



CENTRE FOR PSYCHOLOGY
AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Understanding and Working with Emotional Pain in Psychotherapy: From Brokenness to Transformation

Elizabeth Bolger, Ph.D., Psychologist



March 12 & 13, 2026



9:30AM – 4:30PM (Eastern Daylight Time)



Live Online Workshop

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OVERVIEW

Knowing how to work with emotional pain is fundamental to the psychotherapy process. At the heart of emotional pain is a “broken self”. The question is, what is broken and how can we help mend it? Whatever caused the breaking – trauma, loss, abuse, or unmet needs – if the experience feels emotionally unsafe or intolerable, it will likely be avoided or buried beneath layers of protective strategies and behaviours.



These protective responses can present as depression, anxiety, relational difficulties or addiction. While these responses may serve the purpose of covering the emotional pain, in the long run, it is the covers that keep the pain trapped inside.

In this science-based and clinically grounded workshop, Dr. Elizabeth Bolger presents a practical, skills-based model for helping clients access and work through emotional pain. This workshop is for any therapist who works with emotional pain and is looking to better understand the structure of pain, its protective layers, and how to heal the pain. Rooted in 35 years of clinical practice, this workshop draws on Dr. Bolger's research and training in Emotion Focused Therapy and her original research with Adult Children of Alcoholics. This model of emotional pain has informed decades of work with complex trauma, loss, addiction, depression, anxiety, and relational wounds.

OBJECTIVES

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In this workshop, you will learn how to:

- Distinguish between emotional pain and painful emotions
- Identify emotional pain as it appears in clients' narratives and behaviors
- Help clients become aware of the unique way they experience themselves as broken, whether they feel damaged, disconnected, incomplete, or fundamentally flawed
- Identify and assess the emotional reactions, behaviors, and aspects of identity clients use to cover up their emotional pain
- Use the concept of the Covered Self as a transdiagnostic case formulation tool to clarify client difficulties and establish meaningful therapeutic goals
- Apply targeted interventions to help clients allow, face, and work through their experience of brokenness within a strong therapeutic frame
- Support clients in integrating emotional pain and developing a more authentic, self-compassionate identity, one that allows for deeper, healthier, and more fulfilling connection with others

This training follows the arc from brokenness to transformation, offering strategies and interventions to work with what clients bring into therapy: the protective covers, the hidden pain, and the path to healing.



RATES

Early Registration Rate – \$330 (+ applicable taxes)

Regular Admission – \$389 (+ applicable taxes)

Student Rate – \$260 (+ applicable taxes)

Students are eligible for a student rate. Please sign up [here](#) to access student benefits. Student rates apply to individuals currently enrolled in an undergraduate, master's, or doctoral program at a recognized post-secondary institution.

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ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Dr. Elizabeth Bolger completed her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at York University in Toronto where she was trained in Humanistic and Experiential Psychotherapy. Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT) has been a primary influence on her development as a therapist.

Dr. Bolger is a certified EFT supervisor. She has been a skills trainer at the Institute of Emotion Focused Therapy for Complex Trauma and Couples Therapy and consults to other professionals on EFT for individuals and couples. Currently, she is a therapist and consultant at the Centre for Psychology and Emotional Health.

Dr. Bolger has many years of experience working in the treatment of addiction in both in-patient/residential and outpatient counselling services where she worked with individuals, couples and family members. She is the co-creator of a multi-modal addiction recovery model grounded in the relational and task principles of Emotion Focused Therapy and co-developed an early recovery empty chair task promoting self-care.

Dr. Bolger's research with Adult Children of Alcoholics has made an important contribution to the understanding of emotional pain in psychotherapy, guiding her own clinical experience and informing the work of others with a number of clinical problems for over thirty years. Her work on emotional pain has been presented at numerous conferences and published in academic journals.

