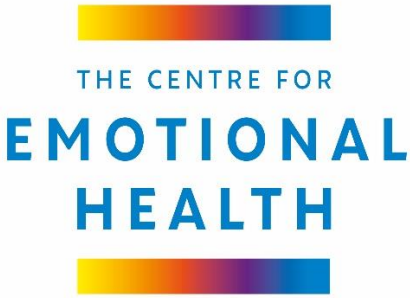

Emotionally Speaking: Ali Gill Transcript

Peter Leonard 00:00
Being Chief Executive of a charity about emotional health is one of the real joys of life. But everyone assumes that you're going to be really kind of chill and Zen about everything.

Narrator (Heather) 00:10
This is Peter Leonard. He's the Chief Executive of the Centre for Emotional Health.

Peter Leonard 00:15
But sometimes you have to be quite firm. And we were dealing with an organisation who wanted something, phoned us up, like, well we need this tomorrow. And I'm like, actually, no, we've got enough going on, we need to put a firm boundary in here. And so, we went back and said, Actually, we'd love to give you this information, but you can't have it tomorrow. You can have it in three days' time. And just reflecting on how sometimes you got to have boundaries, and you need to be able to say no to something and recognise your self-worth, give yourself the space you need.

Narrator (Heather) 00:43
And this is Emotionally Speaking, a new podcast, all about emotions, your emotions, and how they affect every aspect of your life.

Peter Leonard 00:53
One of the things I really value about working on this podcast is that it gives me the opportunity to just think about things like that, like recognising my self-worth and recognising things that we can do to develop our emotional health. So here we are for another episode. Thanks so much for joining me, Peter Leonard, as we explore the world of emotions, and just how much they influence our lives. If this is your first time here, welcome. In this series, I've been meeting people to talk about the challenges we face in life, and how getting through them involves knowing and understanding our emotional makeup. If you've listened before, you'll probably

already know that emotional health and mental health are closely related, but different. And I hope that by sharing these experiences, we can build a deeper understanding of how to apply the principles of good emotional health, to whatever life throws at us.

Ali Gill 01:46
Helping, and like connecting back to others and to newcomers is really what keeps me sober. I love the saying, you know, we can only keep what we have by giving it away. And that's really true. For me, it's about passing on the message. That's really what keeps me sober.

Peter Leonard 02:07
Today, I'm delighted to welcome the chef and writer, Alasdair Gill. Hello, Alasdair.

Ali Gill 02:13
Hi, Peter. Thanks for having me.

Peter Leonard 02:14
It's great, really lovely to have you with us. Thank you for being here. We're gonna be talking about emotional health today and emotions in general, as we're about to hear your emotional toolkit has been built on quite a journey of addiction, recovery and sobriety. But before we get into that, I wonder if you could tell us a bit about where you are now, about your two worlds of food and writing.

Ali Gill 02:36
Absolutely. Beautifully done. By the way.

Peter Leonard 02:38
Thank you.

Ali Gill 02:39
Very well introduced.

Peter Leonard 02:40
Nice segway

Ali Gill 02:41
I'm a chef, I do have my own private catering company. So with that I do anything from Bar Mitzvahs to Diwali parties and private dinners. And then, more recently, within the last year, I've been doing more writing. So I'm a journalist as well now technically, which has been quite cool. U-turn, I suppose. Or a twist….

Peter Leonard 02:59
On TV there are lots of programmes about chefs and cooking looks like a really high-pressure environment. Is that kind of your experience of being in a kitchen?

Ali Gill 03:09
Yeah, absolutely. It is hilarious that all that the production companies have just loved that. But it's not really about the food so much more about the lifestyle. And that's what people want to ask. It's like, oh, you're a chef. Well, do you get beaten with a whisk? Or, what happens?

Peter Leonard 03:25
So you've kind of made a conscious decision to do it differently.

Ali Gill 03:29
Yeah, exactly. I'm sort of cheating while still holding the title of war hero.

Peter Leonard 03:36
Well, at the Centre for Emotional Health, we will say that your you've shown great self-awareness, you made a personal choice, used your personal power to make the right decision for you. And that's a really good thing, a positive thing,

Ali Gill 03:46
Big fan of you guys now. Thank you.

Peter Leonard 03:48
Good. Good. With all our guests, we always start by asking this question. So I'm gonna I'm going to dive in with you.

Ali Gill 03:53
Shoot away.

Peter Leonard 03:54
What does emotional health mean to you?

Ali Gill 03:56
What does emotional health mean to me? I suppose, you know, I guess it's something that is is prevalent in everyone but it's obviously much, much more severe in others through disease which is like what I have with sort of addiction among other things, and it's been a long journey for me personally to understand that I needed any tools or that even it was a possibility to have a different life. So I mean, you could go on and on about so many different sort of tools for it but it's for me if I were to simplify, it would be honesty with gratitude is what's really important for me the gratitude is so important because I naturally want to lean into what's wrong. It's yeah, it's what get what keeps me sober mostly and keeps my mental health in check, is being able to look back at a day and think actually, you know what, I'm really grateful for this. Yeah, because with that, especially with my alcoholism is, it's known that a grateful alcoholic doesn't drink. And that's actually relatable to many different things, a grateful whatever doesn't do this, because finding those little pockets of goodness and appreciating them gives your life more value.

Peter Leonard 05:14
That's really interesting. Gratitude is a real a real theme that runs through positive psychology in a practice of gratitude to, to improve your kind of mental well-being. So I'm fascinated by that, that gratitude is clearly a key thing in helping you cope when you handle your addiction and not drink.

Ali Gill 05:32
Well. One of many.

Peter Leonard 05:34
So can we talk a bit more about that. So in terms of your life, addiction, and recovery has been a huge part of your life. Could you tell us about that?

Ali Gill 05:44
Well, it's interesting. Yeah. Because I suppose you how you say addiction is a big part. Now recovery is, it's funny how I you can almost look at it as no matter if I'm sober or not, drugs and alcohol will always be at the centre of my life. It's just whether I'm using them or I'm not. But now that I'm sober, I have to put my recovery at the centre. Because everything else in my life, everything you know, that I've now gained from it, a life, you know, a job, people relationships. I don't get any of that, if I'm not sober. And everything I've got now is a mortgage. And if I didn't put the work in, I don't get to keep it.

Peter Leonard 06:27
That swings right back into the gratitude thing.

Ali Gill 06:29
Yeah, exactly. So no matter, it's also amazing to have that win, sober every day, no matter how rubbish my day has been. At the end, I didn't pick up. And it's very easy to look at things on a zoomed in lens, when actually you just need to take a step back and think I'm here, I'm above ground. And actually, if you're a betting man, which I try not to be, he wouldn't have put money on that three years ago.

Peter Leonard 06:54
When did it start? And then went on that journey? Did you think oh, actually, hang on this is….

Ali Gill 06:59
this is a problem? When did the addiction start? When I was born? That's how I have to look at it. I really do believe that.

Peter Leonard 07:08
When did it start showing itself?

Ali Gill 07:10

Well, you know, it's, it's for me, it's very obvious I was born an addict, because I think there's many as many things that can lead you down that route of like trauma and things like that. But for me, it's very obvious, because the traits that made me one have always been there. I would be that kid who would steal all the sweeties and then hide them in his room, and then join the search party with everyone else. And I did that with narcotics as well. So even then, you know, I also remember there wasn't ever a feeling of drugs or alcohol, I've got to be careful of that. It was much more, there's something that can make me feel different. What is that? I need to get my hands on that. And you know, that's even a big show at that age, the discomfort in your own skin. So, you know, I don't think there's any, especially if my family they always think oh, well what if this was true could have been different? It's like, I really don't believe that. I don't think there's any trail that could have happened where I'm not an addict because that's just who I am. The big lineage you see in most addicts is lineage runs down and families. But again, that's just my story of why I think I am I think there's many different trails that can get you there. Through trauma and things. Yeah.

Peter Leonard 08:24
Different ways of ending up in that same place.

Ali Gill 08:26
Yeah, but it's all the same gutter.

Peter Leonard 08:27
Well, yeah. So, what about the journey of rehab? When did that start for you? What did it look like?

08:34
The journey for rehab that was I was 27. And I suppose I had really reached the end of my trail, mentally, physically, spiritually, everything I was just done, you know, I was in this sort of weird space where I didn't, I didn't want to die. But I didn't want to live either. I really was done with my life. And I was also physically very sick. And through going to the doctors, I found out among many things, I had alcoholic cirrhosis of my liver, and was told it was going to kill me. And even then, you know, it's my response to that was what drugs can you give me for that? And I really was on the fence even about doing anything about it. And I sort of just went along on alright, I'll go to rehab, like the doctor suggested. And it's, you know, it's amazing. Those, those tiny little moments they see resulted in my life being able to change, I really think lines have to line up waves have to sort of come together for a successful recovery to be possible. And so even with all the work and you know, everything coming together, there's just luck at the end. So I consider myself lucky.

Peter Leonard 09:54
In the people we've been chatting to in this series. It's really interesting how what goes into an emotional toolkit for people is often a small thing, but it has a massive effect.

Ali Gill 10:03

Yeah. Exactly.

Peter Leonard 10:04
Like you said, gratitude is ultimately quite a small thing, but clearly has a massive effect and impact on you.

Ali Gill 10:11
It can be it can be really hard to do.

Peter Leonard 10:14
Yeah.

Ali Gill 10:15
Right out of gratitudes. It can really annoy me. But that's because I, I naturally lean towards demise, I suppose. Yeah, I've got a fight if I want to go the other way. As an alcoholic, and as a drug addict, it's against your natural state to be sober. Your natural my natural state of to just be is to fall back into the gutter. If you want to be sober. You've got to fight and put the work in. That's also been a big realisation is this is all a programme of action.

Peter Leonard 10:16
Yes. Yeah. It's really interesting. Listen to you. And I'm really grateful Alasdair for your openness about this. It sounds like it sounds like hard work.

10:57
Yep, do you know what it's really to simplify it, when I was using my life was really easy. And I wanted to die. Now, my life is really hard. But it's incredible. And actually, especially as addicts you to say that sentence to me, it almost doesn't make sense. But that is what it is. It's crazy, you know, I get so overwhelmed by anything. It's like, I had to learn how to live like a normal person in the last, at 27, I really didn't know how to do anything. I didn't know how taxes worked or anything like that, or how to fill out a form. So really, I find all that incredibly difficult, but it's worth every second of it. And that's why it's so important to look back on the day and go, look, look, what I've got, this is this is something that I never dreamed would have been on the cards for me, ever.

Peter Leonard 11:53
I mean, it's incredible listening to you. And it's really inspirational, because I'm thinking, you know, I don't do that I don't end the day and think, What am I grateful for? But what, what a brilliant thing to be doing in terms of what goes into an emotion toolkit. You know, how amazing is that? You know, just and not because I'm an addict, or in recovery, but just because what a positive, amazing thing to do.

Ali Gill 12:13
Yeah, it sounds a lot better on paper, but I'm rubbish at it.

Peter Leonard 12:18
But you're doing it aren't you. That's you know, that's, you know, you know, the difference it makes, I suppose.

Ali Gill 12:22
Will you call my sponsor and tell him?

Peter Leonard 12:25
You mentioned sponsor, so your rehab was 12 Step programme. Yeah. How was that? What did it look like for you?

Ali Gill 12:31
Awful. But it worked.

Peter Leonard 12:34
Okay, yeah.

Ali Gill 12:35
What you find with a lot of people who go, addicts who go into sobriety is you'll, like I did, I got the first couple of months in rehab, sober. And then your ego kicks in. And I thought, actually, I don't need to do anything else. I just got two months sober, I've done it. What else do I need to do I don't need to do the steps. I'm good. I'm golden, when actually it's alcohol and drugs is just the tiny bit of what it is to be an addict. There's nothing wrong with alcohol and drugs, it's not shoving itself down my face. It's, there's something that was making me do that. And you only get to the bottom of that, through the steps, you know, through sorting out your resentments and making a fearless moral inventory and you know, making amendments. We call that being a dry drunk, or white knuckling it is when you're just you're sober, but you're not doing a programme. Because the sickness doesn't go is always going to be in me, there's a reading in the book, that, I think it's something like, my addiction is something inside of me, that thinks something outside of me is going to cure it. And you hear a lot of amazing things in those rooms. And in the book, obviously. But every now and again, you can hear a line that can just sum it all up. But addiction is something inside of me that thinks something outside of me will cure now, what I see from the is that my addiction is sort of a big black hole here. And I tried to fill that with sex booze, drugs, love, but it only feeds it. And the truth is that it's always going to be there and you can't, you can't fill it or jam it. It's just about managing it. And being honest with it and, and being able to connect with other people. That is how you really find a life worth living, not one that's just surviving, but actually a life worth living. Because that's what being a dry drunk for me was I was getting through the day sober. This is how you find out properly and for me, anyway.

Peter Leonard 14:37
Yeah. There's a lot of very powerful emotions at play here. Some of which are potentially positive, some of which might not so helpful. I wonder if you can say something about what

those emotions might be. I'm thinking, is there any shame? Is there any guilt? What's going on there?

Ali Gill 14:54
It's funny you said that it's exactly the fine line between that between shame and guilt. Do you see them as the same thing?

Peter Leonard 15:02
No, no, I don't see them as the same thing.

Ali Gill 15:05
Exactly I would of. And it's funny because I think I'll still have shame, but it's about easing the guilt.

Peter Leonard 15:12
Okay.

Ali Gill 15:13
It's an incredibly crucial line that. Because you've such shame about what my life was as an alcoholic. But I don't feel guilty about it, because I understand what I have now. And all I can do is do the best I can to amend that, and be the best person for me, but also for others. But it's interesting because I would have put them together.

Peter Leonard 15:37
That's really interesting.

Ali Gill 15:38
And same with sort ego, you know, pride and ego this addiction is more than anything, a crux thing of my pride and ego. You know, it's me thinking, I'm in control. I've got this. And it's, it's I remember, like a therapist and rehab given me homework on pride, and it triggered me so much. I just wanted to tell you, I have no idea what you're talking about. Because I was so full of shame. I didn't have pride. Try talking your way out not needing pride homework, you sound like such a beep. Again, it's interesting because shame and pride, they kind of go hand in hand, even though they sound like opposites.

Peter Leonard 16:15
Shame is such a powerful, destructive emotion. Growing up gay shame was a massive thing for me.

Ali Gill 16:21
Really?

Peter Leonard 16:22

And it took me years of therapy to really get down to the heart of, of what was, you know, what was causing my issues, which was shame.

Ali Gill 16:30
Really…

Peter Leonard 16:30
I mean, it can be so destructive can't it.

Ali Gill 16:32
Why did you feel the shame?

Peter Leonard 16:33
I think because people around, you know, I'm of a generation when it was unacceptable. So, so you kind of you're the shame is given to you by others, but you also then take it on board and carry it and live with it

Ali Gill 16:44
Yeah, of course.

Peter Leonard 16:44
And it's so destructive, isn't it?

Ali Gill 16:46
Do you still now know.

Peter Leonard 16:47
No. I had years of counselling. And after about, I know, six sessions I'm like, I'm fine. Thanks very much. I'm off. And it was only when I had amazing counsellor who said no, let's just keep going for a bit.

Ali Gill 16:57
Sit back down.

Peter Leonard 16:58
Yeah, sit back down, you're not going anywhere. And it really got to the heart of it and uncovered what was what it was, which was shame, and that was such a powerful realisation.

Ali Gill 17:06
It's remarkable that moment, isn't it.

Peter Leonard 17:07

And mentioning it, which is why I'm very happy to talk about it because vocalising it suddenly makes this for me anyway, this is, you know I'm not projecting on anyone else, for me made this monster of shame inside me much more manageable.

Ali Gill 17:20
Exactly. Secrets make you sick.

Peter Leonard 17:22
Yeah. And talking about it is so powerful, makes them smaller and more manageable.

Ali Gill 17:26
It's remarkable that isn't it? Because you're just you until it happens, you also would never think that that's not going to help.

Peter Leonard 17:33
Yeah. This is Emotionally Speaking, the podcast about emotional health and relationships. I'm Peter Leonard. And today I'm talking with writer and Chef Alasdair Gill, about his journey of recovery from addiction. So let's come back with a question at you. We should mention that you're you come from quite a high-profile family. Your father was the writer, AA Gill and your mother is the former home secretary Amber Rudd. I'm just wondering whether you feel that was there extra scrutiny because people know something about your family? Because there's names out there. Do you think?

Ali Gill 18:11
Yeah, for sure. I mean, it wasn't it definitely wasn't cool to have the Tories weren't in. If that's what you mean.

Peter Leonard 18:19
I was being completely a-political…

Ali Gill 18:20
And they haven't been for a while. But I suppose it was, it was something that was kind of always, I mean, Dad was always in the public eye quite a lot. Mum definitely rose to fame. And that was like, whoa. And because that happened very quickly. I think she was like the fastest rising politician since the Second World War. I didn't even know what a Home Secretary was. She's gonna be working from home, great. So it mashed up in a terrible, my own terrible world. I was so deluded about what anything else was, but it was, um, you know, I feel very lucky with my family. I think I think I was blessed with incredibly loving people around me. And. And high achievers, the only thing slightly is that everyone was sort of busy. But yeah, there's no really resentments there. But it's, you know, life is hard. We've all got our own problems, and we're all trying to make it work.

Peter Leonard 19:21
Yeah.

Ali Gill 19:22
And the love has always been there.

Peter Leonard 19:25
Clearly that's been very powerful. And you mentioned earlier about relationships and the 12-step programme, you have a sponsor, so there's a relationship there. But relationships played an important part in that journey, too, for that recovery journey.

Ali Gill 19:40
Oh, yeah. Well, they were non existent before really. I was very dishonest and conniving and manipulating and you get good at covering up what you're doing as an addict. You sort of become a pro at it because you're selling it so well. And so that's why I think it was a big thing for me quite early on to be actually, this is what I'm doing this is what I've been getting up to. And that suddenly makes it a more lot real. Once you say, you know, I've got a problem with this even to a bit, you've almost crossed the line of actually, it's going to be tricky going back now, now that you've made that, in many ways, my my life only got real when I got sober, not even then actually only developing into the programme and finding my life because that's, that's when I should have started to find myself. And you know, that's something I struggle with a lot in early recovery is identity. And I think, in a weird way, I think I struggled with identity. Now, after getting sober and also as a child, but weirdly enough, not when I was using, I almost had an identity then. And that's also what feeds into shame, because like you can know what you are and I can't let anyone see me like this.

Peter Leonard 20:58
I think I think you're absolutely right. It's really interesting to use the expression want to be heard. We're back to vocalising, again, aren't we about vocalising your identity? And, and in a world where, you know, you have your kind of your real identity? And then there's your social media identity?

Ali Gill 21:10
Yeah, exactly.

Peter Leonard 21:11
Such a balancing act, isn't it? It must be exhausting. I've done it in the past. And I'm too tired to do it now. Like, I just post pictures of my dog now. That's all I can manage. There is that, you know, it's ever its effort to turn.

Ali Gill 21:23
So much effort. And I think why are you doing it? What are you doing?

Peter Leonard 21:29

We talked a bit about effort. And we've heard you've, you've portrayed a very powerful picture, I think of recovery in the effort involved in that. You clearly dedicated to that, you know, you're doing the work. So how do you maintain that?

Ali Gill 21:45
Why did I suppose in many ways, yeah, I don't maintain it. Or sometimes I do fall, I haven't relapsed, I should say. But I get into moments where I can feel that I'm not in a good space. And I've pushed away in my recovery. If I haven't been to a meeting in a couple of weeks, it will start to show. But when I see those moments, it's a very huge proof for me that my addiction is still thriving in there. Because it's almost like there's something inside of me working against that.

Peter Leonard 22:13
What does it what does it look like? What do you spot?

Ali Gill 22:16
Well, I get, I start questioning things. And then when I don't, if I don't go to a meeting, it's almost harder than to get back into that routine. Because it's like, an addiction really wants to get me alone so that I can drink and isolate me and not connect. And that's where I'll fall. I think if I were to fall this I know I'd probably got another drink in me. I don't know if I've got another recovery in me. So again, it's going back to that gratitude.

Peter Leonard 22:46
And connection sounds really important.

Ali Gill 22:48
Connection, the opposite of addiction. Helping, and like connecting back to others and to newcomers is really what keeps me sober. I love the saying, you know, we can only keep what we have by giving it away. And that's really true. For me. It's about passing on the message. That's really what keeps me sober.

Peter Leonard 23:07
Yeah. So, you've done that incredibly powerfully today. It's…Yeah. I'm blown away by your openness, your honesty, and your journey, and your kind of commitment, dedication to it. And I'm just thinking, okay, what am I going to put in my toolkit, what's gonna go in my emotional toolkit?

Ali Gill 23:24
Yeah, what's your toolkit? You want to borrow some gratitude?

Peter Leonard 23:27
Yeah, I want to borrow some gratitude, I want gratitude in my toolkit. I want connection in my Toolkit. I want vocalising in my toolkit.

Ali Gill 23:33
I love that.

Peter Leonard 23:34
They're like the big the big things. Plus we can only keep what we have by giving it away. That's massive.

Ali Gill 23:40
That can be translatable all across life.

Peter Leonard 23:43
Alasdair, it's been an absolute privilege to talk to you, I've I've loved every second of this and I could just keep going because you're a real inspiration and your honesty and I think maybe perhaps I'm gonna stick honesty my toolkit, actually. Because that's a powerful thing too.

Ali Gill 23:58
Well Peter thank you so much. It's been a real pleasure talking to you.

Peter Leonard 24:02
That felt like such a powerful episode and listening to Alasdair the talk so honestly about his experience in his emotional toolkit. I'm really struck by the honesty, and the gratitude, and the vocalisation. Three really powerful tools that go into our toolkit. So I just want to encourage you to talk about emotional health and starting that conversation can be difficult, so why not share this podcast with someone and see what conversations happen.

Narrator (Heather) 24:28
Emotionally Speaking is presented by Peter Leonard. Peter is the chief executive of the Centre for Emotional Health, and you can find out about their work and training courses by visiting their current website Family Links.org.uk.

Peter Leonard 24:41
I'd like to really thank you for listening. I hope that you felt part of that incredible conversation. You can find the other episodes if you're not listening to them on the places you'd normally get your podcasts. Thanks so much for listening.

Narrator (Heather) 24:53
Emotionally Speaking is produced by Freya Hellier and Alexandra Quinn, and is brought to you by the team at Loftus Media.

ENDS