

# Talking Therapies: Navigating the cycle of emotions

With Alivia Rose

Suzy:

Hello and welcome to Talking Therapies, a podcast made together with Psychologies magazine and the UK Council for psychotherapy or UKCP for short. I'm Suzie Walker, and I'm the editor in chief of psychologies. Each month and talking therapies, we will be talking to a UKCP psychotherapist about a range of topics. When we enjoy a global pandemic, losing a loved one or finding out, we no longer have a job, it can result in a cycle of emotions difficult to process.

Alivia:

When a client comes in the consulting room, and sits down, they're ready. I normally asked what's brought them to therapy at this time in their life. And they're just relieved, they just tell me they just start to unburden and share what seems to them total chaos doesn't make sense. They're all over the place. So many different feelings are racing around. And it's a scary time. And often the question is, am I having a breakdown? Am I going mad? And at that point, I've got in mind where they are in the wave. And I'm thinking about this roadmap, and the cycle of emotions, and then the beginning to talk to them about this. The reassurance can come in the room that this is doable with, and we can work through this together and its familiar terrain for me.

Suzy:

That was UK CP psychotherapist Olivia rose. Prior to training as a psychotherapist Olivia worked for an addiction and drugs agency. With now over 35 years of experience as a psychotherapist, she continues to support individuals. Along with her private practice work. Olivia co presented an award-winning show for BBC Radio Bristol for over 10 years, and now continues to feature in articles and other news providing her psychotherapeutic insights. In this episode, UK CP CEO Sarah Niblock talks to UK CP psychotherapist Olivia rose to unpack the varying waves of emotion we can experience when something significant happens in our lives.

Sarah:

What do we mean by the term cycle of emotions? And when might we experience this?

Alivia:

When I've been in my consulting room, it's the repetition of this wave of the different emotions that are heightened times of extreme circumstances and increase with situations of crisis loss. And certainly, in this pandemic, I call it a wave as it can give a clear roadmap of the different extreme emotions we might go through. And an understanding that waves come and go, they peak, and then they recede, which is exactly what happens to us emotionally. But to put this in context, the range of emotions seem to be the same in all of us. But each person can experience the sequence of emotions differently. For example, some people might get anxious first, others may get angry, but we will all experience the same range of emotions in this wave. This is a roadmap and roadmaps can make us feel less out of control.

Sarah:

In terms of when we might experience it. Could you perhaps name a couple of typical scenarios where we might find ourselves engulfed in this wave?

Alivia:

When we lose somebody, and they pass away? When we are in this pandemic, when we've lost all control, this is about when we lose control, and what happens to us emotionally. So, in the pandemic, I've seen it in a very extreme manner over this last year. And I think it can kickstart irrational emotions and strong emotions, hence this wave.

Sarah:

And so talk us through the different emotions that we experienced during this way.

Alivia:

anxiety, fear, we can feel frightened have irrational fears and anxiety a bit like I said just now after loss, and the mind can start to go Will someone else die with the pandemic will I get COVID it can feel like uncontrollable anxiety which can feel like a bushfire jumping from thought to thought. thing is with all these things. I'm going to talk about they're all useful. anxiety can be a useful tool, so can fear. But it's when it feels out of control. And that's what we're dealing with today really is what happens when we feel out of control with our emotions. Then the next one is pain, upset, grief, and dealing with pain and loss. The question is, can we bear the pain, and often people think they can't, it could be a loss of a job, income, once identity in a beloved person passing away, it can throw us into extremely painful places. And then anger and frustration. And when we feel we can't control our anger at the situation that we're in, around the people around us, around lockdown around loss of someone, we can be very close, why did they die? Why did they leave me, it can make us very angry and frustration can just explode out. And then we may go into denial again, the roadmap works differently for different people, but the emotions seem to be the same. So, in denial, when we're cutting off from the situation that are causing these really deep and uncomfortable feelings, we can then disassociate, we can cut off, it's not really happening, we may say, it's all a dream, it's going on and the other side of the world, it doesn't impact me. And then we may have depression. And that's like the grey like fog that covers over all difficult feelings. It's a kind of emotional tea break, but it's a grey tea break. And then acceptance. And this is what I call the pause time when we've come through so many strong feelings in this strong wave and arrive at this moment. And we say this is the way it is. And I can accept it.

Sarah:

I think it's so interesting what you said there about depression offering a bit of a tiebreaker. It's almost strangely like some rest bite a brief lule, in this way. I wanted to just check whether there is any timescale, average timescale for these emotions. You mentioned, that is very personal, we see to each one of us who might experience this wave. But I wondered in terms of the ordering of the emotions and the time they take to pass it is there any general conclusion we can draw from that?

Alivia:

I don't think it's that simple, to be honest. And I think the more we understand we're in a wave. And that these emotions will come in their own sequence and go, the quicker the wave will pass. So, they're not so unfamiliar, and so terrifying, and so shocking, and so out of control, the more we understand ourselves, and what we're going through, I think speeds it up.

Sarah:

So, I was going to ask you, how much of this wave or cycle we can actually control. And you've mentioned there that just acknowledging and recognising that this is what we're in the midst of may be of some help.

Alivia:

I think knowing and starting to see an experience that these extremely strong feelings come and go can give us a feeling of being able to cope. And when we understand and put something into context, we can feel more in control. And then the wave moves in a quicker way because we have that understanding. We know this is going to pass.

Sarah:

Yeah, we're bearing witness to it as opposed to just being completely overwhelmed or immersed in it.

Alivia:

Exactly.

Sarah:

None of us live in a vacuum. There's always going to be external influences impacting upon us when we might be going through this whether it's loved ones or work colleagues, I wanted. Can others influence the way we experience this way?

Alivia:

I think friends and partners can definitely help temporarily in feeling not alone. I mean, being the only person in the world going through a really tough time can feel frightening and isolating. And with the right friends. It can feel supportive. I think the difficult Tea is when people desperately want their friends to make you feel better. Because they don't want you to be going through it. And they want you to stop feeling bad. Think that can feel not support as, as it can make you feel a bit mad, like have a cup of tea, have a hug, but not be listened to, can create a sort of Mad making internal feeling inside.

Sarah:

Yeah, the natural tendency is to want to distract or to somehow relieve loved ones of what they're experiencing when it might be better just to give them that space to articulate it.

Alivia:

Absolutely agree that I think it's really tough. I think we're trained as psychotherapists to deal and bear the unbearable, I don't think it's an easy thing to do when you see some new love and care for going through it. I mean, I want to do that, oh, have a cup of tea, have some dinner come over, you want to immediately make them better, but it doesn't work.

Sarah

And there's so much pressure in popular culture in the media. To think positive isn't that there's this real thing about reframing everything as a positive, everything is okay and being happy. And sometimes, you just need to sit in the muck, don't you, you kind of need to just sit with it. And as you say, acknowledge it, and allow it to pass rather than trying to necessarily cover it up.

Alivia:

There's a place for affirmations as a place for happiness. Absolutely. And I would hate to think that my clients are going to sit in a difficult time forever. The purpose of psychotherapy is that we get to a good place a good enough place where we feel happy and positive at times, and a lot of the time. That's what we're looking for. So, it's surviving these feelings, getting through them, knowing their manageable speeds them up, in my opinion, so we can get into a more positive place and a happier place.

Sarah:

So, tell me more about how like therapeutic support can help someone experiencing these waves of emotion.

Alivia:

As I said earlier, I think psychotherapists, I think we trained to bear what is really unbearable, like sitting in a room with someone absolutely in pieces, and not changing subject, not making them better. But being there and holding it. and supporting is a big ask. But I think all the years of training, that's what we're trained for, to stay with and allow someone to build really heard and understood. As we said, It's unusual in daily life. And that's what we offer. And I think also, we offer the understanding and the ability to be able to talk about these cycles about the wave. But we have a roadmap of understanding that I think allows people to feel contained and more in control. And the understanding that the temporary feelings of being out of control, emotion is okay. And those emotions need to be expressed, understood, and then they pass. And what we offer is a sanity and a calmness in the Ivor emotional storm.

Sarah:

If you described how for someone experiencing a life changing event that sparks that process of emotions, psychotherapy is probably one of the only spaces where you can sit for, say, 15 minutes. I know psychotherapy works in so many different ways. And have someone just unconditionally prompt you to articulate what you probably couldn't say to even your closest loved ones. Tell me a little bit about how it plays out. I mean, I know that every psychotherapeutic session is going to be unique to the therapist and their clients or service users. But is there a particular way a session might unfold?

Alivia:

Or I find that when a client comes in the consulting room, and sits down, they're ready, normally asked what's brought them to therapy at this time in their life. And they're just relieved, they just tell me. They just start to unburden and share what seems to them total chaos doesn't make sense. They're all over the place. So many different feelings are racing around. And it's a scary time. And often the question is, am I having a breakdown? Am I going mad? And at that point, I've got in mind where they are in the wave. And I'm thinking about this roadmap and the cycle of emotions. And then the big Beginning to talk to them about this, the reassurance can come in the room that this is doable with. And we can work through this together. And it's familiar terrain for me.

Sarah:

Or emotions can feel like a whole separate being can't buy and you're completely overwhelmed. And as you say, it feels like this thing has a whole life of its own. It must be very reassuring to actually hear that that is a perfectly normal reaction to what is probably an inconceivably traumatic event.

Alivia:

Definitely, I think so. And I think that's our job as psychotherapists is to be able to articulate that it's quite normal. And that we can all go through this, and that we come out the other side.

Sarah:

Is there anything else someone can do, if they're listening to this, inevitably, we're going through such turmoil as a species right now. So, people will be listening to this who are themselves in the throes of these emotions. And then psychotherapists don't tend to give advice but is there anything you would want to say to them.

Alivia:

I love giving a bit of advice now. And then, I mean, one of the things I think is really important, is to breathe. And I find being aware of your breathing is seriously underrated. But actually, putting attention into our breath for a moment brings us right back into the present. And a sense of, at least we can control something, be kinder to ourselves, we're going through tough times. Be nice to yourself, think of nice things to do for yourself, even if it's having a cup of tea, going out and looking at a flower, the daffodils coming out, and understand that you can survive this. And trust this will pass. Because it does. If you look back in your life, you have probably survived really difficult times at different stages. And so this too, will pass.

Sarah:

I think it's so reassuring what you said and couldn't be more timely. I think this is an evergreen topic. What I take away from what you said is that actually we shouldn't fear, this strength of emotion, that actually just like perhaps a reaction to a vaccine, when we feel rough, it may be a sign that our minds are actually healing, that the healing processes are underway, and that perhaps it's time to accept, acknowledge and work with this process. Am I right in thinking that this is really a healing process, and that we may in a strange way, need to welcome the sensations?

Alivia:

Think managing them and surviving them. Coming out, the other side is going to make us stronger. Make us know we can survive difficult times, especially in this pandemic, as you just said, who would know that we were going to be here? Not in my lifetime, I wouldn't have known that. But actually, I've had to find resources that I didn't know I needed to have to get through this. And I think this is a world issue, that we're all having to find resources to become stronger so we can come out of this. wiser and stronger. It's an opportunity to grow. I don't know if we can welcome it. That's a big ask maybe in five year's time when we look back, yes, we can work from that. But definitely, we can appreciate how it's strengthened us. It's been a really and is continuing to be in a mental and emotional gym, and we're working on the muscles.

Sarah:

Yeah, I love that analogy, that this is something we can work on. And as you say, coming through this we can come through with certainly a greater self-knowledge and perhaps respect for our own endurance and for those inner resources. And that's the thing that, for me, psychotherapy is such a powerful tool to help us to identify and activate those resources that lie within all of us that perhaps get dampened and forgotten a little bit in everyday life. I find this offers some hope. I think it's incredibly useful. And I think that being able to just envision a wave of emotions as a roadmap as a cycle, as a normal process is so incredibly helpful and reassuring. Olivia, thank you very much for taking us through this and I think offering a lot of words of comfort to listeners.

Alivia:

Well, thank you so much. It's been a joy to talk to you.

Suzy:

That was UKCP psychotherapist Alivia Rose speaking to Sarah Niblock, the CEO of the UK Council for psychotherapy, if after listening to that you feel you could benefit from some talking time with psychotherapist then go to the Find a therapist section of the UKCP website and have a look through. The website address [www.psychotherapy.org.uk](http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk) and use the Find a Therapist tool. We'll also be discussing the cycle of emotions in Psychologies magazine this month, or you can find us [online at www.psychologies.co.uk](http://www.psychologies.co.uk). We'll be doing a podcast each month with some of the UKCP's psychotherapists, so remember to like and subscribe to our channel to listen to it first. So, join again next month, till then thank you for listening and take good care of yourselves.