

Ep #97: Emotional Drinking



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With Your Host

Dr. Sherry Price

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You are listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle Podcast* with Dr. Sherry Price, episode number 97.

Welcome to *Drink Less Lifestyle*, a podcast for successful women who want to change their relationship with alcohol. If you want to drink less, feel healthier and start loving life again you're in the right place. Please remember that the information in this podcast does not constitute medical advice. Now, here's your host, Dr. Sherry Price.

Well, hello my beautiful friends and welcome back to another episode of the podcast. I'm excited you're here because what we are going to talk about today I think will resonate with anybody who is still overdrinking. So, I mentioned in two podcasts ago that the number one reason why women overdrink or drink a little too much is because of their emotions. And we talked about a few of the emotions that really led to overdrinking, so that was anxiety and sadness.

And yes, while these are two emotions that lead to overdrinking there are so many others, loneliness, loss or grieving of a loved one who has passed, feeling disappointed, feeling defeated, or feeling like you just need to take the pressure off of a long day. Now, in this podcast what I'm going to do is focus more on those emotions that are low level energy kind of emotions. And as a society we have collectively identified these as negative emotions. They're emotions that don't feel good in our body, that we don't want to feel.

Now, I will say, I work with a handful of women who drink not because of their negative emotions but because they just want to have fun, and celebrate, and it's the sign of the weekend. And yes, that is for an emotional response as well. And if that is you I want you to consider just listening in to this podcast because regardless if you call the emotion negative or if you call it positive, I think you're going to get a lot of value out of today's podcast.

So, I want to start out by saying men drink for emotional reasons too but we know from the science that it really impacts women. And what we know

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about women in general is they tend to feel their emotions deeper. We are even considered more emotional than men. And I think this is a beautiful thing. And so, our emotions can be this super power, this tend and befriend response that women have. And that tend and befriend response is not as prevalent in males.

So, I'm not going to into the tend and befriend response, we talk about that over in Epic You. But what I will say about it is that in times of stress or in times of need, that gut instinct, that mama bear instinct kicks out and gets revved up to be used for our benefit and the benefit of our loved ones, particularly our young ones. It's that caring nature, we befriend other females that have similar issues, that understand us. And so, we have that emotional connection on a deep level very quickly.

So, for instance in my life when I hear a mom talk about how she has a special needs child I instantly tend and befriend because I feel like we are similar. Your child is unique just like mine. So, when my brain hears this it sends off all these neural transmitters that stimulate my tend and befriend response. And so that's why people with similar tragic issues or in a tragedy, bond so quickly together and then remain lifelong friends. So, it's a sense that we get each other because we've been through a similar struggle or are going through a similar struggle.

And this is why support groups particularly for women can be so helpful. And so, it's helpful to find your pack or your tribe so you can talk about things safely and you are talking to people that actually understand it because they've walked it too. And it's a safety mechanism to protect our young. And men are built with different protective mechanisms. So, emotions are a great thing. And I know myself I feel emotions very intensely. My family will even tease me about it, how intensely I can feel emotions.

I can be quickly laughing and then go to crying just with a good car commercial. It's like, whoa, where did that come from? All of a sudden I'm bawling. So, we're this emotional creature and we know that emotions are going to happen. And I'll tell you what, we can't stop them permanently

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from happening. We're going to get a variety of good ones and a variety of bad ones that come up throughout our lifetime. And I know we know this, intellectually we know this but when the bad ones come what does our brain say? It says, "I don't like this. Let's get rid of this. Let's drink it away."

Because if somebody was handing out more sadness or more grief, and you go to raise your hand and say, "I want more sadness or more grief", there would be nobody's raising their hand for that. Nobody would be going for that freely. But here's the thing, when we have somebody that was significant in our life and we lose them, of course we're going to feel sad, of course we're going to need time to grieve, of course we're going to go through that grieving process.

Or somebody close to us gets bullied, or hurt, or heartbroken because we love them so deeply we are naturally going to want to feel that way to empathize with them. It's the way we bond and connect, it's a beautiful thing between humans. And so, we get these negative emotions or these bad emotions when we care so deeply which is a great thing. So, when my daughter gets bullied, or heartbroken, of course I'm going to want to empathize and be there for her. By me empathizing and being there for her, I'm showing her that it's safe to explore these emotions and that I get it.

She was very disturbed a few weeks ago when one of her famous gamers died of cancer. You may have heard of this famous gamer die of cancer and it wrecked her world. She was sobbing all day long. I had to cancel my plans to be with her. Let me take that back. I didn't have to cancel my plans, I wanted to cancel my plans to be with her, to let her know what she was experiencing was safe and normal. It was tragic for her and she's never experienced this flavor of emotions in her young life yet and so I wanted to be there for that.

I wanted to guide her through that. I wanted her to process these emotions because that's the healthiest way to experience this. Now, heaven forbid she leaves this Earth before I do, if I'm alive when she dies I know I'll be super sad. And I will grieve and I will need time to grieve, a 100%, and honestly I wouldn't want it any other way. I would want to be sad that I lost

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my child. And I already know I would communicate with her spirit every single day. I would tell her I love her. And I would still create this relationship it would just be in a different manner.

I would dream of all her goodness and the innocence she still has at her young age. I would always want to remember all of that, her smell, her looks, how she dresses, how she interacts with the world, her laugh. Oh my gosh, her laugh, her gentleness and her awkwardness because she is a tween. So, I'm not afraid of these emotions. Yes, I don't want them. Yes, I don't want this to occur. But if they do occur I know that that's normal. I know that's to be expected because I deeply loved.

Now, here's the thing, if I was to go to drinking to suppress these emotions, alcohol deprives us of our ability to process the emotions. So, what happens, our brain and our nervous system can't break these emotions down. And so, they get stuck in our body. And we just keep overdrinking to numb, and overdrinking to numb, and overdrinking to numb. But what happens is we never process the emotion. So, we stay stuck in that emotion and we stay stuck in that pain caused by that emotion.

And that pain keeps coming from the unprocessed emotion because we can't integrate it and we can't transmute it. And this is what happens in trauma. People can't move on or they don't move on, they get stuck and they stagnate because they don't process the emotion, they bottle it down, they stuff it down. They don't want to feel it. They don't want to experience it. They want the eject button from this crummy feeling. And so, they engage in behaviors like overdrinking.

Now, it gets worse which I'll get to in a second. But first let me say that if you turn to drinking all the time to process your negative emotions you will never learn the ability to do it any other way. And this creates dependency on alcohol. And I talked about for me it was my anger and disappointment that led to a lot of my overdrinking. I did not know how to manage that. I did not know how to deal with that. First I couldn't even articulate it. I didn't have words for it, I just felt so taken over by my body's response to it.

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It's like the anger was so on fire that my brain shut down and this does happen to people. You become so limbic system activated that your brain does shut down. So, I had to learn tools to understand, to be able to articulate this in a way with my brain so my body could shut down a bit, so could quiet and self-calm. Now, if you're stuck in that cycle of overdrinking because of negative emotions whatever those negative emotions are, they could even be something as simple as boredom or loneliness.

I'm talking about more severe or more negative emotions but let's not even rank the negative emotions. We won't even rank them, we'll just say, they're emotions that just don't feel good in the body whether it's boredom, loneliness, sadness, depression, anxiety, whatever it is. If you're drinking because of that chronic emotion that keeps coming up, that's considered emotional dysregulation. You can't regulate your emotions and what happens is the overdrinking starts happening or other forms of self-injury.

Yes, I use the term, self-injury, think about it, these are ways that we harm ourselves over time. Self-injury can look like overdrinking or drinking too much that the body can't handle it. How you know, the body responds, it blacks out, you pass out, you have hangovers the next day, the body signals back, hey, this is too much. It doesn't feel good. Maybe it's other substances. And you're looking for that escape route, whether it's with marijuana, or mushrooms, or some other drug that you're using to always escape.

It can also look like just avoiding and withdrawing from any difficult situation, any type of conflict out there you just want to run and hide. And we know that there will always be conflict, people will always want to talk about their opinion and their perspective. That's all conflict is, is when two people don't agree on something. Or it can manifest, self-harm can manifest as physical, or even verbal aggression towards others, like physical aggression towards yourself like cutting. It can be something like excessive social media use, so excessive that you don't get to other priorities.

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And I think of it as an overage on anything, overeating, overworking, because when these are not in balance and these are not in check, essentially we're harming our health. So self-injury is an unhealthy coping strategy. Some people call it self-sabotage. But I do like this term, self-injury because it really describes what's going on. If we're imbibing in too much alcohol we are actively killing our brain, our liver, and many other forms of self-harm, setting ourselves up for cancer.

And I don't want to go down all of those paths but there's other forms of overage that are harming our health and are taking us further away from the goals that we have for ourselves in life. So emotional drinking is a big issue, huge. And it's one issue I help women conquer in my programs. And I know we want to just kind of normalize drinking because that's what society has taught us to do. So, we'll say, "I'm just using it to distract myself for a moment."

But think about when you want to distract yourself, it's actually saying you don't want to feel what you're actually experiencing, you want to distract yourself. Sure, and there are other techniques you can use to distract yourself that are healthy to the body. Choose one of those. But then that means you always need to distract yourself. The antidote to breaking emotional drinking is to be able to emotionally regulate. And when you learn these skills to be able to emotionally regulate that's what solves the issue.

So emotional regulation is the ability to effectively manage and respond to an emotional experience. Some coaches and therapists are trained to be able to provide a safe space for people to do this if it's too scary for someone to do it on their own. And they also teach those strategies and I think this is some of the most critical work to be done because otherwise we keep repeating patterns of self-injury.

We may stop overdrinking but then we cave in to our sugar cravings, or the women who come to me after bariatric surgery and said, "Hey, I fixed the food problem but now I have a drinking problem." It's just another form of self-sabotage or self-injury. And when that happens I know we have

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emotional work to do because if we really want to break the pattern, we have to do that emotional work. And what I love about emotions is that they point us in the direction of where the problem lies. Maybe it's from our childhood, maybe it's from just a few years ago.

Or maybe it could be this is just your automatic response to this emotion and nobody's taught you other ways to manage it. Now, managing it is one thing, but really getting at the underlying issue is a whole another ballgame. And I'm so thankful I had a coach that was able to get under my anger, able to help me see how I was creating that for myself and how that was optional. I didn't even know that that was optional. I thought that was a must. I thought that was how I was supposed to respond.

But then I learned other ways and so your brain doesn't know what it doesn't know. So now that I know to do it a different way I have helped eradicate that part that was causing me anger. Now, it's not to say I'm never angry, it's just that I experience a lot less anger after I solved for this one thing that was causing most of my anger. And this becomes very evident when I work with women and they say, "Let's talk about something else."

We get on the hot topic and they're like, "Yeah, let's now talk about something else." And then we go down that path, talk about that, and guess what? It leads back to that problem. And then we get diverted again and then we come back to that problem. And so, keep running away from that problem is not going to help us, we think it will. The brain feels relief when it runs away from pain obviously. But what we need to do is quite the opposite, we need to run towards it to be able to process it. And when you process it, it leaves your body.

And when you feel safe to do this work it's magical because the healing can happen so quickly. So, I recently went to my coach to help me process a minor trauma that I was experiencing. And just in that one meeting with her I was totally set free. I tell you, was quite miraculous, I just healed this one thing that was bothering me and we cleared it right up. So, I know these results aren't typical. Sometimes it does take some time but a lot of

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times if we get to the root of it and it's handled in a safe non-judgmental way, boom, you can immediately eradicate it.

So, a really important thing to keep in mind is if your negative emotions of any kind are driving most of your overdrinking, that's good news because you know the antidote, it's emotional regulation. And learning those skills is exactly where you need to start.

Now, I have an entire module on emotional regulation inside my program because it was a key component to my success to becoming a woman who can take it or leave it and control her drinking. And what I found by doing this work is that I was never taught this anywhere in all of my training. I wasn't taught it in junior high, in high school, in college, in my doctorate program, in my MBA program, none of that. I was never exposed to this information but I'm so glad I have been because now I live my life with a lot less anger.

I mean you've probably seen some really angry people out there, constantly blowing their lid, venting their anger, acting like a loose torpedo or having to blow up in every single argument. Maybe even your teenagers get like this, and this is why I love knowing these tools because I'm able to teach them to my daughter. Because I know firsthand it feels terrible, terrible to operate like a loose canon in your household and just fire off at people that you love the most.

And I'll tell you what feels worse, being at the brunt of that, being the one who receives all of that violent spewage, and verbal vomit coming out of somebody's mouth where you feel you don't have any action that you could take and so you just bottle it and then you want to drink it away or do other forms of self-harm. So, I'm incredibly grateful to have these tools and to know about these strategies that work for me. And it's not to say I'm perfect, I'm not. I'm a working progress, we all are.

And it's not to say I'm getting rid of anger, no, we can't get rid of any emotion. We will always have the full gamut of emotions but we don't have to see them as bad or reasons to engage in self-harm. A better strategy

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would be to look at those emotions, see what they are telling us and then help our body transform them and process them so they no longer reside in the body causing more pain. And when we're able to do that we release so much pain that comes from the negative emotion.

And then the fallout from that is we minimize self-harm. We embrace harm reduction. We embrace drinking less. And we embrace healthy coping mechanisms so we can live as our best self and enjoy our best life. Alright my beautiful friends, that's a wrap for today and I will see you next week.

Thanks for listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle*. If you're ready to change your relationship with alcohol, check out my free guide, How to Effectively Break the Overdrinking Habit at sherryprice.com/startnow. That's sherryprice.com/startnow. I'll see you next week.