

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 131: Why You Need To Start Embracing ALL Your Emotions: Dr. Julie Smith

Society has a role to play in telling us how to manage the emotions we feel when we go through life. You know, on one hand, you have this sentiment where it's like kind of just shrug it off, ignore it, keep going, which doesn't seem to be possible with like deep emotions actually seems to be that you're just compartmentalizing it in the back room and it's going to erode your brain from subconsciously. And the other one is that, you know, the other

narrative we hear is to when you feel strong emotions to really like embrace them and to like, but that feels like it can be a bit too consuming that I might not get out of bed in the morning if I really sit and wallow in my emotions. So what is the balance of embracing emotions or kind of shrugging them off and ignoring them?

Yeah. And actually, it's quite sort of complex work when, when you look at sort of what happens in the therapy room, you know, there are people who when they experience emotion, it's quite unsafe for them because the coping strategies that they've had throughout life have been unsafe or dangerous ones. And so, you know, we'll never kind of advise people to just, you know, open the floodgates and allow everything in. It's very sort of careful and, and there's a process of gearing people up with the tools. And I often talk to people about this when, when they're thinking about going to something like a trauma therapy, right? So while that involves going over the trauma, no decent therapist would ever get you to do that without first gearing up with the tools to be able to cope with the emotion that comes up. So for anyone who feels like they, for example, kind of shut down emotionally and sort of block it out, you want to open up gradually to things and open up gradually to emotions that feel maybe less dangerous or less sort of overwhelming in small ways, in supported ways as well, so that you, you know, you can manage it and it's not going to completely be overbearing. So, but I guess on a kind of day to day level, lots of people don't even recognize that they're blocking. They just recognize that whenever they've done something at work that's embarrassing and they feel awful, they just go home and crack open the fridge and they're just looking for anything. Or maybe it's go on Netflix for like six hours and block out the world or gaming or whatever it is. And so often it's hidden in the behavior. People will say, I'm fine with emotion, but I smoke 50 a day and, you know, it's a kind of, you know, what's the function of this and that and the other. And it's always about looking at it with curiosity, not judgment, but curiosity. Why am I doing that? What's the function of that? What's it doing for me? And often it'll be some level of safety around something that's uncomfortable. But it's really key that there's no judgment there because it's something that we all do. It's, it's human. And, and that's because our brains are so brilliant at taking over for us and doing something very quickly that we need to make things better.

To make us comfortable, to make us feel comfortable in some way, even if it's some destructive medication or something. On that, you know, on that point of we have a behavioral response to some stress or emotion we're feeling and maybe not confronting, I think I did that a lot. When people used to ask me how I dealt with running this big global business, 700 employees around the world, when times got really tough, I mean, on the worst days where there was no money in the bank and payday was today, those kind of days. I used to, I used to say on interviews and stuff that I used to come up with all this nonsense about how

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I dealt with it and how I coped with it. But in hindsight, one of the things I came to learn was that only times I ever got sick or my skin ever got bad or I'm like two days after that, those really high stress moments. So on the surface, I was kind of shrugging off and playing it cool. But my body as the famous book goes held the score. My body would tell me, even if my conscious mind wouldn't admit it, my body would tell me. And then even more recently, I've noticed that in certain situations where I'm pretending everything is fine, I'll notice maybe my eating habits or my other habits get a little bit more extreme and out of control. And I always thought I was invincible. I always thought I was some tough guy. And I think people followed me. Well, but I think they kind of they saw me as that as being this kind of like, you know, mentally perfect, you know, resilient character. But even I've noticed that in my behavior. And it's been so interesting to just pay attention to it. It's sometimes difficult, because especially if you do engage in these kind of coping mechanisms, shall we say a lot, you might find them harder to notice. But for me, I don't. So when I see any shift in my behavior, like, I remember going through a pattern where I was just eating crap again, I'm like, why am I doing? Oh, shit. Yeah. Because of that thing you've not addressed, that's playing on your mind every time you wake up. And then my skin tells me straight away, I get some like breakout on my skin. Men are the worst at this. I mean, so they say they're the worst at talking about how they feel because of the stigmas and stuff. Yeah, certainly. I mean, about 75% of my followers are female. But saying that of the of the male followers that I have, they're among some of the most engaged and asked questions and, you know, come up with new topics and respond to you positively in comments and things. And so I think there is a shift in the right direction. And I think, I think social media has had a lot to do with actually is enable people to start having a conversation that they wouldn't dream of having face to face with people. And certainly I recognize that in when I was just working in my private practice, I wanted to do it around the family. So I couldn't do it all. So I kind of lift the NHS and I thought I'll just work in like school hours and I'll manage it around that kind of thing. So I thought I would have to advertise and and I never did. And that's because well, therapy is a really private thing when you're really struggling. When it works and you get better, and then you're doing fine and it finishes and you go off about your life. And then you come across someone who's struggling and they go, that really helped me try that. And so actually, all of my work was based on word of mouth. And and I think that's happening more and more that people once they struggle, work out a way to get through it, then believe in the tools that they learned, whatever they were, they're willing to share that. And and because they don't want to see other people go through the same thing. And I think that's a bit of the shift of that stigma that that people are going, Oh, yeah, I went through that or something similar. Go and try that. It really helps. And if people are sad at home, and there's something that they know they haven't addressed, that's playing on their mind that they're thinking about a lot often and trying to just kind of compartmentalize and not what would you say to those people? Because, you know, they might be seeing the behavioral symptoms of not addressing that thing. What do you say? How do we how do we get it out of the back room and prevent it from causing us behavioral self harm?

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Well, I guess, you know, some people will go to therapy because they'll have access to that. Others won't even consider it or have access to it for whatever reason. And I think whatever the situation, human contact and human connection is everything. If you can find someone that you trust to talk to, and even let's say worst case scenario, you don't have anyone you can trust to talk to, or you feel so awful about this particular situation, you can't bear to talk to anyone, write it down, just use words, use art, whatever it is, try and get to grips with what what could possibly be going on here, start reflecting on experiences, not with judgment, but just looking at what's happening, what happens here, what happens before that, what leads up to it. That's a lot of what happens in therapy actually is, you know, people come in with a feeling, oh, felt this awful thing. And then and then we'll look at, OK, what led up to that? Let's go back a week and let's work to it. And, you know, what made you vulnerable to that? And then equally, what came after? What did you do? Did it make things worse? Did it help? A lot of those things that that we end up doing habitually are the things that work instantly and they're addictive because they work instantly, right? It's going to the fridge or grabbing the wine or whatever is that they're addictive because they give us instant relief. But in the long term, they keep us stuck. So they're the things that then get us in that cycle of the next time you have that feeling, you feel even more need for that that safety behaviour or that blocking behaviour, because it worked so quickly last time. And actually the things that tend to work in the long term are hardest in the moment, like sitting with it and feeling it and using skills to get yourself through it.