

POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

• A PATH TO AUTHENTICITY •

Episode Guide by Theme

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www.positivedisintegration.org

Over four years and 80+ episodes, we've explored Kazimierz Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration through conversation—with scholars, clinicians, community members, and each other. This guide groups our episodes by theme so you can find the conversations that speak to where you are right now. Episodes are available wherever you listen to podcasts.

Understanding the Theory

Start here if you're new to Dąbrowski, or revisit these to deepen your understanding of the core concepts.

Ep 1 Welcome to Positive Disintegration

Where it all began. Dąbrowski's theory, overexcitability as a tragic gift, and what it means to take a non-pathologizing approach to intense experience.

Ep 2 Overexcitabilities and Pseudoscience

The five types of OE, why emotional OE drives development, and a defense of OE research against pseudoscience claims presented at NAGC.

Ep 9 Complexity and Positive Disintegration — Lotte van Lith

Gifted development through the lens of complexity theory. Lotte guides intense adolescents and adults in Brussels through personal and creative development.

Ep 16 Overexcitability and Openness to Experience — Shelagh Gallagher

The relationship between OE and the Big Five personality trait of openness. What OE actually measures and why it matters for Dąbrowski research.

Ep 19 The Challenge of Levels — Stephanie Tolan

Are there more people at higher levels than Dąbrowski thought? "Stealth fives," the problems with how levels get used, and a challenge to some of the community's assumptions.

Ep 48 Piechowski's Insights on Positive Disintegration — Michael M. Piechowski

A conversation with Dąbrowski's collaborator, recorded for his 90th birthday. How he met Dąbrowski, their eight years working together, and his perspectives on levels and emotional development.

Ep 60 Dąbrowski 101

A modern take on the theory in a nutshell, created as a primer for the 2024 Dąbrowski Congress. Not a scholarly lecture—a conversation for the person going through it.

Ep 68 Overexcitabilities and Dąbrowski's Theory

Debriefing from NAGC. OE and the theory as it's being taught in the gifted education world today.

Living with Intensity

What it's like to experience the world with heightened responsiveness—and why your reactions are not pathology.

Ep 5 Researching Overexcitability — Frank Falk

Forty years of OE research with the late Frank Falk, social psychologist, statistician, and Director of Research at the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development.

Ep 7 Gifted Minds and Empathy — Fiona Smith

Over 20 years working with gifted children, adolescents, and adults in Sydney. Identification, understanding, and what it means to be an intense, sensitive thinker.

Ep 17 The Highs and Lows of Positive Disintegration — Elizabeth Mika

A Polish-born psychotherapist who discovered Dąbrowski at 15 through his advice column in a student magazine. Societal disintegration, the value of suffering, and why we need to huddle up.

Ep 29 The Disintegrating Duck

The Ugly Duckling as a story of giftedness, neurodivergence, and positive disintegration. Literary analysis isn't our normal wheelhouse, but this one landed.

Ep 32 You Are Not Alone! — Sophia Elliott

Fellow podcaster Sophia from Our Gifted Kids asks the question at the heart of Dąbrowski: why isn't everyone feeling this way? Storytelling, dark inner journeys, and the one message that ties it all together.

Ep 44 Complexity, Intensity, and Multiple Perspectives — Matt Zakreski

A clinical psychologist from the Neurodiversity Collective on working with neurodivergent, gifted, and 2e people. Holding multiple perspectives and the value of complexity.

Ep 52 Voice as a Mirror of Inner States — Laura Stavinoha

A classical singer and editor of the Dutch PD website on how the human voice reflects stress, OE, and developmental process. A unique lens on the theory.

Ep 67 Depathologizing Intense Experiences — Caitlin Hughes

A neurodivergent-affirming social worker in Brisbane on disintegration after identification, sensory and emotional processing, and what happens when others can't understand your ways of being.

Personal Stories and Lived Experience

Episodes where guests and hosts share their own journeys of disintegration, discovery, and growth.

Ep 8 Surviving Disintegration

Chris and Emma share their personal disintegration stories for the first time. What disintegration actually looks like from the inside. Content warning for suicide, depression, and drug use. A foundational episode.

Ep 24 Through the Lens of Youth — Seph (Lance) Johnson

A college student speaks about studying the theory as a young, overexcitable, gifted person. A fresh perspective on Dąbrowski. Content warning for suicidal ideation and depression.

Ep 33 A Personal Journey of Self-Discovery — David Sweeney

Not an academic or a psychologist—a fellow traveler. Discovering giftedness late in life, how early trauma shaped his abilities, and self-education through Dąbrowski, neuroscience, and mysticism.

Ep 40 Writing on Substack

Overcoming self-stigma and finding the courage to write publicly. Moving away from seeing yourself as mentally ill and embracing the theory as a way to reframe your life. Dedicated to Frank Falk.

Ep 56 Autoethnography for Personal Growth

Writing about your own life as a method of inquiry and autopsychotherapy. What autoethnography is, what it offers, and how it can become a way of life.

Ep 72 Healing Through Writing — Lil Jedynak

A gifted Australian writer, artist, and musician on memoir writing as a path through the gifted experience, and the role writing plays in healing.

Ep 73 & 74 Live From Wisconsin — Bee Mayhew & Pam Ryan

Recorded in person for the first time. Four friends, burritos, toffee, laughter, and the kind of conversation that only happens when you're finally in the same room.

Giftedness and Neurodivergence

OE and neurodivergent identity describe overlapping territory from different angles. Whichever language brought you here, you're in the right room.

Ep 21 GTN Awareness Week — Marc Smolowitz

The director of *The G Word* documentary on storytelling, intensity, intersectionality, and the urgent equity question: who gets to be gifted in America and why?

Ep 23 Explorations in Gifted Diversity — Jennifer Harvey Sallin

The founder of InterGifted on what giftedness actually looks like in adults, the great range of diversity within it, and the scarcity of people training others to work with this population.

Ep 25 & 26 Experiences Being Profoundly Gifted — Nth Bar-Fields & Joi Lin

A two-part conversation on what it means to be an outlier. Health differences in the gifted population, breaking socialization, intuition, and emotional intelligence.

Ep 27 Through the Neurodivergent Mirror — Tracy Winter

Neurodivergent coaching, mirroring, and the importance of being seen for your authentic self. What happens when coaches and therapists spark transformation—and some of the pitfalls.

Ep 30 Celebrating Neurodiversity, Giftedness, and Overexcitabilities — Katy Higgins Lee

A therapist working with neurodivergent adults. What neurodiversity actually means, how to be neurodiversity-affirming, and the role of environment and connection.

Ep 39 Disintegration and Neurodivergence — Joey Lawrence

A PDA autistic clinical psychologist and neurodiversity advocate. Lived experience in clinical practice and relationships, creating neurodivergent safe spaces, and reaching mutual understanding.

Ep 50 Giftedness and Personality — Deborah Ruf

The author of *The 5 Levels of Gifted Children Grown Up* on how personality type, circumstance, and giftedness intersect. How she incorporates Dąbrowski's theory into her work.

Ep 55 Giftedness Intersections and Transformation — Kaitlin Smith

A PhD student at Harvard and founder of Our Wild Minds, supporting gifted BIPOC people. The history of mind sciences, intersections with African American studies, and who gets included in the gifted conversation.

Ep 63 Diverse Voices and Gifted Belonging — Sheldon Gay

A late-identified gifted and neurodivergent Black man, host of *I Must Be BUGN'*. Giftedness in minority populations, mirroring, self-reflection, and getting messy with the shadow.

Ep 64 & 65 Reflections on Giftedness and Dąbrowski's Theory — Linda Silverman

A two-part conversation with the founder of the Gifted Development Center. IQ testing and its misuses, the history of working with Dąbrowski's theory, and challenges in the community.

Ep 82 Flourishing with AuDHD and PDA — Mattia Maurée

Coach and host of the *AuDHD Flourishing Podcast*. Finding the theory through overexcitabilities, flourishing with AuDHD, and working with PDA.

Inner Work and Development

The practical side of the theory—autopsychotherapy, values, dynamisms, and the work of becoming.

Ep 6 Autopsychotherapy and Self-Leadership — Kate Arms

What autopsychotherapy actually means, how it shows up in real life, and why people in the Facebook group keep asking about it.

Ep 13 Through the Dąbrowski Lens — Amanda Harper

Empathy, spirituality, and viewing life through Dąbrowski's theory. Amanda did both her master's and PhD on the theory in gifted education.

Ep 18 Engaging Transformation — Rachel Fell

Where applied philosophy meets unlearning, meaning-making, and integration. Co-exploration, participatory action, and positive regard as tools for real-world change.

Ep 20 Values

Dąbrowski's theory is infused with values at every level. What values are, why they're the jewel in the crown of multilevelness, and how they shift as we grow.

Ep 35 Dąbrowski's Theory in Practice — Patricia Gatto-Walden

Forty years working with gifted, highly gifted, and profoundly gifted people. Loving relationships, holding space, and getting to the golden core—the authentic person underneath socialization, trauma, and insecurity.

Ep 38 Regret

Recognizing mistakes and correcting yourself without beating yourself up. Reckoning with your own language, including ableism, and doing better.

Ep 41 & 42 Emotional Tension, the Shadow, and Dynamisms — Catherine Zakoian

A two-part deep dive into using the theory in clinical practice. Working with the three factors through symbolic play, reflecting astonishment back to kids, and the magic words: this is part of being gifted.

Ep 43 Trauma and Disintegration

You don't have to go through trauma to disintegrate, but it often does reach that level. Dissociation as a mechanism, why growth isn't guaranteed, and where the two experiences diverge.

Ep 49 Battling Socialization

Socialization isn't something that happens once and stops. It's an ongoing force—through media, expectations, and the goblin hordes that keep cropping up in our minds.

Ep 58 & 62 Walking Your Talk

Preview and full recording of the values workshop from the 2024 Dąbrowski Congress. Exercises for discovering your drivers and defining your values. Grab a pen and do the workshop along with us.

Ep 61 The Power of Professional Identity — Sarabeth Berk Bickerton

Hybrid professional identity—discovering who you are in the workplace when you don't fit a single title. For gifted adults who struggle to define their own role.

Ep 69 Mysticism, Spirituality, and Transformation — Lian Brook-Tyler

A shamanic healer whose father's death led to her recovering from years of chronic pain. Where mystical experience, awakening, and positive disintegration overlap.

Relationships, Connection, and Community

Co-regulation, sitting in the muck, building communities of care. Being in connection is biology.

Ep 14 Relationships and Vulnerability — Michele Kane

How Dąbrowski's theory transforms how we see our personal relationships. Michele has spent her career enhancing wellbeing for gifted people across the lifespan.

Ep 22 Nonviolent Communication — Bob Yamtich

Nonviolent communication as a path for speaking with empathy, even under trying conditions. The difference between needs and strategies, and how NVC connects to Dąbrowski.

Ep 28 Positive Disintegration in Organizations — Kate Arms

What disintegration looks like in workplaces and organizations—taking the theory beyond the individual for the first time on the podcast.

Ep 31 Gifted Connections — Celi Trépanier

Friendships, listening, holding space, being vulnerable, and pulling each other through the muck of giftedness. Bridging gaps between academics and those with lived experience.

Ep 59 Building Better Social Worlds — Sergej van Middendorp & Abbie VanMeter

CMM theory meets positive disintegration. How mindful communication and sharing our stories contributes to creating better social worlds.

Ep 75 Authenticity and Community — Gordon Smith

A licensed clinical mental health counselor whose practice is built entirely on gifted people. Unmasking, safe spaces, creativity, and building and fortifying communities of care.

Ep 80 Sexuality and Relationships — Heather Anne Keyes

A neuroqueer Gestalt psychotherapist on neurodivergent intimacy, non-monogamous relationships, healthy communication, and values. A topic the podcast hadn't tackled before.

Body, Nervous System, and Wellbeing

Story follows state. Start with the body first.

Ep 34 Mental Health Awareness

Recorded for Mental Health Awareness Month and dedicated to the memory of Frank Falk. Addiction, trauma, the theory, and why pathologizing intense experience does harm.

Ep 70 & 71 Suicide, Stigma, and Support — Stacey Freedenthal

A two-part conversation with a suicidologist and professor of social work. Chronic suicidality, what it means to sit with someone in pain, and the fact that these things don't resolve quickly.

Ep 77 & 78 Polyvagal Pathways to Connection — Autum Romano

A two-part exploration of how our nervous system shapes development and relationships. Why bottom-up regulation comes before top-down, PDA, neuroception, and the insight that changed everything: story follows state.

The Bigger Picture

The theory is fractal. It applies to children, classrooms, culture, and the species.

Ep 11 Positive Disintegration in Children and Adolescents — Tina Harlow

How the theory shows up in young people's lives and what it means to work with intensity in children.

Ep 12 Gender and Authenticity — Ellie Krug & Tamara Grady

Gender identity as a path through disintegration toward the authentic self. Two guests share their experiences with gender, family, and living authentically.

Ep 15 Creativity and Authenticity — Melissa Bernstein

The co-founder of Melissa & Doug toy company on open-ended play, a personal journey of self-discovery, and founding Lifelines to help adults discover their purpose.

Ep 36 Fostering Gifted Growth at Yunasa

Working with gifted kids and teens at Yunasa camp. The difference the camp makes in young people's lives and the value of sowing seeds for their journey to authenticity.

Ep 37 Self-Directed Education — Marni Kammerzell

A 2e parent and doctoral student studying cognitive diversity in education. What self-directed learning offers twice-exceptional kids and families.

Ep 47 Harry Potter and the Path of Positive Disintegration — Emily Strand & Katy McDaniel

A crossover with the Pottermory podcast. Disintegration, values, and character development through the lens of Hogwarts.

Ep 53 Red Flag Behaviors

How to spot problematic sources—from racism in Heathenry to transphobia in gifted spaces. Critical thinking tools for anyone researching a new topic.

Ep 57 Nurturing Giftedness and Overexcitabilities in the Classroom — Summer Cowick

An educator with 15+ years in low-income and Title I schools. Identifying OE in underrepresented populations and the importance of authenticity for students and teachers.

Ep 79 Crisis, Connection, and Fractals of Transformation — Richard Edelman

Species-wide disintegration, the deep neuroculture, toxic enculturation, and how individual and collective development are the same work at different scales.

Our Journey

Milestone episodes where we reflect on the podcast itself—how it started, what we’ve learned, and where we’re going.

Ep 46 Two Years of Positive Disintegration

How we met, why we started the podcast, what surprised us, and how it exceeded every expectation we didn’t know we had.

Ep 54 Navigating the Tides of Change

Our first Gift-a-Palooza presentation—and our first time presenting together. An introduction to the theory for the Gift-a-Palooza audience.

Ep 66 Three Years of Positive Disintegration

Musings, insights, and lessons from our third year.

Ep 76 Cosmic Connections — Bee Mayhew

A crossover with cosmic cheer squad during Emma’s visit to the United States.

Ep 81 Four Years of Positive Disintegration

A year of strong boundaries, living values, and the theory showing up in real life.

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