a caring way as well, if that makes sense, because it can become another stick to beat yourself with about. I'm not doing

enough self-care. I should be doing more. And now I have to feel bad about that as well. That's not helpful.

**KAREN FOLEY:** No, I know. I know.

[LAUGHTER]

I know. The other day, I had been trying to get things done at home so that I could have some time to spend with the family. And by the end of it, I was ragged. I was so knackered. And they came home, and I was like, oh. And I thought, actually, what sort of greeting was that to people, when I was just on my knees with exhaustion? And I thought, actually, I was no fun at all, probably.

**MEG-JOHN BARKER:** Well, that's right. We then to forefront everything else and think, well, we'll maybe do the self-care if we've got everything else done. But then that's the day that never comes. So it's about giving it as high a priority as your studies and caring for other people and all of the other things you do with your life, not necessarily more, but at least as high a priority.

**KAREN FOLEY:** But in all things to do with counselling and even psychology, we like to look at our definitions. And self-care is one that I think is worth just-- what do you mean by "self-care"? What are some of the things that could be included in that?

**MEG-JOHN BARKER:** I think there's a lot of different ones, actually, so you can chunk it up a bit. But it's anything that involves looking after yourself. But so one would be getting your basic needs met.

So there's, again, a lot of useful stuff online of like a checklist. If you start feeling really bad, it's like, have you eaten today? Have you drunk enough water? Have you had enough sleep? Have you looked at enough pictures of cute animals on the internet? These are the basic needs, right?

[LAUGHS]

**KAREN FOLEY:** Especially cute animals on the internet.

[CHUCKLES]

**MEG-JOHN BARKER:** So that would be one kind of self-care, have you done those things? Another kind of self-care would be around are you trying not to do the things that you know are really quite bad for you? That would be one thing just like learning the things that really don't help and trying to not go

into those ones.

And then just kindnesses, just doing things that are kind to yourself. That's like treating yourself like someone who's worthy of kindness, really. So that would be our hot baths or listening to music you really love or anything, being with your pet, whatever gives you just that real sense of warmth and self-kindness.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And loving yourself, yeah.

**MEG-JOHN**  
**BARKER:** Yeah. And then a final one would be time for self-reflection. So you're not just going through, boom, boom, boom, getting things off the to do list. But you're actually giving yourself just even moments to pause and think, you know what? What space am I in? Is it a good idea to go and read that textbook right now? Or am I feeling like my concentration isn't all that. Actually, this would be better to go and get some domestic chores done and do that later. That kind of checking in and reflecting.

Or more long-term planning of like, OK, what have I got coming up in the next few months? Can I say yes to this extra thing, or should I maybe not do? So yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:** People in the chat room are saying that they have difficulties when the to do list is so long, and they don't feel there's enough time to actually sit down and reflect on things.

**MEG-JOHN**  
**BARKER:** Yeah, exactly. It gets like that. Mhm.

**KAREN FOLEY:** This space actually may be a good time to think about and share even some of those quick fix tips and things that can work for you so maybe we can pick up on some ideas that we didn't have before. How do you get around this idea of time and actually starting to build things up? Do you have to spend a big time reflecting? Or how does it look?

**MEG-JOHN**  
**BARKER:** No, I think building in as little bits of time first is a really good one. And I think there's something a bit weird about it that I feel like once you start living your life a bit more in this way, you do often find it feels like you've got more time rather than less. I can't guarantee that for anybody, but that's my experience is, weirdly enough, building that.

I suppose, maybe when you're just pounding through everything, often you do waste a lot of time. You do things when you're really not in the right headspace for it, so it takes a lot longer. Or you keep going onto Facebook and getting distracted, because you're really not loving it.

So again, this doing it in a more self-caring way actually, I think, will probably mean better quality of stuff that you're doing. You're enjoying it more, and you probably will feel a bit more spacious around it.

But, I mean, what works for me-- and it's not for everyone-- is certainly starting the day kindly. So I leave my phone upstairs, so I can't go straight onto Facebook and go, what's Donald Trump done now?

[LAUGHTER]

For example, would be one way. And starting the day with a nice cup of coffee. Actually, I go sit by the river and have a cup of coffee, but whatever anyone else-- then you're starting the day in that way, before you've got sucked into everything, everything. Again, it doesn't work for everybody's life, but maybe trying to put something in the early part of the day, where it's nice. Or thinking about how you do the commute. If it's like you're in the car or you're on the train, could you do something self-caring in that period?

**KAREN FOLEY:** Because those are your routine times, aren't they, mornings, where we often get in a pattern. And if you can shift that, that might be good. People are talking about and sharing ideas about MOOCs and mindfulness.

**MEG-JOHN** Yes.

**BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** And I know you're a big advocate of mindfulness. But equally, sometimes that can have connotations of, again, requiring a lot of time. But it doesn't always have to do, does it?

**MEG-JOHN** No, it really doesn't, but yeah, I think there's a real danger with mindfulness, again, that it

**BARKER:** becomes another stick to beat yourself with. I'm not mindful enough, and I'm not doing meditation properly. I've been doing it like 10-odd years, and I still don't think I'm doing it properly. So it's quite-- it's a challenging thing. But really, all it's about is, again, giving yourself some time in the day where you're just being rather than doing.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah.

**MEG-JOHN** So again, me and my cup of coffee in the morning. I stopped trying to do a formal meditation. I

**BARKER:** just try and be with a cup of coffee, enjoying the sensations of it, not worrying too much about if thoughts pop up in my head, just trying not to follow them too much, but just stay with being

with a cup of coffee. And sometimes it works better than others.

It doesn't have to be this kind of sitting on the proper kind of cushion in the proper kind of posture and doing it all the right way--

**KAREN FOLEY:** [LAUGHS]

**MEG-JOHN** --for hours at a time.

**BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** It's just being present, isn't it, I guess, and refocusing and centering on things?

**MEG-JOHN** Yeah.

**BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** HJ and Sophie, I hear there are lots of tips and things being shared. And so I just wanted to allow some space for some of that. What's happening?

**SOPHIE:** It's a really nice conversation going on. Everyone's been absolutely lovely, some really good ideas floating around. I really like Davin's idea to take time to recognise your achievements, no matter how small they may be. So if people could please send us some of their achievements from the last, I don't know, couple of weeks, couple of months, couple of years, we'll put them up on our board. So whatever you think you've achieved, let us know, and we'll put them up.

**HJ:** But, I think, earlier when we were talking about some of the barriers, some people were saying they just simply forget, because we're all in different habits. And someone said, "Barriers, having to work to pay bills." It's hard, among other things, to try and take the time out. And I think, for me, because of all this time put to other things, I either eat properly or sleep properly. I can't quite get doing both at the same time.

But Jordan is also suggesting working out. And some of the MOOCs looks really good, that people are suggesting. So Davin said, there's a Taoism and Western culture MOOC that really helped him about thinking different things. And Amanda mentioned that mindfulness MOOC on FutureLearn is also a really great resource.

**SOPHIE:** We have a poplink in the chat as well so that you can find it on there. But yeah, I know that, for me, it's very much I feel like I'm looking after myself if I'm looking after other people. That's my excuse is looking after others. So it is worth just making sure that you take the time to look

after yourself first.

So a lot of this, then, Meg-John, is talking about taught stuff, people going on MOOCs and thinking about things. Is there a sense that some of this can be taught and that there can be frameworks and be helpful to people? Is that some of what self-help is based on?

**MEG-JOHN**

**BARKER:**

Yeah, I guess that's part of my passion for writing this. If I didn't think it could be taught, I probably wouldn't be writing the stuff that I do. And I think, yeah, a mindfulness course or a book on mindfulness or an audio can be really helpful if it's brand new ideas to you. And it's about finding people who speak to you as well. It's not about, oh, I must go and do that particular one. But actually, check out a few YouTube clips and find, oh, that person, I really like the way they're talking about it. That works for me. Then you can hear that.

But I suppose, for me, a big part of it is that you've got self-care as this individual strategy maybe to help you be more happy in your life and maybe actually study better, for example. But also, there's the kind of cultural aspect of it, which is that we're all really taught by the wider culture to be incredibly self-critical. So we live in a culture that sells most of the products by telling us we're not beautiful enough or successful enough or happy enough. And therefore, we need to buy this book or buy this product to live our life in a different way.

So in a way, when we're doing self-care, we're actually resisting that whole message and doing something a bit different. And I think that's really important as well. So I think it's not just about trying to do individual techniques, in a way, trying to make ourselves a better person. That's almost like feeding the problem. It's about actually trying to think about these messages we get from wider culture about what we should be like and trying to be more gentle with ourselves in a world that's not very gentle, especially at the moment.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Can we talk a bit about how students might experience that with study? Because it just strikes me when you're talking about these expectations and things, that this is exactly the sort of thing that could happen when students are getting a tutor-marked assignment back. They could think, this is all criticism, ignoring all the good bits. It's got a grade. It's ultimately some form of, albeit constructive, criticism.

**MEG-JOHN**

**BARKER:**

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's a hard one, isn't it? Because when we're all taught to criticise ourselves so much, it's very easy to be reading constructive criticism and only hearing-- and taking it very personally as well. We're really feeling it that way. So I suppose, again, as a part of this ethos of self-care would be going easier on ourselves, not expecting ourselves to be



perfect, but recognising we have skills in some areas and really not in others, and that being OK.

Brene Brown, who writes all this stuff about vulnerability, who's done this really popular TED Talk and books about vulnerability, she says it's all about being able to be vulnerable and not trying to be perfect. And that's why you're doing this. And so again, I guess, trying to be OK with the fact you don't have to be doing brilliantly at everything all of the time. And yeah, and that you're valuable as a person without having to be producing stuff or getting certain grades or having certain successes in life. It's just you are valuable.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So some of this about the level of expectation and how we're meeting up to that, often when I'm teaching, I'll say it to students. They' say, I'm really disappointed. And I'll say, well, what did you think you should get? And they say, well, I hadn't really thought about that. I just think it should be higher.

And actually, we'll sit down and say, well, how much time have you had? How hard did you work on it? There are all of these factors that will go into something, aside from just sheer brilliance. So if you don't have any time, and if you've been sick, and all of these things, that will account.

But you were saying about these expectations of being beautiful enough and also being studious enough and producing a good enough thing, is part of this about setting your expectations and really reflecting on how much off the mark you are, I guess, with those, in all reality?

**MEG-JOHN BARKER:** Yeah, yeah, I'm thinking also about where some of those expectations come from. I mean, that's where we do get into the more mental health side of things, I suppose. But getting therapy or other kinds of support to think a bit about some of those ideas you've got about what makes a successful person. That's something we talk about a lot in therapy, where people have got ideas about-- most of us have this ideal self of who we think we ought to be, and then also a real sense of like, oh, my god, somebody might find out I'm actually this really fundamentally flawed human being. And that's where we feel shame is when it feels like that side's been exposed.

So another part of self-care, really, is about not striving all the time to be this ideal self, but realising that you are OK as you are, and that actually you're almost befriending that side of you that's really vulnerable, that feels like somebody is going to figure out that you're not good

at this, or that you do have these internal battles, or that kind of thing.

So in a way, through your studies, that could be your mission, to try and-- and in a way, then you get the bad grade, or that something doesn't go so well, there's one way of seeing it, where that's how you can most learn from those. It's that cliché of we learn most from our mistakes, or whatever.

Then Pema Chodron, who's an author I really like, has this thing about fail, fail again, fail better. Like failure is the best thing we can be, getting in terms of living better in the world.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I felt very relieved once when I failed something, because I've never felt anything ever. And I remember thinking it was the worst thing in the world. And after a while, I realised it never had to happen again. I could never fail for the first time again. I could only fail for the second or third or fourth time. But I thought, phew, thank goodness that's out of the way, because these things do happen.

People are talking about all these different things in the chat that are useful to them, so music and various things. Now surely, if you are an author writing self-help books and working on all of these wonderful modules, you must be in a perfect position to be the epitome of a calm and a relaxed person.

**MEG-JOHN** [LAUGHING]

**BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** But I imagine, as it is you're laughing, that that isn't always the case. So I wanted to talk about some of the things that you found. When you've been doing all this reflection, which we don't have time for in our busy lives, what are some of the things that you've either done and maybe discarded or things that are working for you? You've talked about the phone upstairs thing and about setting yourself up for a good start. But what are some of the other things people might try and use?

**MEG-JOHN** Well, I guess I would say, first, actually, part of the reason I write about this is entirely self-indulgent or self caring, whichever way we want to put it. But it's because I struggle with this stuff a lot myself. And then I think most people do. So it's good to normalise it and think this is a struggle that most of us are facing. And even if people are putting a very shiny, happy face on social media, that's not what's really going on. At the moment, people are really struggling full stop, I think, a lot of us, with everything that's going on.

So things I found useful for me-- I think about balance a lot. I think about the self-caring need for some solitude in life. So if you're just constantly around other people, it's probably not-- you need some time alone to do some other stuff. But at the same time, supportive other people is obviously a really self-caring thing. The more you're around people who are supportive, again, the evidence is really strong that supportive relationships are one of the best things you can do for yourself.

So, I mean, I try and think in a week or a bit, like looking at the week ahead, is it too hectic, too many other people? Or is it like I'm not actually seeing any friends? And trying to make sure I have a bit of both-- yeah, a balance-- in the week, with a bit of both of those things. I get a bit of looking after the body and thinking about when that's going to happen.

And as I say, the more you can plan it, then the less it's hard when you get to that day of, oh, no, I really should do something. Well, if it's already in the diary, or you've really thought about, well, I'm going to do this kind of physical activity with this person. So I'm definitely going to do it, because otherwise, they will be let down. You have to put stuff in place to make it happen, rather than just hoping that it will happen

**KAREN FOLEY:** I did this thing recently where I started thinking about how I felt after things. So often, I think, I really love saying this particular friend, or I really love doing this. But I realised, actually, that I constantly felt bad afterwards, because I'd either felt very burdened or overloaded or hyped up or whatever. And I started just thinking-- which I guess is a really quick way of reflecting-- is how did that actually make me feel? So I think it's a good thing to do, going out with a group of 20 people. But actually, I find it really, really draining.

**MEG-JOHN BARKER:** Oh, yeah, that's a big one for me. Those big public gatherings, I find really hard. So it's about, yeah, you start to tune in. And that's part of this whole mindfulness idea of just slowing down and noticing a little bit, just taking the pace down slightly and starting to notice, OK, whenever I do that, I find it really hard. So maybe I'm only going to do that if I have to do it at all on days when I've got super energy. And I'm not going to try and do that thing on a day when I'm already feeling a bit rough.

And it starts to help you think, well, who are my supportive other people? And who actually are maybe friends that it actually takes a bit more energy to be around than giving me any? And again, you need to balance there. It's all right to be giving a lot to people, but you do need to get some support back. And it may not be from the same people.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Is there ever a sense that sometimes when people are feeling very vulnerable [? and low, ?] they're not always in the best position to form connections and make decisions about what's right?

**MEG-JOHN** Yeah, absolutely.

**BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Because you sometimes forget, actually, going for a run makes me feel really good, because you're feeling really lethargic and don't want to do anything. Is it in any way useful-- have you got any techniques about things people might use to remind themselves or to make-- do you ever have a diary and just write "Things That Make Me Happy" or "Things That Make Me Sad"?

**MEG-JOHN** A list would be great to remind yourself. I mean, again, those checklists online are really good, that are kind of like you're starting to feel a bit low, just check, have I eaten something today? Have I had enough sleep or too much? It's just checking through those basics.

And then, yeah, having a list of the things that generally help, great. And letting yourself off the hook. If you are feeling really bad, then just trying to do something kind. And remembering, often things feel more overwhelming at that point or decisions are harder at that point. Actually, put that decision off. Procrastinate that decision to a time when you're feeling a bit better is a good idea.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I guess you could get a list, and it would probably be surprising what was on that list, because some things, things like, for me, having a nice bubble bath, or playing my cello. That can just take 5 minutes or 10 minutes. But actually, it can matter a huge amount. So this whole idea of time and money doesn't necessarily have to relate, because sometimes those small things, just having to close the bathroom door for 5 minutes and not be accountable to anyone, can really give me quite a big headache. But I forget it, because I'm normally just so busy with everything.

**MEG-JOHN** So again, it's a balance of the list of things. When you're really feeling rough, that's really useful. But also, trying to make sure there's something in every day.

**BARKER:**

The most depressed folks I work with, I say, daily kindness. Like if all you can do-- I remember one example of somebody who really struggled to be kind to themselves. And the first thing he

managed was just when he was looking at the sandwiches at lunch, instead of picking the one he thought he ought to have, he would pick the one he really fancied.

And it's like an upward spiral. You've spiralled all the way down to that point. But you start doing little things like that, and it just begins to turn around the direction of the spiral so it's going back up. And then you're starting to notice, oh, maybe walking is something great for me. Or maybe this particular person, I'll spend a bit more time with. Or maybe I'll watch my favourite series again, whatever it is for you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah. And just being able to vocalise some of those things and say, well, this is what I'd like, can be really liberating.

**MEG-JOHN BARKER:** Well, this is why I end up putting a lot of this stuff in the self-help books I do around sex and relationships, because it actually is a practise of tuning into yourself. And something we're really bad at in sex and romantic relationships is actually tuning in and saying, this is how I want to do relationships. This is the kind of sex I enjoy.

It's really, really difficult to, first of all, to know those things about yourself and then to say them to another person. So both of those books, they both start with self-care, which might seem kind of weird. You're expecting all these pictures of positions, and it's basically, this is attitude self-care.

[LAUGHING]

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, no, because it's important. It's all these ideas and these constructions of what we think we should be, isn't it?

**MEG-JOHN** Yeah.

**BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Sophie and HJ, I know there's a lot of chat going on.

**HJ:** Hm, yes, there's just a few comments that I'd like to pick up on that were relating to what you're saying. One of the things that we have been talking about is choosing the right time to do certain things in order for them not to stress out. So some people are talking about working and studying in the mornings, rather than the evenings, because they find it's quieter. And having less distractions leads to less stress.

But on your other point as well, Kate says she has a bullet journal where she writes down all the things she needs to do and remember to help keep her well in self-care. And we also talked about just trying different things out as well, because different things work for different people. And Davin said, "Failures are the stepping stones to success," which I think is really quite nice, because I think sometimes we just have to try things out. And if we feel that it doesn't work out, we know that there's always something else that we can try, which I think is a good point that you need.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Sophie, what about you?

**SOPHIE:** Yeah, it's been really lovely, loads of different nice ideas. We've also had Phoebe, who likes walking and a couple of busy households. So we've got Libby, who has home-schooled her children. And she has quite a lot of people in the house quite a lot of the time, so she finds it very tricky to get time to herself.

I know that I used to have that quite a lot. And I used to go to the coffee shop and do things like that, because that would get me out for a couple of hours. I'd treat myself to a coffee, leave my phone at home, which was the hardest bit.

[CHUCKLES]

And then at least you've done a good couple of hours of solid work. Even if it's only two hours, it's probably better than four or five sat at home, getting distracted every half an hour.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Actually, turning the email off and leaving your phone could be a really nice mental break, just come to think about it.

**MEG-JOHN BARKER:** Thinking about when you do engage online and when you don't is definitely good.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Not being available all the time for everybody.

**MEG-JOHN BARKER:** And I like that. I mean, I do exactly the same trick of getting out of the house and being somewhere else. And cafes can be really a kind place to go. Or if you haven't got the money, libraries and things like that as well. There's lots of nice places to go. And yeah, it can often feel a lot easier to work under those circumstances. But I also think in busy houses, maybe trying to make it a conversation that you're all having together and thinking about some things you might be able to do together that's more self-caring, as well as how do we respect each

other's space? And when are we going to give each other a bit of space to do this?

Because another thing that we found, Jacqui Gabb and I did that book about the enduring love study and long-term relationships, and that found that having a bit of separate time, as well as together time, was really valuable for people's relationships. So it ties in there as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Actually, now that we've stopped battling with this idea of having some family time at a certain time, and then we can't [? adjust ?] it, let's all just do what we want to do for this bit. It can be quite nice, because then you can all go off and do your own bits.

I want to just end by talking about the module that you're working on, because we're going to show a video afterwards that's part of that and part of-- well, it's available openly. And this is an interesting thing. You mentioned it's to do with counselling and forensic psychology and psychology, which is a really interesting and new mix for The Open University, and something that I know a lot of students are interested in when they can't decide quite what area they want to go at it at an undergraduate level. Tell us about it.

**MEG-JOHN BARKER:** So this is DD310, which is our forensic and counselling psychology module, or we're calling it Mad or Bad.

**KAREN FOLEY:** For short.

[LAUGHS]

**MEG-JOHN BARKER:** Yeah. And it's all about that. It's all about how do we figure out who we criminalise and see who as responsible for their behaviours and then maybe punish or try to rehabilitate? And how do we decide who we pathologise for their behaviours and see as having some kind of mental illness that needs treating? And how do we work differently with people who end up in the offender category and people who end up in the client category?

And it's really spot on again for these times, because it's making the point that a lot of things seem to impact who goes down each route, particularly things like race and class and gender and sexuality of who gets put in the Bad category or the Mad category and then, of course, gets treated really differently for it.

And so, yeah, so I've been writing about the sex and sexuality part of that module because that's my area. So we do talk a lot about-- sex crimes is one thing. But also, we cover, again, who gets criminalised and who gets pathologised for their sexual interests. And also, how we

talk about sex in the therapy room. And there's also a whole week on sex work as well, which again, is a real current area. So we're happy to get to cover that.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Oh, I'm excited. When is this coming out?

**MEG-JOHN** So this is going to be out in October. We've got so many cool resources as well, like the  
**BARKER:** animation you're going to see. But we've got a whole load of other animations in there and really good audio discussions and things. So yeah, I think it's going to be a great one for students.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Oh, brilliant. Well, Meg-John, thank you so much for coming and filling us in.

**MEG-JOHN** No problem.

**BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** We're going to show you one of the videos from that new module now. And if you're interested in that. look out for it. We'll put a little link in the Resources section. And also, Meg-John is rewriting the rules as well. We'll check in there as well for you to have a look at it if you're interested in finding out more about relationships.

**MEG-JOHN** I'm going to do a zine about self-care. That will be on my website soon.

**BARKER:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Oh, great.

**MEG-JOHN** Yeah.

**BARKER:**

[CHUCKLES]

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent. Lots of scope. I hope you found this session useful. Thank you, Meg-John. We certainly have. You've given us loads of ideas here. We're going to show you that video. And then we're going to come back and talk to some people from the OU Students Association, which I'm really looking forward to. So we'll see you in five minutes.

[MUSIC PLAYING]