



Discover Your Emotional Style

Alex Howard

Hi, I'm Alex Howard. Welcome to this session and also welcome to the Trauma and Mind Body Super Conference.

My hope is that this session will serve as a helpful introduction for many of you coming into this conference from different perspectives. I know some of you are coming in because you've had your own challenging journeys healing and recovering from trauma.

There are others of you working as practitioners, helping support and guide those on their healing journeys.

I know there's many others which may be quite new to this area of trauma.

So I hope to bring some value and speak some important principles for all of you in this session. The session is also one of the free gifts as part of this conference, so you have ongoing access to this. I hope this will be a session that will be worth revisiting on a number of occasions.

We're going to get into some really important material in this session. So to give you a bit of a rundown of what we're going to cover, we're going to talk about what trauma is. I think there can be a lot of misconceptions, misunderstandings. I think a lot of people think they haven't experienced trauma when really they have. And I want to get into that and explain why that might be the case.

We'll talk about how trauma shows up, some of the different ways that trauma can impact you. We're going to talk about the safety cycle, this is one of the responses that says that we have to trauma, which can very much perpetuate suffering.

We're going to get into the six emotional styles. The six emotional styles are a model and framework to understand the different strategies that people tend to use when they've been through different traumas in their lives, as a way of trying to cope and trying to deal with those impacts. But although these styles can have their place in normal, healthy functioning, they can very much perpetuate the suffering that we're experiencing.

A key point that I'm going to make today is, it's not just the events that happened to us, it's how we and other people around us learned to respond to those events. And often what's happening is we're re-traumatizing ourselves day after day by the habits, the patterns, the ways that we've learnt to respond, as a result of the traumas that we've been through. And I think this has great potential to help liberate and free us from that ongoing suffering.

We'll talk a bit about how to discover and how to find your emotional style. We'll talk about what a healthy emotional life looks like. I think many of us can be quite confused about what we are supposed to do with our feelings and emotions. Are we supposed to just shut them down and get rid of all the negative feelings, or are we supposed to be constantly feeling and expressing them? Like, what is a healthy emotional life? We'll talk about that.

But just before we get into this in some detail, let me just give a little bit of an introduction to myself.

So I came to this work, like many people, through my own health crisis. I suffered from chronic fatigue syndrome, otherwise known as ME, for seven years, as a teenager. And for the first couple of years, I was really just waiting and hoping that someone else was going to find the answers. I was taken to see many different practitioners and doctors and various people. And after a couple of years, it wasn't that I wanted to end my life, I just couldn't see how I was going to continue to live my life with the level of physical and emotional and psychological pain that I was in each day.

At this moment of crisis, I was helped greatly through a conversation with my Uncle. If you've seen Lord of the Rings, my uncle was a bit like Gandalf in Lord of the Rings. He didn't have a wizard hat but he used to sort of appear out of nowhere, sometimes with just the right words of wisdom and insight that would help kind of point me in a new direction. And then he would sort of disappear off into the sunset, metaphorically speaking.

And in this conversation, he really helped me realize that if I wanted the circumstances of my life to be different, then I was gonna have to be the one to change them. And this set me off on a five year healing journey, where I read hundreds and hundreds of different books on health and psychology and nutrition, meditation and yoga, and saw, I think something like 35 different practitioners.

At one point I was taking over 70 supplements a day. I don't recommend that, by the way. I did many, many, many hours of meditation and yoga and psychotherapy and groups and ended up doing a degree in psychology, and winning the best student award for the British Psychological Society.

I went deep into my own healing path and on the other side, I made a full recovery and I ended up writing a book about my experience book called *Why Me? My Journey from ME to*

Health and Happiness. And that seemed to inspire many other people to want to go on their own healing paths.

I should say, I'd also done training in various forms of brief psychology and psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, NLP, life coaching, EFT. And I ended up, as a result of all of the demand for people to have help and support, setting up the Optimum Health Clinic.

Niki Gratrix, who is cohosting this conference with me, was the co-founder of the clinic and set up the nutrition department. Anna Duschinsky, who is also appearing as part of this conference in the sessions we're doing on therapeutic coaching, founded the psychology department with me.

And the Optimum Health Clinic - this was back in 2004 - so in the 16 or so years since then, has gone on to become one of the world's leading integrative medicine clinics specializing in fatigue. We've worked with well over 10,000 people in 45 countries around the world. A team of 20 full time practitioners. It's now a registered charity in the UK and we've published research in the British Medical Journal Open.

I've written papers for psychology and health journals, medical theory and practice. We published in Medical Hypothesis.

So we're heavily focused on the evidence base behind the approaches that we have been developing. We currently are setting up a randomized controlled trial on the approach here in the UK, and although in no way would I be saying that trauma causes chronic fatigue, for many people, trauma is a part of one of the impacts on someone getting ill.

It can also be part of the experience of living with a condition like that, and so over the years, we've learned a lot about working with trauma, healing, trauma, identifying and understanding trauma.

And through these many years of work on the psychology side, Anna Duschinsky and I have come up with a methodology called Therapeutic Coaching. We've been teaching practitioners in this for over 15 years. And the method that I'm going to talk about a little bit today, of emotional styles, is one of the models that comes from Therapeutic Coaching.

But let's get into what is trauma? When we're talking about trauma, what do we mean? Because I think a lot of people will say, I haven't been sexually abused. I haven't been in a warzone. How can I possibly have trauma?

Well, trauma is an impact to the mind, emotions or body that occurs as a result of distressing events. Trauma is often the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with that experience.

Now, there's what we could call Trauma with a big T. You know, things like sexual abuse or being in a war zone or going through a very destructive divorce or separation or being abandoned as a child by your parents and being sort of left in a very distressing situation. Some people will have experienced that and certainly we're going to speak to that. I'll talk to that in this session. But also we'll talk to that very much as part of this conference.

But many people haven't experienced Trauma with a big T. They've experienced what we might call trauma with a small T. These are much more subtle experiences, and this perhaps, for example, having had parents that loved you and acted in many loving ways and yet didn't really fully meet the needs that you had as a child.

So, for example, let's say that you were a child that was quite sensitive and delicate and needed space and was quite shy. And because your parents loved you, they wanted you to be well socialized, constantly encouraged you and persuaded you to be around other people in ways that just didn't feel good.

Or maybe you were emotionally quite sensitive and you felt your emotions strongly and you would get upset and cry and your parents would say, you know, get over it or, you know, grow up or boys don't cry or stop being a silly little girl. And you were taught that it wasn't okay to have your feelings.

Or maybe it wasn't even so much your childhood, maybe just your adult life has been kind of punctuated by some difficult experiences. Perhaps you've had difficulties with the painful relationship issues. Maybe you've had a bereavement which was very, very distressing or upsetting. Maybe you've been bullied in the workplace. There are many different challenges in life, which are too much for us to process. And that energy, as we're going to come to in a moment, that energy has to go somewhere.

We don't have to have experienced a big, dramatic life event, to have been impacted by trauma. And as I say, trauma can show up in a number of different ways.

There is the more classic trauma response that we'll talk about with Dr. Steven Porges and Dr. Peter Levine and various others, where trauma gets locked in the body and there can be shaking that comes up as we're trying to process that trauma. We can be very easily triggered, like let's say we've been, someone's been in a war zone and they come back and they're hanging out with their family and then a car backfires and the whole nervous system is jolted and triggered by that, a kind of more classic trauma response.

But for many people - I'm going to talk about my own trauma story in a minute. I didn't really have classic trauma responses like this, but I had a lot of anxiety, just an ongoing sense of not feeling I could relax, like not feeling the world was safe.

We can have emotional reactivity and sensitivity that we just notice we're a kind of highly sensitive person. One of my interviews in this conference is Dr. Judith Orloff, who's an expert on empaths and highly sensitive people. You might just find that we're kind of really delicate to the world and things impact us and affect us more than others.

It may be chronic health issues. I mentioned the work that we do at the Optimum Health Clinic with chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia and other fatigue related conditions. It's not that traumas are necessarily the cause, it's a factor, though in many people's case, it's another load on their boat. It's another impact the body just can't quite manage the burden of.

Trauma can show up in relationship issues. It may be that, for example, we end up in codependent relationships, so we become very needy of another and we can't bear to be by ourselves. It might be the opposite and might be, we go from one relationship to another but just as soon as it gets a bit more vulnerable and deep, it's too scary and we run away. Or it may be that we've just got too many walls up and we can't really maintain a long term intimate relationship with another.

Trauma can show up in symptoms, can show up in symptoms like migraines and headaches. It can show up in things like IBS and digestive symptoms. It can show up in muscle pain.

When emotional pain is not processed as emotional pain, often it becomes stored as physical pain. We'll talk about this as one of the emotional styles, where we tend to somatize our feelings. We tend to store our feelings as physical symptoms.

There's many, many other ways that trauma can show up. Of course, it can show up in sleep issues. It can show up in addictions. It can show up in almost any area of our life where we end up out of balance or living in a way which is unhealthy and uncaring and unsupportive towards ourselves.

So I was thinking about some of the ways to help bring this more to life and I realized that often it's helpful to land this in a personal story. So I will talk a little bit about my own journey with trauma. I've talked to lots of people in many other places, in videos, in my first book, about my healing journey from ME, chronic fatigue.

What I haven't talked as much about is some of the journey that happened after that. See in my early to mid 20, my first book came out, I was very successful in many ways. I was offered my own TV series here by the BBC in my work teaching people how to deal with things like phobias and to manage stress and anxiety. I was doing highly paid corporate speaking. I had a very successful career and also the early days of the Optimum Health Clinic.

But there was also a problem, this sudden rise in success and the demands and the pressures of suddenly employing a number of people. The financial pressures. I'd been through a painful relationship breakup. And I started to experience trauma.

I'd had a number of traumas as a child and one of the things that I hadn't realized at the time, and I'll come to in a little bit, is that I developed certain emotional styles to deal with that trauma.

One of those emotional styles was avoidance and distraction, that I was always keeping myself busy. I was always on the go. And that meant that that was sort of fine and my life was working. I was always being productive. I was achieving things. I was doing something that I loved, that I was passionate about.

But as these lows, as these traumas started to land upon me, traumas of financial stress, traumas of being highly responsible for a lot of complex and difficult things, traumas of relationship breakup, I didn't know how to deal with that. And this was sort of compounded at the time by the fact that I was supposed to be the person other people came to for the answers. I was supposed to be the expert.

A lot of the work that I did was more cognitive based. I taught people how to work with their mind and their thoughts, and there were emotional elements to that. But the work I was doing at the time wasn't really about digesting and processing and feeling emotions. And the result of this was I started to experience severe panic attacks.

And I had a period actually, of a couple of years, where I pretty much stopped doing any clinical work because I didn't feel I was really in integrity to be able to do that. I was still running as a leading Optimum Health Clinic.

But every night, I was living by myself at the time, every night, I went to bed, I used to dread going to bed because of the feelings of anxiety and panic I used to experience. I went through a period of being almost slightly agoraphobic. Going outside, the anxiety would rise so much. I felt so much shame about what was happening. I felt that I shouldn't be having these feelings.

You know, I say this now as a nearly 40 year old man, and I was 26 at the time. I have so much empathy towards that. But at the time it felt so enormous and I felt so much pressure. And what I found myself doing was, in time, going back to really trying to understand what was this missing? What were the missing pieces?

Clearly, something was missing in the methodology of how I was working with people because I was applying what I'd learned to do to myself and it wasn't working. So something was missing.

I started going on a number of different workshops and retreats. And I found myself on a particular retreat group that I ended up doing about 35 week long retreats over about a 15 year period. I don't tend to do things by halves. And I remember very clearly there was a major breakthrough that happened for me on this retreat, about my relationship with my feelings and my emotions.

I've been understanding more and more about how I have not been feeling my emotions. I've been avoiding, distracting, trying to get away from that. That I'd been constantly kind of trying to keep going to not feel. The problem was that as a child, there were a few major traumas that I experienced, one of which was that my mother divorced my father soon after I was born and that the grounds were mental cruelty. And I don't know all the details of what happened at the time, but it would have been a very traumatic experience for my mother. And I had no father. My mother did eventually remarry and I had a stepfather. But for a number of years, I didn't have that father figure. And that trauma, in my own mother's body, when she was holding me as a baby, as a child.

I then had a sister that had a number of quite severe mental health issues and it meant for a very emotionally difficult childhood. I'm not going to go into all of the details of what happened, but I really learned that emotions are not safe because of all these explosions of volatility and some violence and then things that happened, that I just learned to not feel my feelings.

So I'm here on this retreat and I'm seeing the anxiety in these panic attacks that I'm experiencing because I'm not feeling my emotions. But I'm starting to hit all of this resistance about all of the things I've learned not to feel like, like it's not safe to feel. And I literally felt and I remember in fact, I got a photo here of this. This is the retreat center, which is now unfortunately been turned into a private home, a place called Buckland Hall in the Brecon Beacons in Wales.

And I remember, I was walking past the building one day after lunch and I felt utterly trapped. I felt I literally had two unbearable choices in my life. I had the choice of continuing as I was, not feeling my feelings and emotions, bottling everything up, staying in my head, kind of staying in a sort of driven mode. And that just seemed so painful.

Or I had this choice of starting to feel my feelings and emotions, that felt so utterly terrifying, like it literally felt like I would die, that I would be dust, I would disintegrate, I would cease to exist. And it just felt like one of those moments of like an utter trap and starkness.

And as a result of gradually working through this, learning how to be taught to feel my emotions, a few days later - and I don't want to make it sound like it will happen in a few

days because there were many months building up to this - I had a private session with one of the teachers and I managed to really contact the depths of my emotion.

And really what it was, what I felt was, or what my body felt was the cause of much of this was the being abandoned by my father; the hatred, the rage, the kind of the murderous kind of rage in my body. But then the helplessness and the vulnerability and the desperation and the longing and the wanting, the pain of wanting a parent that's left and abandoned.

The results of this piece of work were over a period of time. I think for about six months after that, I started to really feel a lot of rage and anger. And I'll talk a bit later about how to have a healthy relationship with feeling emotions. I don't think I was vomiting and throwing it at people, but really feeling that in my body. And then there was another six months or so after that of just feeling a lot of sadness and a lot of hurt and a lot of longing. But it really shifted my relationship with my feelings and my emotions and it became an important change in my professional work. It was part of what helped birth the therapeutic coaching model of this integration of the very best of NLP coaching, of life coaching EFT models with psychotherapeutic models, with that psychology, with really making, learning how to feel our feelings and emotions.

And my whole life really changed over a few years after that, I went from having multiple disastrous relationships, I hadn't managed to have a relationship longer than three months in years. And I used to say if I could just get past three months... While the joke of the story is, I met my now wife. And so, you know how the story ends! I used to say, just get to three months and we got to three months. And to cut a really long story short, our first daughter was born on our one year anniversary which means my wife fell pregnant, it was a miraculous conception, that's another story for another day. But, our first daughter was conceived on our three month anniversary. Be careful what you say in life sometimes.

But, all of that became possible, my ability, all my anxiety, panic attacks stopped. My belief to have relationships changed. My energy and health and vitality got stronger. So many things changed in my life by changing my relationship to my feelings and my emotions and ultimately processing the traumas, the things in my life that had impacted me that I hadn't known how to feel.

One of the things that happens when we have a trauma, be it a big T trauma or small T trauma, we go into a safety cycle. You see, we want to feel, we need to feel, a feeling of safety. But the feeling of safety exists in the body, not in the mind. It's a feeling, feelings are in the body, thoughts are in the mind, and you can't think your way to the feeling of feeling safe.

And so we feel unsafe if we look at the kind of top circle. And as we feel unsafe, our mind speeds up trying to protect us. And that's what we kind of get, a racing mind or we start to predict the dangers in the environment. We go into Polyvagal theory. We could call going

into a sort of fight or flight or even a sort of shut down mode of all of that energy in our system.

We disconnect from our body because we've gone into our mind, so we feel more unsafe. And it just goes round, we feel more unsafe, so we speed up more. So the very feeling that we need to calm our system, that feeling of safety, it's in our body. But the more unsafe we get, the further away we get from it. This was the cycle that I was in with panic attacks, with the anxiety, with all the relationship issues I was having, because I kept going into my mind trying to feel safe. And ultimately, it was not working.

You see, trauma is not necessarily caused by what happens to us. It is caused by how we and others around us, respond to what happens to us. What I mean by that, is what we learn from the experiences determines how we relate to ourselves ongoingly.

We might have a painful experience, but we respond by allowing ourselves to feel the hurt, to feel the emotions. And because we do that, we process, we digest, those emotions move through us.

If we're a child and the others, people around us, respond by really protecting our feelings, letting us have our feelings, again, we learn to process and digest. It's when we resist. What we resist will persist. When we fight, when we reject, when we push away - we'll come to this in emotional styles in a moment - when we push away our emotions, that's when we get trauma. When we metabolize, when we digest, when we process our emotions, something might still hurt, but we don't have to be traumatized.

The question is, what did we learn? What did you learn from your traumas? We can learn, some of the things that we might learn, I learned things like 'emotions are not safe'. Those experiences with my sister, my father leaving. I learned it was not safe to feel my feelings.

We can learn that the world is not a safe place, that you need to be wired. You need to be ready. You need to be prepared for danger. You might learn that people are not to be trusted. So we always have to be guarded. We always have to protect ourselves around other people.

We might learn that we're not loved. And if we don't feel loved, we don't feel safe. And if we don't feel loved, we don't have the greatest gifts and the magic and the joy of life.

We may learn that we don't have what it takes. We just haven't got what it takes to meet life and to do the things in life that bring us pleasure, the things in life that matter.

Our traumas teach us how to relate to ourselves emotionally. This results in ongoing trauma. You see, if you take the example of my story, I learned it wasn't safe to feel my feelings. I learned to deal with that by always being busy and avoiding, distracting and sort of living in

my mind. The result of that was, I was ongoingly traumatizing myself. I was recreating the environment that I'd grown up in my life day to day. And that's what we do, we learn from the experiences that we have.

We create our own internal model because we learn about the world from our childhood. We create our own internal model, which normally is a rough reflection, a mirror of what we grew up in.

So if we grew up in a harsh, critical environment, we tend to have a harsh and critical relationship with ourselves. If we grew up in an environment where emotions were ignored, we didn't learn how to hold our feelings, we tend to ignore our own emotions.

So much of the suffering that we experience is not what happened to us, it's what we learned from what happened to us and how we're re-creating that experience moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day in our lives. We become the architects of our own ongoing trauma and suffering.

The more awareness we have, the more that we can learn to change and understand our emotional style. The more we can shift how we relate to ourselves emotionally, the more that we can not just heal the past, but we're not ongoingly traumatizing ourselves in our ongoing life.

So I want to now come into this, a model of six different emotional styles. As I mentioned earlier, this is one of the models within the therapeutic coaching methodology, Therapeutic Coaching as a coaching model which integrates key principles of hypnotherapy, developmental psychology, neurolinguistic programming, life coaching, emotional freedom, techniques in mindfulness to help people live a happier, healthier and more relaxed life.

Really we're taking the best of psychotherapeutic approaches with coaching approaches and really using them. And one of the key principles is empowering people through psycho education, through having understanding and awareness and practical tools and techniques.

And this model of emotional styles - Anna Duschinsky, who is the founder director of psychology at the Optimum Health Clinic and has developed the therapeutic coaching methodology with me - she and I came up with this through some time reflecting on exactly what we've been talking about in this session. What are the different strategies that people use when they feel overwhelmed, when they experience trauma as their way to sort of deal with it, but often are that what perpetuates and kind of creates an ongoingness to that suffering?

So I just want to kind of thank Anna for her contribution here. And Anna also has a number of sessions with me, a session each day talking as part of the conference about key principles of the therapeutic coaching model.

So I want to go through just briefly what these six emotional styles are and then let's come to each of them in a bit more detail.

So the first one is avoidance and distractions. This was one of things that I was a bit of a master at, that we're constantly keeping ourselves busy. That our mind has always got something that it's going towards and it's focusing on, really as a way of not feeling our emotions, not feeling what we're feeling.

The second emotional style is state changing. That we're using, it could be sex, it could be drugs, it could be alcohol, it could be sugar, it could be exercise, it could be excessive work. But we're using whatever we can to change our state and we're always trying to get away from feelings that we don't like, trying to state change them into feelings that we do like.

The third emotional style is analysis. This is where we really don't meet the world through our hearts. We meet the world through a constant analysis of our mind. Of course, our minds are an amazing tool and it's not that it's wrong, but when we live in our mind, we're not really in contact with our feelings.

The fourth emotional style is blaming other people. It's when we have feelings, but rather than owning them as our feeling, the focus becomes on, 'I'm feeling this because this person did this to me and it's their fault that I'm feeling it'. And it's really a way of diverting or distracting away from the feeling.

The fifth emotional style is being an empath. This is where we're highly tuned and sensitive to everyone else's feelings and emotions. And it's almost like we're feeling too much and feeling too much of other people's stuff when we're doing that.

The sixth emotional style is somatization. This is where we experience emotions as physical symptoms. I touched on this a little bit earlier. When we don't process our emotional pain as emotional pain, often it then instead becomes physical pain.

So let's go through each of these in a little bit more detail. And I'll also touch on some of the situations and circumstances which can create these emotional styles.

So this first one, avoidance and distraction. We're staying so busy that there's no time to feel or focus on our feelings, or we can be focused on other people's needs and feelings. So we're avoided and distracted by what's going on for everyone else. And some examples might be, we're always working or we've always got the radio on in the background or we're watching

TV, whilst surfing the Internet, while still having a conversation with our spouse. Or we just pack so much into our day or into our schedule that there's no time to stop and to have space.

So we simply can't feel what's happening in our hearts because we're so busy with all of the activities and all of the things that we're doing. Some of the conditions that can create this: we can grow up in an environment where we lack safety. We just didn't feel safe in ourselves and so we sort of needed to distract away from that feeling. It can also be we are a highly sensitive person, and so as a result of being a highly sensitive person, it just feels too much. So we need to be distracted, to be busy, to get away from what it is that we're feeling.

Now, my point is not that there isn't a place for sometimes numbing out and watching mindless TV. There isn't a place we've been busy trying to accomplish things in our lives. The question, though, is what place are we doing that from? Are we doing that just because we're in a particular chapter in our life that's busy or we're doing it because we're just letting ourselves numb out for a particular evening? Or have we become dependent upon this as a way of avoiding and distracting away from our emotions?

Let's come into the state changing in a bit more detail. This is using external tools such as sex, drugs; could be prescription drugs, recreational drugs, alcohol, sugar, exercise to change how we feel emotionally. So this is really whenever we have feelings that we don't know how to manage, we don't like and we have to use something on a kind of continuous basis to keep changing those feelings into something else.

Conditions that can create this: emotions that are just too strong to avoid and distract from, i.e. trauma. The absence of emotion and wanting to feel something. Sometimes we are in a, what's called, a polyvagal shut down where it's been so overwhelming that our systems shut down and we feel numb and we just want to feel something. And by state changing, at least we start to feel something. Or if there's been emotional or intellectual neglect in some way, so much trauma and pain at its core. As a result of that, we need to change the feeling. If you've seen RocketMan, the Elton John biopic, which is always going to appeal to me because it begins and ends in a therapy group. So I was always gonna be sold on that.

But I think it's a powerful example of state changing. About the trauma for Elton John of not feeling loved and not feeling seen and validated by his parents and the pain of that and using, I guess you could say, using the success of his career, but also particularly using drugs as a way to constantly change how it is that he was feeling.

Analysis. This is where we're over analyzing, intellectualizing our feelings rather than feeling them. I remember back in the day, as someone said to me, how do you feel? And I would completely unintentionally respond to that question with something like, "well, I

think..." and I would tell you what I thought. Or I'd give you a very articulate description of my feelings but I wasn't really feeling, I wasn't really in touch with.

It's where we're analyzing things and we might even be talking about feelings and emotions, but it's in a kind of analytical way. We're doing it from our mind as opposed to doing it from our actual hearts, of what it is that we really feel. And some of the conditions that can create this, it might be we grew up in an environment that valued intellect over feelings. That what you thought and your, kind of that the cleverness of your mind, was more important than your feelings that you may be having.

There may have been a lack of safety and emotional holding that it just wasn't safe to be in your body. So you went into your mind to build a feeling of safety. One of things we do when we do a lot of analysis, go back to what I was saying about the safety cycle. We try to think our way to a feeling of safety, and it's almost like if I analyze this enough, then I will feel safe. The problem is, as we talked about earlier, a feeling of safety is a feeling. It's not a thought. You can't think your way to a feeling of safety.

Blaming others. That's where we blame the outside world for our feelings. They made me mad. I'm only feeling this because of how that person let me down. So it's like we're feeling our feelings in a sense, but we're not really feeling them in a vulnerable true way. What we're doing is we're justifying, 'I'm only feeling that because of what this person did' and there's a constant blaming of others for our felt and lived experience.

So the conditions that create this: shame of feelings, from a family culture that doesn't allow. If we grew up in a family where feelings made you weak or how you felt wasn't important. It was more important that you were playing a team player and part of a family, that we had feelings but we weren't meant to have them, so we had to blame someone else for having them.

It may also be we were raised in a blame culture. We were just raised in an environment where what you did was you blamed other people and that wasn't really the ownership and the taking responsibility. The problem is, if we don't take ownership of our feelings, we can't really feel them, because it's like we're just a victim of something that happened. We're not really present to, we're not showing up to, we're not really making space for what it is that we feel.

So the empath or empaths - and as I mentioned earlier, Judith Orloff has got a great session as part of the conference on this - empaths take on other people's feelings and they feel them as their own. So if we can be around other people and let's say that's someone's feeling angry, then we start feeling either the anger is aimed at us when it may well not be, or we just feel the intensity and the stress and the energy of it.

Or we're around somebody that's feeling kind of really vulnerable and delicate, low self-esteem and we feel the need to rescue them. We feel the heaviness of it. We feel like we need to be there for them. So in a sense, what we're doing is we're feeling everyone else's feelings, but we're not necessarily feeling our own feelings. And sometimes it can be a way of coping with our own feelings to be giving to others what we really deep down long for and need them to give to us.

Conditions that can create this: we can have learned as a child to create safety by merging with and being able to predict other people's feelings. So what we learnt was, if I know how mom's going to feel or Dad's going to feel and I predict it, then I'll be safe. So we learn to merge too much with others And so we predict, in an attempt to control others' emotions by doing that. If there wasn't a lot of space for your feelings, perhaps a second, third or fourth child, you learn to merge with others because your feelings, there wasn't enough separation, your feelings weren't really seen. Your feelings weren't really allowed. But again, what we can see, is that as an empath, it can be hard to really make space to feel our own feelings and emotions.

Finally, the sixth emotional style is somatization. This is unconsciously expressing your emotions as physical symptoms because we're out of touch and they have to go somewhere. As I said earlier, if we don't feel our emotional pain as emotional pain, it can become physical pain, migraines, headaches, digestive problems, muscle pain, neck pain, backache.

So many of these things can have - and again these are things we'll talk about as part of the conference - so many of these things can have emotional triggers that are not being processed and not being digested, that are then being held and stored in the body.

So what are the conditions that create it? We learned that feelings are not safe or our feelings are too big to process. They're too overwhelming to feel. And so we just learned to put them in our body because they had to go somewhere. And I think one of the important points of these emotional styles is it's not that they're all wrong. I mean, some are perhaps a little healthier than others in certain situations, but they all have unhealthy impacts when they've done too much.

Ultimately, you don't ever want to be somatizing your feelings and emotions. But analyzing, sometimes avoidance and distraction, those things have their place. But when we become in a consistent pattern and we're using it as a way of not feeling, of not dealing with our emotions, that's how we ongoingly traumatize ourselves. It's not just what happens, it's how we respond and how others around us have responded to the events that happen. And if your response to trauma is to somatize it, trauma continues.

If your response to trauma is to analyze all of it, but not feel it, again, the trauma continues.

The relationship that we have with ourselves is really what determines whether we have an ongoing impact from the things that happened to us or not.

So I want now to talk about what a healthy relationship with our emotions actually looks like. If we're not doing these different emotional styles to excess and we're not defending and avoiding and distracting and blaming and somatizing and analyzing our emotions, what does a healthy relationship look like?

Well, our emotions are like waves in an ocean. Those waves come in and they sometimes get big and they crash back down again. We need to be able to let our emotions wash through us, to be able to feel them, to be impacted by them. The problem is, it's almost like, we build a bigger and bigger wall against our emotions, they start to feel like a tsunami because there's so much pressure that's built up that then it suddenly floods in and becomes completely overwhelming.

I'm not encouraging - as much as I think feeling and processing and digesting our emotions is so important to avoid us having trauma - we're not vomiting our emotions at other people. It's not a sort of blanket invitation of whatever you feel and just throw it out at others.

And I've seen people go through psychotherapeutic work where, for many years, they've not felt their feelings and now they've finally built this new relationship with their emotions and it feels so important that everyone knows how they feel that it becomes a sort of subtle permission to throw their emotions at other people, which just perpetuates and causes more suffering.

Is there a place sometimes to let people know how we feel and a strong emotional wave? Of course there is. But we don't just want to be vomiting left, right and center. What we want to be doing is feeling, feeling in our body. One of the things I think is important here is you can't feel selectively, if you shut your heart to sadness, you also sort of shut your heart to love because one of the consequences of love can be hurt and sadness.

So the more defended we get, the more defended we get against everything. If we shut our heart to our rage and or hatred, we also shut away our strength and our capacity. So it's how to feel our emotions, to let them wash through us. We're not walking around, here's another metaphor, like a massive black sack of all the stuff that we've not felt. We're just driving around in our car and someone cuts us off. And we had this black sack explode off all of this stuff because we've got this deep wound of not being seen. And it feels like this driver didn't see us. We thought we were enraged and angry, that we're digesting.

The metaphor that I often use is, it's like eating a meal. It's like you chew on something in your mouth, release a bit of acid and digestive enzymes as you chew on it. And then you

swallow and your stomach churns and it chews and it digests and it metabolizes. And then it comes through into your small intestine and you absorb and you take the nutrients and it goes through your large intestine, the waste products. So then eventually expound. But you take the goodness and the nutrients, in a sense, of the emotions, the lessons and the learnings in the end, the kind of experience. But we have to chew. We have to digest. We have to feel.

The body has an amazing ability to digest emotion and often we need some outside support and guidance. And how to do this is somewhat beyond the time that we've got in this session but we need to be able to learn to process and metabolize and digest.

We also want to learn to respond in different contexts, that there are certain people where it is really appropriate for us to be and feel our emotions and have our emotions with no layers and no kind of protections. And in other contexts, it's not appropriate. You know, if you're in a team meeting at work, let's say, and you're feeling really angry and hurt about something and someone asks how you're doing, it may not be the moment to let them have all the emotion of feeling that's there. But just because things aren't always appropriate in some context, there has to be context where they are allowed and where it is appropriate.

We also need to have healthy boundaries and our emotions can help inform us; who do we feel safe with? Who do we need to have a little bit of distance from sometimes? Who can we learn to trust and to open ourselves up?

And I wanted to tell another short story, well what it was, was a very painful life story. But to give a bit of example, I talked about my experience of trauma and not feeling my emotions and this breakthrough of really shifting and learning to feel and digest. Well, a number of years after that, I mentioned the part of the story where I hadn't met my father. And at this point my wife and I were married. We had our first daughter and second daughter was very close to being born. And I really felt that there was something fundamentally missing in my heart and in my soul. That was half of where I'd come from, a sort of a mystery. My father hadn't been seen since soon after he and my mother separated. He never paid any child support. He'd never been around. And I just felt that there was that not knowing and as having become a father myself, that something was just missing. And I needed to sit in the presence of my father. I needed to have the experience of what that was, whatever that might be. And I tried to find my father a few times previous to this, and I hadn't been successful in doing that. I tried quite hard a few times. And I'd also sort of had a sense for a number of years that the timing just wasn't quite right. And at this point, I really felt aligned that this was the time, I was in a very loving, happy relationship and of my own. I was creating my own family and I had the kind of really good support from my friends and I had my own sort of therapeutic support. And I just felt the time was right. So I tried again.

And to cut a long story short. Surprisingly easily, I ended up one day finding where my father lived. And at that moment, I wanted to jump in the car right away and go down. And I wanted to, I suppose, confront him somewhat and some wisdom sort of kicked in and I felt that I needed to be a bit more gentle. And I ended up contacting some old friends of his and they went down and it turned out and they found my father.

I went a few days later and I drove down. I remember my wife didn't come down in the car journey because she was due to have our second daughter literally any day, and so we didn't want to risk her being out of London. I didn't want to miss the birth. It was a few hours away from London. But I also was like, I need to kind of follow this journey. And I met my father and we had this amazing connection. And, you know, he said he was sorry in a way that I felt was very heartfelt and I totally, I was very deeply healed in my heart to hear him acknowledge that he fucked up, which was his words. And we got very close over the coming few months. And it was like this sort of perfect, blissful, amazing experience. The father that I longed for, that I'd, you know, in a sense, had been absent in my life, but here he was. And he was, you know, in many ways very simple, humble, but kind of, it seemed a good man.

And then as things unfolded and we got quite close over a period of time, it then started to get a bit more edgy. And one day we were out having dinner and some hard truth started to come up in the conversation. And I'm not one for mincing my words, I don't believe in being unkind, but I also believe that often it's unkind to mince things too much, that sometimes we need to be truthful. I said some things which were not aggressive, but they were quite punchy and they were quite direct. I remember he said to me, as we were saying goodbye, thanks for dinner. And we had steak which was almost as raw as the conversation. I don't think much of it.

And then to cut a long story short, he then disappeared and my father abandoned me again. He ignored my emails, he ignored my attempts to reach out. I knew where he was, it wasn't that he literally moved house and disappeared. But he, I believe the term is, he ghosted me, he just stopped responding. I'm laughing cause I'm not quite sure what else to do. I haven't told the story in public before, but the rage, the anger, the hatred that I felt was like nothing I think I can explain. I literally wanted to kill him. Because I was mature enough at this point to understand what was happening and that when your long lost son turns up after all these years, rule number one, you don't do the same again.

But what did I do? I felt the feelings. I screamed into pillows. I raged. I talked about it with my wife, with my friends. I was in therapy and everything that I could to just let myself have the feelings. They weren't just waves, they were enormous raging storms that were bursting through. But I wasn't traumatized. It was a very painful, very painful experience. But I wasn't traumatized. And I don't feel traumatized now.

It feels quite delicate talking about it because it's not something that I've talked about publicly. But I feel it's an important story to share what is possible, that we can go through and re-experience our greatest trauma and wound. And it hurt, almost intolerably and unbearably at the times, but on the other side, I don't feel trauma.

What I actually learned was a number of amazing things. I learned things about how I'd been very focused on how we were similar, how different we are as people as much as I have some of his characteristics and qualities. I learned about the importance of being present and solid and loving and being there for, and showing up to what's challenging and what's difficult in life. And the only way out of pain is through it. We try to avoid it when we try to run away, when we try to get away from things that's what causes suffering.

One of the phrases that I use a lot in my teaching, that's one of the key principles of therapeutic coaching is, 'if you can see it, you don't have to be it'. If we can become aware of our patterns or our habits, if we can really see the ways that we cause, that we've learned to cause ourselves suffering, that knowledge is power.

Now, is that seeing it alone enough to change it? Often it's not. The therapeutic coaching methodology is, you know, an entire training program and talk methodology of pro practical, not just models like this, but tools and techniques and different ways of working.

I have a 12 week online coaching program, the reset program, where we very much get into the specific, the tools, the techniques. You can see it, you get the awareness, but then you also get the tools to practically change. But I think the point that I want to leave you with here is, this is really here as an introduction to what I hope is going to be an amazing conference, about 75 of the world's leading experts on trauma and it's many, many, many different forms.

But I want you to reflect. Do you have trauma? You might have come into the session thinking, 'Alex, I don't have trauma'. And what I hope is, through some of what we've been talking about, you don't have to experience being abandoned twice by a parent. You don't have to experience those kind of big PTSD type traumas. There's the different subtle impacts and hurts that we've all had in life. And as a result of that, what is your emotional style?

I'm really curious as we went through those six emotional styles. What came up for you?

My emotional style, particularly avoidance and distraction and as I talked about when I worked through that and I learnt to feel my feelings as I went through the most painful thing of my life, it didn't have to be trauma.

Your emotional style, it's not that these don't have their place, but used in the wrong way, that is what perpetuates the suffering that we have. How is it causing that further suffering in your life?

So I really hope this is a session that you will rewatch, particularly that kind of bit where we go through the emotional styles. Hold that in mind as you listen to the other sessions in the conference.

Please be open to the idea that we've all been hurt by life. We've all been impacted by life. We've all learned different ways of relating to ourselves.

And our relationship with ourselves is the most important relationship in our lives, because it's the relationship from which all of our other relationships happen.

I hope the session has been helpful and useful. If you want to find out more about my work, you can go to the [TherapeuticCoaching.com](https://www.therapeuticcoaching.com) to find out more about that, and there'll be details about the next reset program as it happens, I'd love you to come through that program.

If you found this powerful, boy, you're going to love, love that program. I really hope that you enjoy this conference. It has been an enormous passion putting this together. I have so loved interviewing these people, researching the interviews, spending time with them. Niki and I, crafting this conference together. I'm super excited for you guys to experience this and I hope you've enjoyed this session.

Thank you for watching.