



Conscious Life presents

ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

Understanding and coping with climate anxiety

Guest: **Caroline Hickman**

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[00:00:10] Jaia Bristow

Hello and welcome back to this conference all about anxiety. My name is Jaia Bristow and I'm one of your hosts.

And today I am very pleased to be welcoming psychotherapist, researcher and University lecturer, Caroline Hickman.

Welcome, Caroline.

Caroline Hickman

Thank you, Jaia. It's lovely to be here.

Jaia Bristow

Thank you for joining us today. I'm really excited about today's conversation because I think it's such an important topic where we're going to be talking about eco-anxiety.

So do you want to start by telling us a little bit about what that actually is and how you got into this line of work?

Caroline Hickman

Absolutely. Well, I think the first thing to say, it's very much an emergent topic. By that, I mean, humanity has never faced a crisis like the current climate and biodiversity crisis before. Humanity knows how to navigate other threats, other crises, but this is completely new.

So eco-anxiety has been around for some years, but primarily being felt by conservationists, ecologists, people working in the field. Now what we're seeing is it's moving into the general population.

So the general population is starting to feel this stress, this anxiety about the climate. But it's not just climate, it's about the future of humanity, the future of the planet. It's an anxiety that we feel when we look at what's happening in the world. So it's an emotionally congruent, healthy response to feel threatened, to feel anxious.

We measure mental health by looking at our capacity to respond to external reality. And if you look at external reality with ice sheets melting, with seas warming, with air pollution, with heat domes, with

increased temperatures because of carbon emissions, it would make absolute sense, wouldn't it, to be anxious.

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In fact, I would go so far as to say... (dog barks) Wilfred would add his little voice here. But in fact, I would go so far as to say I would worry about people that weren't anxious.

So it's a really emotionally healthy response, but it's not just anxiety. Anxiety is the first thing we will feel, but that can quickly be followed by depression, by despair, by frustration, by anger.

So when we're talking about eco-anxiety, it's not just anxiety, it's a range of emotional responses which are healthy in response to the way the planet is changing around us. And we're watching this change whilst living with it, whilst trying to understand it.

And that's what I mean when I say it's emergent. So whilst I might say yes, I've been researching this for 10 years, I know a great deal about this. I would also say we don't know anything like enough about this. So because this is new, we're finding out about it.

So humanity doesn't really psychologically understand how to deal with this at the moment, but we are finding out through the research that we're doing, globally and locally, about how this impacts on people, how this impacts on people's mental health, alongside how it impacts physically. Because people are used to the physical impact of climate change, with heat, with rising sea levels, but not as clear about the psychological mental health impact.

So it's new for us and that means we have to have a little bit of humility and a little bit of openness to discovering what it means to live through one of these ongoing crises. And I'm sorry, this is not going to sound very nice, Jaia, but humanity deals with threats by thinking of, oh, what will it be like after we're over this? What will it be like when we're on the other side of this? What will it be like when we can go back to normal?

And we hear that narrative, that way of communicating about wars and about famines and about the COVID crisis. It's the way we frame it and the way we contain the worst anxieties. But we can't say this about the climate emergency or the biodiversity crisis. And the reason we can't do that is because it's already too late. It's too late to go back to the beginning. There's already so much carbon released into the atmosphere.

And this is one of the things that makes the eco-anxiety very different to other forms of anxiety. We can't reassure ourselves that way. Because the amount of carbon that's in the atmosphere, even if we went to zero carbon emissions tomorrow, which we're not going to manage to do, sea levels would continue to rise, heat will continue.

So we're halfway through the story now. We're not at the beginning of the story. Now, that does not mean we can't change the end of the story. We can change the end of the story. So this is not a completely doom and gloom story that I'm giving you here.

Jaia Bristow

I'm glad to hear that.

[00:05:25] Caroline Hickman

Absolutely. But what it does mean is when people split because of this anxiety as a way of managing the anxiety psychologically, they go to either doom and gloom, apocalyptic thinking, what's the point? It's all hopeless.

Or they go to the opposite end of the scale, which is, it'll be alright. The government will save us. Technology will save us. Human beings have survived worse things.

So you can see what we're doing. We're trying to regain psychological control of a narrative where, unfortunately, we are grappling with multiple uncertainties and insecurities. And it's that uncertainty and insecurity that causes people to try and simplify in order to self-regulate emotionally and calm themselves down.

So that's a very circular answer I've given you, but that is the landscape we're trying to navigate, which is multiple uncertainties, multiple vulnerabilities, and a lot that we don't know. But there is a lot that we are finding out through research and through clinical practice.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And I think it's a really good introduction to the topic because I think, as you say, one of the things you always worry about is people who don't experience anxiety around it. So I think it's great to remind people that anxiety is a total normal response to this situation.

And it's a situation unlike other situations, which can't be resolved by the normal methods we might use to regulate anxiety. Because as you say, a lot of the time when people are anxious about something, they focus on getting to the other side of the issue, like with pandemics, wars and all the examples you gave. And of course, there isn't really another side.

And it's really interesting that you're talking about how the two most common responses are either to bury one's head in the sand and I think ignore it or be overly hopeful that it will all get fixed magically without having to do anything. Or getting so depressed and worn out by it that it feels overwhelming and people don't know how to respond and what to do. And I think that's very common.

In my line of work, I work a lot around social equity, for example, and privileged dynamics. And it's similar. People can feel really overwhelmed. And if someone already has other forms of anxiety anyway, then these kinds of things, like just hearing you talk, I can feel myself getting anxious, as I so often do when I think about the climate crisis, because I feel so helpless.

And so before we make everyone even more anxious about this topic, let's start looking at, well, let's start looking at some of the ways to cope with it. And I also want to talk about, of course, generational anxiety because you and I, I don't think are quite the same age, and of course it doesn't impact everyone in the same way.

So let's also talk a little bit about the generational anxiety, and then we'll reassure people that we will get to how to cope with it. And I love that you say that we're halfway through the story, but we're not at the end and it's not all doom and gloom.

[00:08:42] Caroline Hickman

No, absolutely. It really isn't. We absolutely can have hope here, but it's a particular kind of hope that we need. What we need is radical hope, not naive hope.

Jaia Bristow

What is radical hope, then?

Caroline Hickman

Radical hope means it's an acknowledgment and acceptance. It's grounded in knowledge and awareness that things are seriously bad. And it's not shying away from that, not being defensive around that, not using defenses like denial or disavowal.

Disavowal is, I think, our favorite defense around the climate crisis, where we say, oh yeah, it's really scary. It's really big, isn't it? Oh, but I can't wait for this to be over because I want to fly to New York and go shopping for Christmas. And you think, whoa, hang on a minute. There's a massive cognitive dissonance here. These two things don't fit together.

And it's a way of minimizing our anxiety and stress whilst acknowledging that there is a problem. What it does is it doesn't allow us to act sufficiently rapidly, so it dismisses it. There isn't that much pure denial anymore. I think the majority of people are aware that this is a significant global problem. And all of the latest reports, the IPCC report, the UN reports, António Guterres is very clear about the significance of this, and we need to act urgently.

But we defend, don't we? And those defenses get in the way of us taking rapid action and that is the biggest problem, which is why this kind of conversation is so important to provide a container for this. And you're talking about the importance of people not feeling too much panic, but enough anxiety and enough distress to recognize that urgent action is needed, but not absolute meltdown and panic.

And you're also right with a couple of other things you've said here. One is the scale, and the scale is huge. So let me address that. And then we'll come back to a couple of other points.

So the scale is crucial in understanding this, because, again, humanity has never addressed anything on this scale before. With other crises, with other traumas, other threats such as wars or terrorism, I'm not minimizing these, there would be places on the planet that would not be affected by that. But that is not the case for the climate crisis.

The climate crisis is going to affect every part of the planet. You're quite right, not equally. So we'll address the social justice aspects of this in a moment. Because it's covering every aspect of the planet, it's what Timothy Morton says is a hyperobject. It means it's really hard to see and it's really hard to understand.

So you kind of think, okay, I'm really concerned about what's happening in India at the moment with the temperature rises. So you can engage with that and feel grief, you can feel panic, you can feel upset, you can feel scared. And then someone says, yes, but what about plastic pollution? And go, okay, right, let me worry about plastic pollution. So you engage with that, and then somebody says, yes, but what about sea level rise? You go, okay, let me engage.

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So you see, what happens, is we keep... So it's a systemic problem where all of these interconnected threats need to be dealt with all at the same time. But that can feel too big for our little human brains to cope with. And that's where it fits with the social justice argument and the injustice. And this fits for the intergenerational argument as well. I'll come to that from this.

You're absolutely right. It's not affecting people equally, geographically. It's also not affecting people equally in terms of age group and demographic in other ways. We know that children are infinitely more vulnerable to temperature changes as are older people. So there's vulnerability there in different age groups. There's vulnerability geographically. There's also vulnerability in terms of having the economic power to take action on this.

And this brings us back to where we started, which is, what is eco-anxiety, then? I just want to be really super clear that eco-anxiety is not just anxiety and stress about environmental problems. It is started by our concern about environmental problems, but what follows is the fact that these are problems that are caused by human beings. They're caused by people, the way people have acted. And the power to change this is in the hands of people.

So the eco-anxiety is the fear and the terror that we feel that people will not act sufficiently urgently to take care of other people who are going to suffer. So it's an anxiety about people abandoning other people.

And this is where it affects children and young people and people in the global south and people without their economic power or political power or voting power, it can affect them more profoundly because they haven't got the power to take action on this. And they can see that oil companies, governments, people in power have got more capacity to take action on this.

And then you can look at them and think, well, why aren't they doing this? A 19 year old said to me, he said, why are people not running around the streets terrified? He said, how come people are living their lives normally as though this wasn't going to affect them? He said, I can't do that.

And I think that's what happens with, and I know I'm generalizing, but with a lot of children and young people, as you become aware of this crisis, you can't go back to sleep, you can't become unaware because it shapes the way you think about every aspect of your future. Whether or not you're going to have children, whether or not you can fly somewhere, whether or not you should take out a pension, whether or not you should invest in your education, because this is impacting on the whole of your life.

Whereas somebody of my age, those choices are behind me. So although I've got, hopefully, some years in front of me, a lot of those choices and options are way behind me. And I wasn't worrying about the climate crisis when I made those choices for myself. If I was your age today, it would be affecting every choice I made about my own future. And it would seem crazy not to think of it that way.

I call that, I've come up with a way of thinking about this, it's like looking at your life through a climate crisis lens. It's like a lens that you put on a camera which changes the way you see. So you still see the same image on the other side, but there's a filter. And so the climate crisis can act as a filter through which children and young people, in particular, it affects everything, it colors everything, it shapes everything because you're thinking about so much of your future through that lens.

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And the defense is that older generations can use, more often, I know I'm generalizing, aren't available so much to you because, let me explain why. Because children mostly do not like unfairness, do not like injustice. They do not want to accept the unfairness that exists in the world.

And we see this through youth-led movements like the Black Lives Matter movement and the MeToo movement and the youth climate strikes, where young people are saying, no, hang on a minute, this is unfair, this isn't right, this is unjust.

And what we found in our research is that the suffering and the struggle that young people are having is around a form of moral injury, a hurt that people who should take care of you are not taking care. The governments, the adults say, oh, don't worry, we'll deal with this, but then are acting the opposite way.

And why that hurts is these are the people who are supposed to be looking after you and have your best interests at heart. So it's a moral injury, which is a form of hurt of your consciousness where somebody's hurting you and telling you it's not really hurting at all. You're left confused and betrayed and abandoned and hurt by people, and scared of the environmental problems.

Jaia Bristow

So there's a lot of layers to this issue. Because as you say, there's the very concrete, factual element of what's happening in the world and that the climate crisis and things deteriorating very quickly. There's the lack of faith around government and the responsible adults, as it were, and that can bring up a lot of personal trauma and history for people, as well as the systemic element.

And then there's, anxiety is very much founded a lot of the time in uncertainty, and there is so much uncertainty in the future. Anxiety is founded around fear and lack of safety. And as you say, there's not a single place on the planet which is not impacted by this. So, of course, there's not that safety.

And then it can feel like there's no one to turn to at times to hold these conversations, hold this space, hold this anxiety because everyone's impacted and everyone's feeding off each other with it. And so it becomes a really scary and almost taboo topic because it's like, what do we do? If we talk about it, are we feeding it? What can we actually do?

So I'd love to spend some time talking about that, so that people, I think, who are listening to this are probably aware before listening, hopefully, and even now, especially by listening, of the severity of the issue, of the multilayers of the issue, how it impacts people on all these different levels. And so how can we cope with this anxiety when we're living in the reality of this disaster and this crisis?

Caroline Hickman

Absolutely. Well, the first thing I would say is there's good news here. There's always some bad news, but there's also some good news.

Jaia Bristow

Let's start with the good.

[00:19:30] Caroline Hickman

We'll start with the good.

And the good news is that I have found through my psychotherapy practice and through the workshops that I've been running for youth activists, through parents, support groups work brilliantly. What people need is listening to other people and support from other people and the mirroring and the reflection and the stories and the understanding and the empathy from other people so you're not on your own.

So you need to deal with this collectively. It's not an individual problem and I would not want to individualize it. So I wouldn't want to say, oh, this person, this individual is eco-anxious. I would want to say, well, let's form a group. Let's form a community because actually everybody's anxious.

Now, we may not be anxious equally, but we all share that concern. We need collective solutions to this. It's not an individual problem. It's a collective problem. It's a social problem and is psychological, but actually there's far more power to act collectively and in groups. So groups are very comforting.

The other thing to do is to think about what amount of anxiety you're feeling. And so I tried to develop a range so that we can understand it better. So don't be scared of it, turn towards it and get to know it more. I'm not going to sound too cliché to say, make it your friend, but you do need to understand this because it's not going to go away just by burying your head in the sand or wishful thinking, and thinking somebody else can deal with this.

It is an opportunity, therefore, to develop psychological resilience. And it's an opportunity to develop emotional maturity and emotional intelligence because those are the things that will help you navigate it. Don't be under any illusion, you're not going to be able to completely get rid of your anxiety or control your anxiety, but you can absolutely live your life in a way where the anxiety is part of your life that doesn't take over.

What you don't want is the anxiety to be suppressed or denied or shut out, because if you try and do that, it'll come back with a vengeance. It's like locking a group of puppies in a room and then you open the door and then there's chaos because they're all out running around all over the place. Don't lock it away. Don't try and get rid of it.

Equally, you don't want to live with it so it's absolutely overwhelming you and in your face and over your head 24/7. You don't want it absolutely all the time. You need to take breaks from it, but you need to keep it in conscious awareness here alongside you as part of your world, because it is part of our world now, but not overwhelming you, but not in denial. Because if you deny, it will get pushed into the unconscious and it'll, like I said, come back within absolute vengeance.

Learn how to talk about it. I say to parents, make this part of everyday conversation with children so you don't save it up and then once a month have this big scary conversation, which in itself is traumatizing and overwhelming. Don't treat it as something that isn't part of everyday life.

So the way to think about that, a different example of that is, you wouldn't dream, if you've got children, even young children, and mommy and mommy or mommy and daddy were getting divorced, you wouldn't dream of not talking to your 2 year old, your 3 year old, your 4 year old about that. But you would use language and you would use metaphor and you would use ways to explain to that child what was happening.

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So you didn't terrify them, but they weren't sat there thinking, what's going on, where's mummy gone? Because children will fill gaps with their imagination and their fantasies. And they'll go online. They're not stupid. They'll go online, they'll find out for themselves.

So what you want is children to be informed, but informed in ways that you've digested the information for them and you give it to them in a way that they can understand. But if you try and exclude it from their lives, then they'll just have fantasies.

I'm going to quote an 8 year old, Sofia. I have to use her name. I'm in terrible trouble if I don't. When I started my research with children, I talked to a lot of children and said, how do we talk to you without terrifying you about this? And she said, well, she said, you've got to tell us the truth. She said, because if you don't tell us the truth, you're lying to us. She said, and if you lie to us, we can't trust you. If we can't trust you, we can't tell you how we feel. If we can't tell you how we feel, we're on our own with this.

I love this child. I think she should be running the world. She said, but don't tell me all the bad news all at once. Tell me some bad news, then some good news and some bad news and some good news. She said, anyway, she said, I'm not a baby.

So a way to think about this is we need not to be babies. No matter what age we are chronologically. We have created this, we are culpable, and one of the best ways to deal with that is face that, take responsibility for it and say, what can I do?

The, what can I do part needs to have a mixture of what I call external and internal activism. External activism means, yes, pay attention to recycling, to reducing your carbon footprint, to taking what physical, practical action you can take in the world, to joining campaign groups, by becoming an activist. Anything and everything that you can do which helps you feel that you are actively engaged in this is going to be valuable.

But don't be judgmental. What you might do might be different to what someone else might do, but they're all equally valid. That needs to be balanced out with internal activism.

Internal activism means taking care of how you feel. It means taking time out. It means nurturing yourself. It means if you are getting stressed and overwhelmed and getting towards burnout, step back, take some time out. A lot of activists and people who throw themselves at taking action on this subject do run the risk of burnout and overwhelm because you're trying to save a planet.

So you only need to save your bit of the planet and the person next to you needs to save their bit of the planet. And if we all join together and save our parts of this problem, and I don't want to oversimplify this, but I want to get that balance between collective and individual action, between internal and external activism, and between short-term and long-term. There are short-term things we can do, but we are also in this for the long-term.

I also think we need... a significant part of this is about repairing our relationship with the natural world. Because frequently, and I know I'm generalizing again, I'm sorry, but frequently in Northern industrial Western society, we've absolutely lost that connection with the natural world and with the importance of biodiversity and that interconnection and dependency on nature. And we've forgotten that we're part of nature.

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Now, for a lot of people, spending time in nature is very nurturing, it's very healing, it's very helpful. For a few people who are super anxious, extremely anxious, it can trigger you. It can make you feel worse because you just look at the trees and you look at the world and you think, we're destroying this. So you have to find the right way for you. And again, don't judge.

But spending time in nature and certainly repairing that relationship and thinking carefully and thoughtfully and making conscience led decisions about your diet, about moving towards plant based diets, about reducing the amount of driving, flying, and reducing consumption is very wise. But I also think we have to do this on a global scale.

So I want to come back to where we talked about the emotional, because I don't want anybody to get rid of my eco-anxiety or my distress or my anger or my frustration. I want to support people in shifting into a different relationship with it so that it's part of your life.

Because my anxiety and my distress is a really important way of connecting empathically with other people, with feeling as though I am part of this collective struggle and I'm not on my own with it. And it joins us up rather than separates us out.

And the young people that I talk with in Nigeria, the Maldives, in Brazil, and the older people as well, we may be living on different continents, we may have strong differences between us, but we have a shared collective love of the world and a shared collective desire to do something about this together.

So the international webinars, the international movements are really comforting because you really get that sense of trying to work together around this. And there is more that we have in common than we have that separates us at a human level, and for me, that's enormously comforting. And that can reduce some of the more severe end of the eco-anxiety.

At the mild end, we're often reassured by recycling or that people will do something, that we'll take care of it. The more significant end, we've lost faith in people. We've lost faith in people's ability to take care of each other. We feel betrayed, we feel abandoned, we feel hurt, and then we can retreat away from people. We can go into ourselves.

So anything that helps reconnect us through love, through compassion, through care, allows us to convert eco-anxiety into eco-care, eco-compassion, eco-empathy, eco-community.

So what I say to people, you're feeling eco-anxiety. You're only feeling eco-anxiety because you care. If you didn't care about the planet, you wouldn't feel eco-anxiety. I don't want you to judge that. I want you to feel proud that you care.

So actually, I want to transform your eco-anxiety into something productive. I don't want to get rid of it, but we can transform it into something productive and creative and imaginative because it's that lack of compassion and care and pride in care, which actually underlies the shift that we need in humanity.

This is a transformational moment in history for humanity. Gus Speth is famous for saying he used to think the solution to the climate crisis was technological. And he has now discovered that he thinks it's selfishness, apathy, and greed.

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So actually, one of the best ways to tackle your eco-anxiety is to tackle selfishness, apathy, and greed in humanity. That is reparative. We have wounding and hurt ecologically, emotionally, psychologically, soulful, spiritually, practically, economically, in terms of justice. But actually tackling it through selfishness, apathy and greed makes us all feel better.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. So there is a lot of information that you've just shared, and I think it's fantastic. And I just want to highlight some of what you've said because it's really interesting.

Someone was telling me about a debate they had with someone about whether to create change in the world, whether you need to be motivated by fear or hope. And I think it's a bit of both.

And that's what I'm really hearing in what you're saying. When you feel this anxiety, anxiety, it's an uncomfortable feeling, but it comes up. It's like a warning bell. It's showing that there's something that wants to be looked at. At least that's how my therapist describes mine to me.

And so in this case, like you say, having anxiety is not a bad thing. It's a good thing. It means you care. But anxiety can be paralyzing, especially when we live in an individualist society.

So everything you've been sharing around communal support, communal solutions, and remembering that we're not in this alone. This impacts everything. And so often I think activists feel like they have to take the weight of the world on their own shoulders.

And remembering that because everyone is impacted, there are many other people who care and there are many other people who also feel like they want to do something but don't know how.

So by coming together and finding communal solutions, communal support, by embracing, as you said, your anxiety and recognizing it because it is rooted in something very real. It's not just based on some mysterious fear that is from the book you read or something like that. It's factual. And so it's important to recognize the facts and to find the balance in yourself. It's the whole, put your own oxygen mask on first before helping someone else on the plane.

So what you said about taking breaks, looking after your wellbeing and your mental health is super important. And again, activists forget this often. So it's okay to take breaks. Yes, we live in it, and yes, it's imminent in some ways, but the chances of the whole world ending tomorrow are pretty small. I see you, but hopefully there's time for self-care as well.

And again, do self-care with other people, I think is what I'm hearing. And a lot of what you were sharing is the same advice I hear from other therapists and people talking about more general anxiety or other forms of anxiety around not dismissing and knocking away the anxiety, but not being so identified with it that it overwhelms you and totally paralyzes you and you can no longer function.

So it's finding that balance. It's finding that community support. And then I love again what you were saying about the internal and external. I think that's so important.

And again, on this conference, we offer so many different practices people can do, from mindfulness to Qigong to yoga to DBT, EMDR, all these different tools that can support you for creating that inner

space and inner balance so that you have more grounding to go out into the world and do this kind of work.

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And as you say, it's also important to do external things. You talked about recycling, reducing consumption, diet and consumption of all the things that are endangering the planet. And I think again, the word reducing rather than feeling like from overnight we have to go from 100 to 0 or 0 to 100 depending on what it is. It's okay to take some time and to educate yourself and to do things progressively and together.

So hopefully I've summed up the important points of what you just said.

Caroline Hickman

You summed it up beautifully. And there's a few more things I want to just add in response to what you've said. You summed it up beautifully.

I'm always fascinated by that debate about what motivates people, fear or hope? It's the carrot and stick argument. And actually, the argument itself is pointless, because, you're absolutely right, it is both, but there is another stronger motivator than either fear or hope, and that is love.

So it's not either or. I would never go for an either or solution to this. I don't think you want to have an either or argument about this unless you just want to pass the time and have an interesting debate with somebody. But actually it's a circular debate because you can always argue both sides of that. It's binary, and it's that binary splitting psychology that has got us into this mess in the first place with the climate crisis.

So actually, we need to navigate that through a both and solution, and find non binary solutions. It's not about either not flying or recycling or this or that. It's both. It's always got to be both and. And love is infinitely more powerful than either fear or hope.

Wisdom, we're talking about wisdom and wisdom embraces the shadow. Wisdom embraces the pain, the loss, the humiliation, the depression, the despair. When you listen to people talk about their journey of understanding around climate and biodiversity, the depression and the despair is crucial in developing wisdom and resilience.

Somebody asked me a couple of years ago, how do you develop psychological resilience, emotional resilience? And I said, well, you fail and you mess up and you get stuck, and then you despair, and then you rage and then you fall on the floor and go, I can't do it. And then you get back up and you try again, and then the whole cycle repeats over and over again.

And what that does is it gives you that rooted, gritty, emotional resilience that we have to despair in order to achieve that. The trick here is to feel all of this, feel the guilt, grief, rage, despair, shame, feel it all. But don't get stuck in any one of those feelings. Allow all of them.

So you want, what I call, and a friend of mine who's an ecologist laughs at me for this, Elouise, thank you, but I call it a biodiversity of emotions. So we need that emotional biodiversity to help with that radical uncertainty that we're navigating.

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So the metaphor I use for this, which is very practical, I'll give you this, is think of yourself as a bus, any kind of public transport. Let's have an electric bus, even. On every seat in that bus, there is one of your emotions. There's your 5 year old self, there's your teenage self, there's your raging self, there's your depressed, despairing self, there's your rebel self who is empowered and saying, we're going to deal with this.

Every part of you has a seat on the bus, and you don't want to kick any part of you off the bus. If you try and get rid of your depression and your hopelessness, you throw them off the bus, imagine it. You shut the doors and you drive off. All you're going to do is see them in your rear view mirror, running behind the bus, trying to get back on the bus. And then when you stop the bus at lights, they're going to be hammering on the door, trying to get back on the bus.

This is the problem with depression and despair when we try and get rid of it out of our lives, we live in fear of it haunting us, pursuing us, controlling us from the unconscious, from behind. Keep your depression and despair on the bus. Let it have its turn at the steering wheel, but not 24/7. If I don't feel depression and despair every week for an hour or so, I'm in trouble because then when I get to the end of two weeks, I need to feel depression and despair for four or five days to play catch up.

Every emotion needs its turn. So it just depends who's got hold of the steering wheel. Now you don't want your baby self to be given the steering wheel, because that's not a wise thing to do. You don't want your depression to control the whole of you and drive the whole of you the whole time.

You need a conductor. You need a part of yourself that says you, over here, you, it's your turn. I want my optimism to be part of this, but I also want my depression to be part of this. Because any part of you that you disallow, comes back hurt and angry and furious, and then will fight to get back in.

So you want that emotional maturity and relationship with the different parts of yourself, which then says to you, and this came from a webinar in the Philippines, their opening question was genius. I thought it was brilliant. They said, this is the Philippines, they said, is it okay to not be okay around the climate emergency?

And we all said, yes, it's okay to not be okay. And I'm okay with not being okay. I'm not always okay with not being okay. I have my moments where I say it's there, and this really sucks. And I really wish this wasn't happening.

Jaia Bristow

Exactly. And I think that's so important. And I love that metaphor. And I love the idea of our emotions being an ecosystem and the biodiversity of emotions and our emotions being an ecosystem themselves.

It's like, I sometimes think, why do mosquitoes exist? I wish they didn't exist. But then I found out how important they are in the whole ecosystem and balance and stuff. And I think it's a little bit like that sometimes with our emotions, there's some that are definitely harder to be with and more frustrating and that we'd like to get rid of, but if we get rid of them, then we lose that balance because they all work together.

I'm mindful of time and I'm so sad to have to let you go soon because I think this is a fantastic conversation and I feel there's a lot more we can add.

[00:41:17]

I just want to thank you again for bringing in this topic, for everything you've shared. I think what you were saying as well to just remind people around the both and. As you said at the beginning, there's all these different issues happening and they all need addressing. So not to judge people who are focused on a different issue to oneself.

And that ultimately if we all work together and address these issues, then there's love, love for the planet, love for each other, love for humanity, as you say. There's hope and yes, there's still some fear as well, and they all work together to get this work done.

Caroline, how can people find out more about you and your work?

Caroline Hickman

That's beautifully summarized and that is a beautiful summary of that radical hope, which is that, well, we might be going off a cliff, but we're going down fighting.

So think about yourself working in relationship with the planet. It's not just about people, it's people and the planet.

You can find out more about me and my work through my website, caroline-hickman.com.

You can find me on my website, my email, caroline.hickman@yahoo.com.

There's podcasts that I've been doing, there's short pieces I've written, psychotherapy, individual psychotherapy and workshops.

Get in touch. It's all about relationships. So the more we work together to develop this work, I'm always interested to hear what other people's thoughts are about this.

And thank you, Jaia, for inviting me to be part of this. I've enjoyed talking to you and you're very skilled at summarizing very long answers. I'm really impressed.

Jaia Bristow

Thank you very much and thanks again for taking part. I really appreciate it and I really appreciate you and all the amazing work that you're doing.

Caroline Hickman

Thank you.