



EUDAEMONIA

Connection, with John Kenny

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Kim Forrester 0:00

Belonging. Validation. Understanding and compassion. There's something magical in a shared moment of intimacy and openness. I'm Kim Forrester. You're listening to the Eudaemonia podcast, and today, it's time for a conversation about connection.

Intro 0:21

Welcome to Eudaemonia, the podcast that is all about flourishing. Plug in, relax and get ready for the goodness as we explore the traits and practices that can help you thrive in life ... with your host Kim Forrester.

Kim Forrester 0:41

John Kenny is an author, speaker and founder of interpersonal relationship coaching. John has worked with thousands of clients for over a decade - firstly as a counsellor, and in more recent years as a coach and hypnotherapist. It's my pleasure to be chatting with John today, to discuss the vital importance of human connection, and to learn how we can enhance our well-being through authentic and meaningful connection with others, and with ourselves. John Kenny, welcome to the Eudaemonia podcast. It's just a delight to have you here with me today.

John Kenny 1:14

Hello, Kim. Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to be here.

Kim Forrester 1:17

John, we're often surrounded by other people but I'm not sure that we're often connecting with other people in the way that we're going to discuss here today. What does connection mean to you? What is the added ingredient that takes companionship or conversation and turns it into true connection?

John Kenny 1:40

I think connection is something that is inherent in all of us. We are, as by definition, a group species, and connection was vitally important to the survival of that species. So I think there's an emotional kind of attachment, a safety, or belonging that is created between us when we establish that sort of level of connection that we're talking about today.

Kim Forrester 2:08

Now, studies actually show that we are profoundly disconnected from each other; we're incredibly isolated in our modern societies and communities. What is it, in your opinion, that prevents us from connecting with others in really healthy and helpful ways? You're saying that it's inherent in us and yet, what is it that stops us from sort of engaging in that kind of connection, particularly in urban areas?

John Kenny 2:33

Yeah, I think there's less necessity for it nowadays. We don't really need to survive as a group species because we all have our own individual lives, and there are many ways in which we can live our lives without ultimately connecting with anybody else. So I think it's a lot easier for us to disconnect. There's far too many distractions. We're not really spending as much time with each other as we used to. I mean, when I was a kid, there was one TV in the house, and now ... This is going way, way back. But, you know, we all sat around and watched the TV, we sat up at dinner and had dinner together. I mean, now there's iPads, iPods, phones, TV in every room, a thousand-million TV channels to watch, different places to go, things to do. And there's a lot of individual pursuits. And I think we're losing sight of what it means to be connected to one another because of all of these distractions. I think it's been really interesting actually, lock down. I don't know what it's been like where you are, and maybe where your your listeners are, but obviously, there's been trouble with certain relationships, because if they're unhealthy and toxic, and you're spending too much time in someone's company is going to cause a lot of problems. But because of the lockdown, and people spending much more time at home and as a family, I've noticed with quite a lot of people they've actually been saying much have enjoyed it - reconnecting with their kids or reconnecting with their partners - because they've had to spend time together. And there's only so much time you can spend on your Xbox or your PlayStation, or whatever it might be. And they're spending a lot more time together. So the only things they could do was sit in the house and then go for walks as families, and stuff. So this has helped them to reconnect. And some people have really reevaluate their lives and have decided they're going to do a lot more of these things in order to sort of keep that connection going. Because it feels ... it's a fulfilling space when you feel connected to someone. There are lots of reasons why we probably don't, apart from kind of individuality stuff that's going on at the moment. And these distractions ... I mean, at a deeper level there can be an avoidance, a fear, a vulnerability to connect. I know definitely in the work that I do that's very, very prevalent.

Kim Forrester 4:53

Let's talk about the work that you do because an important facet of your coaching is encouraging people to connect with the child they left behind. And this sort of implies that we are disconnected from our most pure, our most authentic selves. Would you say that's true, John? Have we disconnected from a sense of innocence and authenticity, and what challenges do we have to overcome to establish a deeper, sort of, true connection with that inner child?

John Kenny 5:30

Yeah, so there's a documentary that I made in 2019 about this. And it was about fitting in. And when we're children we're born with this kind of empty kind of vessel, apart from a few sort of bits and pieces that we get through our genes. But as our personality evolves, we learn to fit into the environment that that were brought up in. And if part of our natural sort of authentic self isn't accepted, or is told that it doesn't fit into that, then we do have a tendency to suppress that.

Because we want to fit in. Again, we are an inherently group species. And as babies, we need to belong, we need to be looked after and cared for in order to survive. So it's really important for us as kids to fit into the environment that we're brought up in. And I remember when I was a kid, I was told to stop being stupid; stop messing about; to behave myself. And all I was doing was just trying to kind of just have a laugh and a joke, and try and be funny, and just express myself. So that part of myself was a very much suppressed. And as I grew up, it was only when I had a few drinks, that that part of myself would show his face, because I dropped the conscious blocks that I had to be in that person, and was freely able to express myself. But it didn't feel natural, it didn't feel right, because I wasn't accepting of that part of myself. So I think it's really important that we are aware of perhaps those parts of ourselves that we don't feel like we accept - that we only let out on very rare occasions, and it feels maybe a little bit uncomfortable - and try and bring those parts back as a whole. So we can feel congruent, we can feel authentic. And all parts of our personality that we that we have, we accept and show off,

Kim Forrester 7:34

Let's go deeper into that concept. Because I'd love to understand, when we do connect with others or with facets of ourselves, and we don't necessarily like what we find there, is there value for us in those moments of connection? Is there value in us connecting with our child-self that we don't accept, or with other people with facets or values that we really don't resonate with? Is it still important for us to connect?

John Kenny 8:08

Yeah, I think it's important, definitely. There's a definite exploration that needs to go on there. If it's about you, if you're looking at parts of yourself that you don't feel like you accept, that might be because they weren't accepted when you were a kid. So therefore, is it that you're just dismissing them because you feel like you won't be able to fit into your society, or your relationships if you show that part of yourself? There may be parts of yourself that you aren't overly comfortable with. So I know that sometimes I say things or do things, and I think that's not me, actually, that's my dad. But it's been entrenched in my behaviour, because it's something that I lived with for many, many years. And I've learned that from him. But again, that doesn't feel right to me. And I challenge that now. Whereas before I would have gone along with it, but just felt quite uncomfortable with it. So again, that exploration of "Okay, is that really me? Or is that something that I've just learned from somebody else that I now exhibit within myself, but actually I'm not very comfortable with?" So by being able to connect with myself, I can explore that and decide if that's part of me or whether it's something I'm going to leave behind. When it comes to other people, what do they say? They say that the parts of you that you dislike is tendency in other people, is what is reflected in yourself. When we don't connect with others ... I'm not necessarily sure how true that is because I know there's definitely people that haven't got on with the past and they haven't been like me at all. And therefore, that statement isn't necessarily 100% true. But we are very judgmental of ourselves as well as we are of other people. But we don't have to connect with somebody that we really don't resonate with. And I don't think we would connect. We may have a friendship with them, or an acquaintance with them, or some kind of level of relationship with them. But no, I mean, if they don't ... if they're not on the same kind of energy level as us, or like you said values and principles, then we're not going to be able to connect with them too deeply anyway. And I think that's another exploration that we need to take into account is, we have a tendency to, in fact, unfortunately, form relationships with people that we might not necessarily be able to connect with on a deeper basis. That could again, be something to do with what we're expected to do what we should do, what we believe to be a protective mechanism. Because if we have some kind of maybe avoidant

personality, or a difficult relational pattern, we might try and connect with people, which keep us stuck in spaces that we've learned as kids. So, you know, if we didn't really connect with our parents a deeper level, then we might end up never connecting with anybody else because all we're used to is that surface level of connection. It's such a wide and varied kind of inner topic for us to look at, and to understand for ourselves. And then we will know who we really want to have these close relationships with, and to feel safe with those, too.

Kim Forrester 11:12

I do love that idea that it is wise for us to be discerning about those we try to connect with on a deeper level. Through all of this, though, John, through all of this, you know, conscious activation of connection, and discernment, and exploration, as you were saying, what are the benefits of it? Why are we undertaking this kind of deep connection with ourselves and with others? How does it help us flourish in life, when we can attain these types of true connections?

John Kenny 11:46

Yeah, so firstly, I'd say if you can connect with yourself deeply, you know yourself. And if you know yourself, then you can live a congruent life. If you don't have a connection with yourself - a healthy connection, let me just add to that - so if we don't really explore who we are and, and develop a healthy connection with ourselves, then we're generally going to live an unfulfilled life. There's always going to be a hole that never feels quite filled because we're not allowing ourselves to have that kind of genuine, authentic relationship with ourselves. Like ourselves. Praise ourselves. Love ourselves. And if we don't create that connection with us, then it's going to be very difficult for us then to know what kind of connections are healthy for us outside of ourselves, as well. I discovered many years ago, that my connection with my dad was always based around negativity. So my dad's quite a 'glass is half-empty' kind of person. And whenever something used to go wrong in my life, or if I used to get one over on the establishment, or something like that, I would always be ... the first person would be my dad that I've called. Because I'd learned to connect with my dad in a specific way. And that was to really engage with the negativity, and that's the only way I knew how to be with him - was on the negative basis. And since I've decided not to do that, our conversations are much shorter. And there is a different way now that we connect, because I've decided I didn't want to do that anymore. Even though it formed that the kind of the basis of our relationship, it wasn't a healthy space for me to engage with. So changing that has kind of changed the relationship that I have with my dad. And it's helped him I think, as well, to kind of step out a little bit of his space. Because we've connected on a much healthier, more positive level. And I think it's really good - it's a fulfilling space - when you can connect to someone more deeply, but actually more positively. There is a fulfilment side of that which we will miss out on if we don't allow ourselves to have those types of relationships.

Kim Forrester 14:01

So it's all well and good for us to talk about, you know, forming deep connections with ourselves or with others, John, but how do we get there? Are there particular skills or characteristics that we can enhance in ourselves that will help us connect? Do concepts like maybe curiosity, or compassion, or mindfulness play a role in learning how to connect deeply and authentically?

John Kenny 14:29

Yeah, I think all of those will probably be quite useful, because they're allowing you to have that space ... especially on compassion, you said, is a massive word. It's difficult for us to have compassion for ourselves, I think. Especially in the Western world, because we're not taught to do that. We're generally taught to kind of, you know, get on with things and don't really take the time to understand why we're feeling the way that we are and really understand ourselves at that level. And not blame ourselves for things. When I talk to my clients, they always talk about guilt and responsibility, and blame. And blame is a very unhealthy space. So the responsibility is okay to take with you, you know, you need to take responsibility for yourself and your actions. But we're taught to take responsibility for everybody else, when we're growing up. People say, "You make me feel angry", or "You upset me". You know, people can't find it really hard to accept responsibility for the things that when they're having a difficult emotional space, and we're taught to accept responsibility for other people. And that can lead us down a quite a dark path. But if we accept responsibility for ourselves - and that's okay, we do need to do that, because we are ultimately responsible for the outcomes of our lives. And if we are able to connect with ourselves at a deeper level, we can understand what our wants are, what our true needs are. And we can live our life searching for those and aiming for those, which otherwise we won't do, because we're just going to go around in this little bubble otherwise, not really knowing what's gonna make us happy and fulfilled. Maybe following sort of stereotypes and what we're led to believe is the right thing for us to do. And that's where your shoulds, and your 'have to's and stuff come in.

Kim Forrester 16:14

In your experience, John, does it take courage to connect deeply? Or am I overthinking this? Is it literally about just letting go and letting this natural process unfold?

John Kenny 16:25

Yeah, it's a very interesting word, isn't it courage. It depends on how you see the word. It's the same with the word vulnerability as well. Some people thrive on being vulnerable and that will help them to connect. Some people need courage. And if that's something that they need in order to feel that they're going to be able to overcome something, then that's, you know ... whatever works for them is perfectly okay. I don't particularly like those, because the meaning that I've grown up with courage means I need to be brave. But I don't need to be brave to connect with someone. And I need to just find it easy; I need to want to do it. But again, if courage is something that I think will help me to be able to do that, then I don't think there's anything wrong with the words. It's the same with vulnerability. If I feel vulnerable, to me, that always had a negative connotation. So I'm opening myself up to something that could hurt me, you know. But again, if you feel that being vulnerable is your way of opening up to someone and that helps you, then it's okay to use the words. So long as you're not giving them a negative meaning. So if you're using courage, but it actually feels a lot harder because you need courage, then I would discourage the word, because it makes everything feel a lot harder than it needs to be. But it's about understanding your blocks to connection in the first place. So why would you need courage? Why is it a vulnerable space for you to feel close to someone? Again, we would need to look at what happened in your childhood, or likely, to understand where that kind of sense of vulnerability comes from and why it seems like a hard thing for you to do to be able to want to be able to connect with someone in the first place.

Kim Forrester 18:11

John, in your answer there, immediately I saw that perhaps and one thing we truly need to connect with ourselves and with others, is willingness. Right? It starts with the willingness to do so. Would you say that's true?

John Kenny 18:22

Yeah, I think it is about recognising within yourself that this is what you want. And there needs to be a willingness to take that step, and have the kind of ... overcome perhaps the blocks that might stop you from doing it.

Kim Forrester 18:37

So let's expand this entire concept of connection because I'd actually love to know, do you think there's value in connecting with something greater than ourselves? And this to some people may look like faith, or a spiritual philosophy, or nature, or perhaps just wonder in life itself.

John Kenny 19:00

Yeah, I think everybody gets an uplifting experience from something. And if you can find something that, kind of, opens something within you, that allows you to have that level of connection with someone or something - I think if you can feel that within yourself, then it's a positive thing anyway. I like to believe that this comes from within us. But again, we come back to that willingness that you said. There's a willingness within us to connect. But if we can find something that lifts us and makes us feel that deep sense of connection with something or somebody else, then you know, everybody has their own personal way of doing things. And it's not for me to say what's right or wrong if you get a positive benefit from that. The only the only issue I do have sometimes is when people pass responsibility for their actions over to something thing else, and maybe put things down to fate or something like that. And they don't take control of their own space. But yeah, I don't know what's out there so I'm not gonna tell anybody to believe in anything. And if it does them some good, then great. Then that's amazing for them.

Kim Forrester 20:21

John, you've been exploring this concept of connection for many, many years. In your experience, once we learn how to connect with ourselves, or once we learn how to connect deeply with those that we choose to, is it a skill that we retain? So, once we've learned how to connect are we sort of like ... do we carry that achievement badge with with us for the rest of our lives? Or is it a process whereby we have to, sort of, keep tuning back in and reconnecting and re establishing connections?

John Kenny 20:52

I think that's a very personal, individual type of space. I'm very an avoidant personality, so I've had a lot of trouble deeply connecting with people in the past. And this is one of the reasons why this is something I'm so interested in, I've done a lot of work with. And I still have avoidant moments; there are still times that I don't want to be close to somebody. And I'll put the barriers back up again, because there's something going on in my subconscious that triggers that inside of me. But I do have the ability to - because I've learned to connect, because I've learned to let go of those barriers - I do have the ability to have to be able to put those to one side. So again, we come back to that

kind of awareness of, if you've got any reasons why it might be difficult for you to connect, to understand what those are. But yes, I think that once we learn to do that, I think if we're brought up in a very connected space, then it's something we'll always be able to do. Unless maybe we experienced some kind of major trauma later on in life, which affects the way that we see things and we put barriers in place in order to protect ourselves. Or maybe a loss of some kind might dent our ability to connect. So, I was talking to a client - in fact it was this week, funnily enough - and they have got a brother who has done exactly the opposite of them when they lost their father. So there, they grew up in quite a nice environment. When he lost ... when they lost their father, the brother has gone completely opposite ways. He's really shut down, he doesn't really want much to do with a family. He's really not ... He's protecting himself from future losses. Whereas my client has really engaged more with his family, and so his own wife and children, because he thought, you know, life's too short. You know, dad died very young. And he's decided that he wants to engage even more with his family, because he sees it as a benefit and a positive. So hopefully, his brother will come out of that space, once he realises it's safe to do so. Because he has already had that experience of being on a very close and caring and loving family. But again, if that block that he's now put in place to avoid loss becomes more powerful than his want to connect, then it is something that he will struggle with probably for the rest of his life.

Kim Forrester 23:23

Listening to you talking there, I can tell that coaching is your passion. Have you found a link between connection and passion? When we learn to connect deeply with others, or our true self, our inner child, in your experience do you feel it enhances our ability to tap into passion, inspiration, motivation?

John Kenny 23:45

Oh, yeah, definitely. Definitely. You know, I don't think we can be passionate about something unless there's a real connection. And I don't obviously mean, there's a hormonal thing going on. A completely different type of passion altogether. But yeah, I mean, even that is your brain telling you to connect. So even when we're in the throes of early relationships, and there's a lot of passion around, it's because our brain is telling us that we need to connect with this person because we want to end up having babies with them. And that's where that kind of early kind of relational passion generally comes from. But then as we develop that kind of different sort of sense of passion, then I think it is about, you know, finding that connection to something. But like you just pointed out, my passion is coaching. And I really feel it, because I'm connected. You know, I'm so involved with it, and I love it, and I allow myself to immerse myself in it. And it's something I just really, you know, couldn't do without nowadays, because I am connected to it and what it offers me, as well as what it can offer other people that I work with. So I think for you to have a sense of passion about something, there does need to be a connection. I mean, if you look at somebody that has a passion for cars, or motorbikes, or horses, or whatever it is, they're connected to that topic in a specific way. You know, they could probably tell you everything that you needed to know about something, because they're so passionate about it. And then they are connected. And then, you know, if you took that away from them, or they didn't have that in their lives anymore, there would be a real emptiness I think within them.

Kim Forrester 25:30

John, my final question is one that I ask every guest on the Eudaemonia podcast. Can you share a morning reminder, this may be a simple practice, or a mantra or an affirmation, something that can help my listeners become more connected in their daily lives.

John Kenny 25:46

Okay, so I don't really have a routine thing that I say anymore. I do have a routine in the morning, I get up and I have my breakfast, and then I switch off before my day starts. So I won't do any work for half an hour to an hour or so. And I'll just give myself some space before I start something and then, most of the time, I try and fit in some exercise. Keeping fit is a massive positive boost for me so I do my best to get my exercise done in the morning. So I can start off the day ... Well, when I used to really struggle with my relationship with myself, and I learned that I had a certain set of beliefs that I wanted to overcome, then I would wake up in the mornings, I would have some positive reminders popped around the house everywhere. So I'd do post-it notes all over the house, to make sure that everywhere I went in the house, I would remind myself of something positive about myself, because I really struggled with having a kind of positive idea of who I was. I've actually got like a 21-day positive mindset programme that I've put together and that is about, kind of, forming a daily routine, which is full of the things that you want to do. But not just that, but the positive kind of gratitude, appreciation stuff - something really positive to, kind of, start your day on. That could be mindfulness. So there's a mindfulness recording and stuff in there as well. And it's about people finding something that really works for them to get themselves either pumped up for the day, or mindful for the day, and in a good positive, healthy space to start the day. And again, that's what exercise does for me. Now, if I can get in and do a bit of exercise, even if I'm running out of time, I try and fit something 20 minutes or something in just so that I can start my day off on the right foot for myself.

Kim Forrester 27:39

And if people want to find out more about that 21-day programme, more about you and the work that you do, John, where can people go to find out more?

John Kenny 27:47

So yeah, I'm splashed all over social media. Probably like everybody else. If you just put John Kenny Coaching in your pop up somewhere. But if you wanted to visit my website, that's where the 21 day programme is, it's at www.johnkennycoaching.com.

Kim Forrester 28:03

Well, John Kenny, it's just been an absolute delight chatting with you today. I'm really grateful to you for your time and your wisdom. Thanks for coming and joining me on the Eudaemonia podcast.

John Kenny 28:12

Oh, you're very welcome. Thank you for having me. It's been a pleasure.

Kim Forrester 28:15

As the American philosopher William James once said, "We are like islands in the sea. Separate on the surface, but connected in the deep." You've been listening to the Eudaemonia podcast. If you'd like to learn more about how to live a truly flourishing life, please subscribe and check out www.eudaemoniapod.com for more inspiring episodes. I'm Kim Forrester. Until next time, be well, be kind to yourself, and connect deeply with life's amazing moments.