

Episode: 15

Title: The Good and Bad Days of OT

Hosts: Mahek Bansal & Larissa Ferrari

Mahek Bansal

Hi, everyone. Welcome back to the New PossibilOTs podcast. Larissa and I are super excited to have you here with us. Today's episode is going to be a little bit different. Larissa and I are going to talk about the good and bad days of OT. So we thought it'd be nice to, validate how our profession can have ups and downs personally and how it can impact us as OTs but also in our personal lives and how we feel about ourselves and validate that this is something that happens to all of us, no matter what level of experience we have or what setting we work in.

Larissa and I thought it'd be nice to share some of our experiences, talk through what we mean by a good and a bad day, and offer some general strategies or tips to support our wellbeing.

Larissa Ferrari

Yes, Mahek, I think that's actually a good theme, a good topic. When I talk with few friends and friends that are either practicing in a new country or just graduated recently, they all have these shared feelings, and I think I also have them. So why not share with everyone so then we can all feel supported in our practice, right?

Mahek Bansal

Definitely. We've had some new grads start with us in our clinic, and it's been great to see that journey through their eyes and reflect on the fact that it is a bit of a roller coaster. And it's great here. We have a supportive team and plenty of people to seek support from. So we can definitely navigate those things. But we thought it'd be great to then open that up a little bit to all of you that are listening.

Larissa Ferrari

Okay, so, shall, start with we chose a very catchy name, but let's try just to explain what does it mean? Like a good and a bad day? Just so it doesn't look that awful, but it's just a catchy name. I think when I thought about the good and bad term, I thought about when we're feeling really really good with what we did on that day, but also when we have those days that we're not very good or the day didn't go as we expected, so we have that not so good feeling within us. And I'll call that the good and the bad days in relation to how we feel, but not in reflection to our session goal. Have you got good and bad days, Mahek?

Mahek Bansal

100% and I agree. I think the terms good and bad is more our perception of what's happened in the day or how we felt from it, and not necessarily an outcome of what we did or the level of our skill and things like that. As you said, for me, a bad day could be anything from things unexpected happening, feeling overwhelmed or stressed, things like having more complex situations that I feel unprepared for or things like that they don't go to plan and that might make you feel bad, but it might just be feeling some sort of stress, overwhelm, something to reflect on and things like that.

And -maybe one thing that changes as you get more experienced is the level of which these things that occur in our day to day profession impact us personally and our own level to cope with them and grow from them and reflect on them. And -that's one thing to validate, like, it still happens. No matter how experienced you are, these things still happen. But -it's how we then move forward with that within ourselves.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah, that's already a great strategy. Thank you. And I totally agree. I still feel those feelings, and I think it is expected because we chose a profession that is pretty much relationship based. So it's not that we can make a plan and go through that plan, and that will work perfectly. Even though we can

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plan a perfect session, it is still relationship based. It still maybe my clients, maybe their family or carers and the activity. And that relationship is a very much important part of the session.

So even though when we have this amazing plan, we can have all these things that maybe I am not on the best day, the client's not on their best day, we might be tired or something might have got one of us out of our expected feelings, or the activity itself didn't work and triggered unexpected or uncomfortable feelings. And that's all very much life, isn't it? I feel like we have good and bad days with everything else, so we shouldn't feel bad about having good and bad days in our profession as well. We do have that with our family, with our friends in the community, in our relationship, with our leisure activities. So it is expected to have not so good days. But because I feel like it's always good to start with a positive thing, maybe we should look like what a good day looks like for you, Mahek.

Mahek Bansal

So for me, a good day is one that I feel confident. I feel like maybe I've overcome some obstacles. For example, if I've got a big meeting coming up, a multidisciplinary meeting or something like a report that I'm sending to a family or things like that I have been working hard on or trying to prepare, and it goes well, it goes smoothly, it was a positive experience, then that's a good day. I walk out feeling confident, good about myself, things going to plan or seeing, like having some small little successes and wins in sessions, building relationships with families and carers, all of these contribute to what I would say is a good day or even something as simple as my own personal to do list and my organisation, being able to tick everything off and feeling like, by the end of the day, I've gotten through my to do list. All of these things can accumulate to make a sense of feeling like it's been a good day and feeling good about myself. What about you, Larissa?

Larissa Ferrari

Oh, pretty much the same things. And the to do list was definitely on top of my head. When I have that, all the ticks in my list, I feel so proud of myself, and that makes me feel good. Also, when something I've planned to do with my client works perfectly well, like whether it was the performance or the goal we achieved. And maybe when someone, a family member or a carer is in the session as well and I have someone else to share that happiness with me, that proud feeling like, yes, we did it. This is the best feeling and the best reward. Whenever I have this happening on a session, that's when I said I definitely chose the right profession. I just love what I do, and I feel so good about it.

Mahek Bansal

Sometimes we can have OTs of good things that happen in a day, and maybe one thing doesn't go to plan, but it's still within us to reflect on whether that makes it a bad day because of one thing or a good day because of all the successes we had. So we talk about days, but even within a day, there can be this roller coaster of things that went to plan, things that didn't or something in between. And that doesn't necessarily mean that it has to just be a good day or has to just be a bad day, and that's okay, too. That's probably more the reality of our day to day is a mixture of these things.

Larissa Ferrari

Totally, agree. But maybe let's try just to name some of our not so good days or not so good moments because they happen.

Lisa Hughes:

Hello, my name is Lisa Hughes. I'm the CEO and therapy manager at Occupational Therapy Helping children. I'm just jumping into your ears to let you know about our upcoming New PossibilOTs course. This course has been specifically designed for OT students, new grad OTs and OTs looking for a career change into paediatrics. If you are looking for in depth knowledge, practical strategies, and want expert guidance, this is the course for you. It is on the 9th and 10 March but will be fully

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recorded and you will have twelve months access to the recordings. For more information, please go to our show notes or to our website www.occupationaltherapy.com.au. Bye.

Larissa Ferrarri

What would you say, Mahek? Which ones are some of the examples of not so good days or feelings you might experience in your profession?

Mahek Bansal

Maybe we can take turns here Larissa.

I'll say one. You say one. One of the things that might make it a bit of a challenging moment, is something unexpected happening?. -maybe more so in the sense of in a session. It could be in a session where you plan a beautiful session and then the child comes in really dysregulated or not 100%, or the parent comes in with needing support for themselves, or unexpected in the sense of a client cancelling that you've planned this huge, beautiful session for, and then they can't attend anything that -happens that's out of plan. And it might necessarily not make it a bad day. It just might take a moment to say, okay, that's okay, let me put my plan aside. Let's problem solve this on the spot.

Mahek Bansal

And again, that comes with confidence, and that comes with having confidence in yourself to do this flexibility. But initially it can be quite an uncomfortable feeling, and it comes with this experience and it happening multiple times and reflecting on it and knowing what you could do better next time.

Larissa Ferrari

I think instead of sharing another one, I'll actually expand on yours. I feel like when I've started, when I planned an activity, and let's say I plan a handwriting activity, but the child couldn't perform the task, and instead I had to decrease the level to something I know the child was pretty much capable of doing before, but we had to work much more on regulation strategies. I feel like before, like years ago, that would make me feel not so good because it would make me feel like I didn't progress on the session. However, nowadays I feel like I don't feel as bad or worried because I know that probably regulation is one of the goals that is behind the handwriting.

So I can adapt and try to make the session still look good, but that might take some time and experience for us to get to that point. I think that we might not feel good with what we expected, but on the other hand, we should feel good when we manage to have that client still engaged with us, engaged with a session, and somehow participating in whatever task we came up with instead.

Mahek Bansal

Yeah. And actually reflecting on it, that something unexpected happening, and that feeling of being able to be flexible in the moment and turn it into a success is what also contributes to a good moment. So it's not necessarily that it's going to be bad just because it's unexpected. It might just be a sense of, okay, let's just process this has happened, but let's move forward with it. And that can take some time, it can take some confidence, as we've said, but it's realizing that it's not necessarily a bad thing, it's just what we make of it. What do we do next?

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah. And -the other thing I would consider a not so good feeling for me is when I'm having a good session with a client, but something happened in the last ten minutes, and the child is not leaving the session in the happiest state. It might have happened something that challenged their self-confidence, it could have been something that, or even a fall, a trip over, I don't know, something that just made the child feel upset or not happy with whatever they did in the session and where they do

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not leave with that sense of achievement, happiness, accomplishment. It might get me to feel a little bit upset, too. But what usually helps me is that whenever they come back, they are just like me. Like it was just something small. I'm recovered, ready to move forward. And that helps me to say, okay, that was just a little part of our session. The overall was still good, but, yeah, that's personally saying that's something that I don't really like to experience in a session, but it happens.

Mahek Bansal

Yeah, I agree. And -sort of related but another point is something that makes me feel -, uncomfortable or could be a bad moment for me is more just like safety and accidents and things like that. I feel like emotionally and mentally, it can be a lot, and it's bound to happen. We do as much as we can to manage risks, to identify hazards and things like that, but accidents happen sometimes, especially when you're working with kids. So things like falling off swing, or in our clinic we have an elevator to get between levels, so there's been incidences with children running into elevators and things like that. So when things out of our control or incidents and stuff happen, that can also bring -, an extra mental load to the day.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah, totally. And that can really upset our feelings because we feel like it's our fault. So definitely for these ones, we can come up with some strategies to help, because I think this needs an extra care from the team that you're working with.

But continue thinking about the not so good feelings we have in a session. I feel like the other thing is that as a paediatric to, I would like to know everything. However, we never know everything. So I feel like when I need to give answers to the parents, and the parents are really anxious to have answers about the questions and strategies that work, and we try something that's not working and we are in a little bit of a rough initial path that we're going together, I might feel bad not to have all the answers. But -I've learned that having an open communication with the parents really help, and the carers really helps me, because when they trust us, it means that they will also believe in us, even though if we don't know everything, so we can have an open conversation to say, let me rethink these strategies. Let me rethink, let me revisit the literature. Let me see if I'm missing something here. And they'll actually trust you even more if you're having that open communication. So it sometimes feels bad not to know everything, or it sometimes feel bad to think of strategies and they don't really work as well as I've planned, but I think that's also expected, again, because we are working with human beings, so whatever works for one might not work for another one.

Mahek Bansal

And building on that, we do have times where we are encountering, we're trying to problem solve something, and no matter whatever strategies we bring up, they don't work, or they work for a little bit and they stop working. And you feel like you get to a point where it's like, what else can I do? And it impacts you because you're trying really hard to come up with these things. And even on the podcast, give OTs of tips and strategies. But that doesn't mean that every time we encounter a problem, the first strategy we try is going to work. So that can contribute to a not so good day is coming up with another strategy, and only for it to also not be successful. And that requires a lot of perseverance and resilience on our part as well, to know it's okay, let's go back to the drawing board. Let's rethink this or let me get someone else's opinion. Maybe I'm missing something, which can be tricky.

Larissa Ferrari

I'm running out of ideas here. Could you think of anything else?

Mahek Bansal

I think for me, another maybe not so good day is sometimes when more. -I'm thinking of two things. One is more like an admin perspective. A not so good day could be having a chunk of time for report

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writing and feeling not mentally able, mentally in the right space to write a report. And so it feels like it can be like pulling out teeth trying to write a report when you're not there mentally. And then it can feel bad because you feel like you weren't productive, you haven't spent your time well, you've got so many things on your to do list, and it's just pushing those things out. So that can be a tricky day, too.

Larissa Ferrari

I totally agree with that. And report writing. Let's just imagine ourselves. We are super active and think about multitasking whenever we're working with children. All of a sudden, we have to sit down and be very focused and very quiet, very straight to the point how tricky it can be just to go from one to the other and from the other to one. And it is very challenging when we just can't feel that productive. And I totally agree with you.

Mahek Bansal

The other thing I'm thinking is more, I find it a not so good day or uncomfortable, a tricky time is when I feel like there are procedural or administrative or things outside of our control that's presenting a barrier to therapy. Because for me, as a therapist, the reason I do what I do is because I want to support as many people as possible. I want people who need support to be able to access it. And so things like when you're trying to fight NDIS decisions or provide support to get NDIS and that's not going through. Or sometimes working with schools and we've talked about collaboration before, but sometimes when you feel like that relationship is not collaborative and you're not really finding that you're getting somewhere with it, then all of these things can feel like, -, a bit of a step down and a bit of a knock because you're trying to do as much as you can and you really want to support this family, but there's these things outside of your control that are just presenting as barriers.

Larissa Ferrari

It's almost like you're feeling alone, but you want to support the child in all settings.

Mahek Bansal

Exactly. And it's just like a wall. Like you're faced with this wall that you can't break down. And there's only so much that we can do as well. So it just feels a little bit hard to then have to accept that.

Larissa Ferrari

Yes, I totally agree. And I also feel like that's a big thing for me as well. I would love to hear of what the people has to say in that regard. And it would be great if people could tell us even more situations. And maybe in the future we can share some other things, because I feel like just good to have a space like this for us to feel safe, that other people feel the same way as we do. But maybe let's also think of some strategies or maybe some suggestions about what people could do to help them with the not so good feelings.

Mahek Bansal

These are all very general and probably more related to what we can do personally to support ourselves and gain support because as we said, the good and bad days are more related to how we feel internally and the perception of our day, not necessarily what happened. So -it's more about supporting our emotional and mental wellbeing to be able to be confident and resilient and persevere through these difficult moments.

Larissa Ferrari

Totally. I have read a few papers that were talking about the stress in occupational therapists in general. Some of them would address the stress in new graduates, occupational therapists or occupational therapists working in paediatric fields. And this is something that I feel like even the literature is important for us to consider. So it's really for therapist, whoever's listening to us, not to feel alone. This is expected and I think we can still take care of ourselves as well in our professional roles.

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Mahek Bansal

So -a first thing to consider, a first suggestion is the team around you if you work in a team, then trying to gain support from your colleagues, from your peers, from your supervisor, and if you don't have access to those things, then looking at how you can get access to supervision and mentoring.

Whether that's external or what that looks like over telehealth or things like that, or looking at OT support groups and literature groups and things like that. -Just connecting with the other professionals in our area to gain support from each other.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah. And adding to that, I feel like try to think of what are the things that you're not feeling so good about and you're probably going to find someone that could help you in that specific situation. For example, if it's more with the admin part of it or the financial part of it, or the actual role of OT and clinical reasoning. So you pretty much can find someone that could help you with mentoring, coaching or supervising if you don't have that within your workspace or environment.

Mahek Bansal

Another suggestion is to consider your own work life balance. As OTs, it is a very mentally, physically, emotionally exhausting role. So making sure that you have some balance, whether that's if you're finishing at five, try not to take your work home, leave home life for home and personal things so that you have time for hobbies and interests, even if it's reading a book or just having some time to use a face mask or do your nails. Consider how you can make sure work stays at work and you have time to just decompress and have your time to yourself.

Larissa Ferrari

Yes. And I would add to that, maybe try to find things that could literally take your work away from you. Things that you enjoy so much doing that you cannot think about work when you're doing these things. If it's a guided meditation, if it's a podcast, or if it's a book or a club. A book club. I don't know. But just something that can really get you to consider the things you like. Leisure, hobbies. What makes you feel good? Yeah, -something I would add to that list is seek support if you need. So one of the things that I really like about the place that we work is that we can access therapeutic support for our own mental health. If that's something you do not have in your work environment, then maybe try to reach out for the public services, community services, or even other therapists that could help you with managing your own mental health. That's really important and part of your life as a whole. So that would be something I would add.

Mahek Bansal

Most workplaces should have access to an employee assistance program, which is what Larissa is referring to we have access to here. So it's a great way to try and use and seek support. And seeking support doesn't necessarily need to be related to your role at work. It could just be just general stress or overwhelm, and it doesn't necessarily need to be after something's happened or getting to a really difficult point to then do it. It can be preventative; it can be to just make sure as a check in for yourself. So definitely prioritise your mental health, because, like very much the foundation of paediatric OT is co-regulation, and we can't co-regulate if we're not regulated ourselves.

Larissa Ferrari

True. Beautiful. My other tip would be to, even though it's within our responsibility to keep building on our professional development, don't feel the pressure that you have to know everything. Just take the pressure away. I think as paediatric or professional therapists, we work with the individual as a whole, and that means we have to know so many different topics. So, yeah, just to take that pressure out of yourself, continue with your PD within your time frame. But we be honest that you can find the answers if you need, and everything's going to be fine.

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And, like you said, Larissa, we work in a relationship based profession that every single individual we work with is unique. So we're not going to know everything, because every situation is unique. It's different. It's individual to that person and that family. So I don't think it's possible to know everything, and it means that I think the best way to go about it is just with integrity to say and to be really transparent about that and say, look, I understand these are the difficulties. Can you give me some time just to have a little bit of a think, a reflection, and find what I think will work best or what we should try? And most parents, if not all, really respect that. They really respect that you're really open and clear with them and it helps to build. And as you said, the parents trust your opinion and your guidance.

Larissa Ferrari

My last tip, I think, I don't know if you have any more Mahek, but I think to be flexible within your plans. Make plans, make plan A make plan B, C. But also think of your session as steps. If you're not in the top level, come down a few steps. If it's regulation, if it's engagement, if you just have to readapt a little bit, I don't know. But just be flexible so that you don't lose that engagement and you're working with some of the different goals that could impact your main goal. But be flexible. Just to be able to navigate this very tricky step. Sometimes we have to go up and down, but that's fine. It's fun. It can be so fun.

Mahek Bansal

My last tip, Larissa, is to reflect and think of these bad moments as learning and to try better next time or learn from it next time, -Things happen and that's okay. But later on the next day or a few days later, if we can have some time to just reflect on what happened, what you might do differently next time, if there is anything you would do differently next time, and just take those moments as opportunities to grow. Because that's when I think moving forward, those things that happen might impact us less when we can see them as it's okay, these things happen. What can I do differently next time? That's how we develop that resilience. So just take some time to reflect and grow from things and seek support. If you need support with your reflection or suggestions of what you could do differently next time. But it doesn't mean that it's never going to happen again, firstly, or that it's any reflection on your skill as a therapist, but just that we can take these opportunities to learn and grow.

Larissa Ferrari

Yeah. Sometimes even talk to your OT friends. I'm pretty sure most of them will sometimes feel just like you.

Mahek Bansal

Lots of things to think about and hopefully just some validation and support for getting through some of those bad moments and turning them, hopefully into some opportunity for good moments in the future. But as we said, days can be full of good, difficult, uncomfortable, chaotic moments. But that's what the life of an OT is. And I don't know about you, Larissa, but I love my job. I know that you love your job, too, so we wouldn't change it for the world. But it doesn't mean that we don't need support sometimes. We don't need to check in with ourselves sometimes, because we definitely do.

Larissa Ferrari

Totally agree. And yes, we do love what we do just so much that we decided to talk about what we do as well.

Mahek Bansal

Exactly. So thank you so much, everyone, for listening. Please, if you have any general tips or things that you would like to share that works for you to manage your good and bad days, then please let us

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know and share it with our community, because this is how we can also gain support from each other, is through podcasts and communities and things like that. So we would love to hear from you. And if not, Larissa and I will be with you again in our next episode.

Larissa Ferrari

Yes. Bye.