



# SELF-CARE FOR THE ASTRO COMMUNITY

## FINDING BALANCE IN CONSULTATION

### HELD BY THE COSMOS

#### ASTROLOGY'S ROLE IN EMOTION REGULATION AND GRIEF WORK

by Andrea Conlon



There are many ways to work with astrology. I find the greatest reward from using astrology as my core theoretical lens for psychotherapy.

All therapists have some kind of internal working model that guides how they work with clients. Astrology offers unique value for this purpose and complements any therapeutic modality.

A therapist using astrology seeks to bring healing and movement to frozen and tangled-up psychic states, with the natal chart informing the process. Over multiple sessions, I ground myself and let the client's situation and their chart wash over me, speaking to me through the astrological symbols. I then describe the chart's energetic state and work with the client to identify and live into their next developmental steps.

This article explores two key concepts in working with this synthesis: emotion

regulation and grief work. As you will see, these concepts are deeply interwoven.

#### Astrology's Role in Emotion Regulation

A century ago, Freud famously said that therapy is the talking cure. Our contemporary understanding is that therapy is "the affect regulating cure" (Schore, 2009, p. 128). Much of what leads people to seek therapy can be traced to fear and resistance to emotional life.

Astrology is a tool to help understand and, thus, regulate the nervous system in times of crisis and emotional reactivity. Many clients have shared that an astrological interpretation calms them by normalizing their process, allowing them to work with their emotional state. This is closely akin to what Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön (2025) expresses as the primary importance of being able to relax with your own energy.

If a client is in the middle of a Pluto transit, for instance, they are likely experiencing a descent into their personal underworld. Knowing this, the therapist can de-pathologize intense and painful feelings—even what might be labeled depression—as something natural at this time and help them navigate the challenging period. An empowering transformation can often be the result.

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#### The Objective Psyche

Jung (1969) used the term *objective psyche*, or *the collective unconscious*, to refer to a deep layer of the psyche that all individuals share. This has great importance for astrologers. The objective psyche exists independently of conscious awareness and thus includes the archetypal patterns of the planets and the zodiac. Astrology as a symbolic system gives form and specificity to the objective psyche.

The difference between astrology as one's internal working model of therapy and other models is that astrology is based on the cosmic design of the solar system. You are working with something beyond the personal, beyond even the cultural. Planetary cycles and their timing operate whether you acknowledge it or not. This gives the therapeutic work a particular kind of grounding, a sense that you are aligning with forces larger than individual will.

#### Feeling Felt

Therapeutic astrology is an authentic empathic encounter between two people that blossoms over multiple sessions. *The astrological map is the guide for feeling into the psychic world of the other.*

The neurobiologist Dan Siegel (2010) describes *feeling felt* as the experience of being truly understood, not just intellectually heard. It combines empathy, acceptance, and presence and is fundamental to well-being. This creates a profound sense of safety, which is the foundation of all healing. Astrology is powerful in its capacity to impart a sense of being deeply felt and understood in one's patterns, struggles, and nature.

#### Finding a Handle

I generally find my way into the work of therapy through an outer-planet transit or a significant progression. As I learn about the person's situation, the chart begins to

speak to me. One way astrology provides holding and containment is by providing context for meaning during times of crisis.

Ann was going through a breakup that completely undid her. I shared with her some themes about transiting Pluto conjunct Saturn while simultaneously opposing the Sun/Chiron conjunction. Quite a difficult and life-changing transit!

I had an easy empathic resonance with her from my own life experiences, where I, too, had felt emotionally undone by breakups. I held a balance between staying with her tears and pain and introducing theoretical interpretations of the Pluto transit. This is typical; shuttling back and forth between astrological material and therapeutic process is how the integration goes.

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As we worked together, I introduced Pluto as the death-rebirth dynamic—how an old self was dying off to make way for a new identity. This is a cycle of cleaning out and dismantling (Pluto) of old defensive insecurities (Saturn) so that one begins anew on a whole new track. It would require facing wounds of the self, never an easy proposition. Framing the situation as a Pluto transit offered a scaffold for navigating the intensity of a dramatic, once-in-a-lifetime configuration. Together, we faced the strong dark feelings arising, with Pluto's insistent direction that her relationship with herself could fundamentally change.

The breakup also came with transiting Uranus square Mercury as shocking news! She was reeling from the impact. Therapeutically, it is containing and regulating to have the right words reflected, as in "I can feel the shock of this with you." The therapist helps metabolize the other's distress. This is the nuts and bolts of all therapy, and astrology is such a profound tool, guiding me through it all. As a therapist, I can go much deeper into areas where other astrologers don't have the time or structure to explore.

I once heard an interesting statement by a Jungian analyst. He said that the purpose of therapy is to hold the anxiety of the analyst. Throughout my career as a therapist, astrology has profoundly held me. Whether I share the astrological language with the client depends on many factors—primarily their openness to it or knowledge of it. At this point in my career, people come to work with me because of my astrological orientation. I am grateful for this evolution in my work and the culture.

## Stopping for Suffering

The therapist works with suffering by helping to bring empathic presence to the whole person—mind, heart, and body. When I see a chart like Ann's and sense why she is seeking help, *I want to communicate that I see her suffering*. This is real, and the client has a right to feel it. In fact, if they don't engage with the feeling honestly and wholly, they can't move through it. As Jung (1969) said, "neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering".

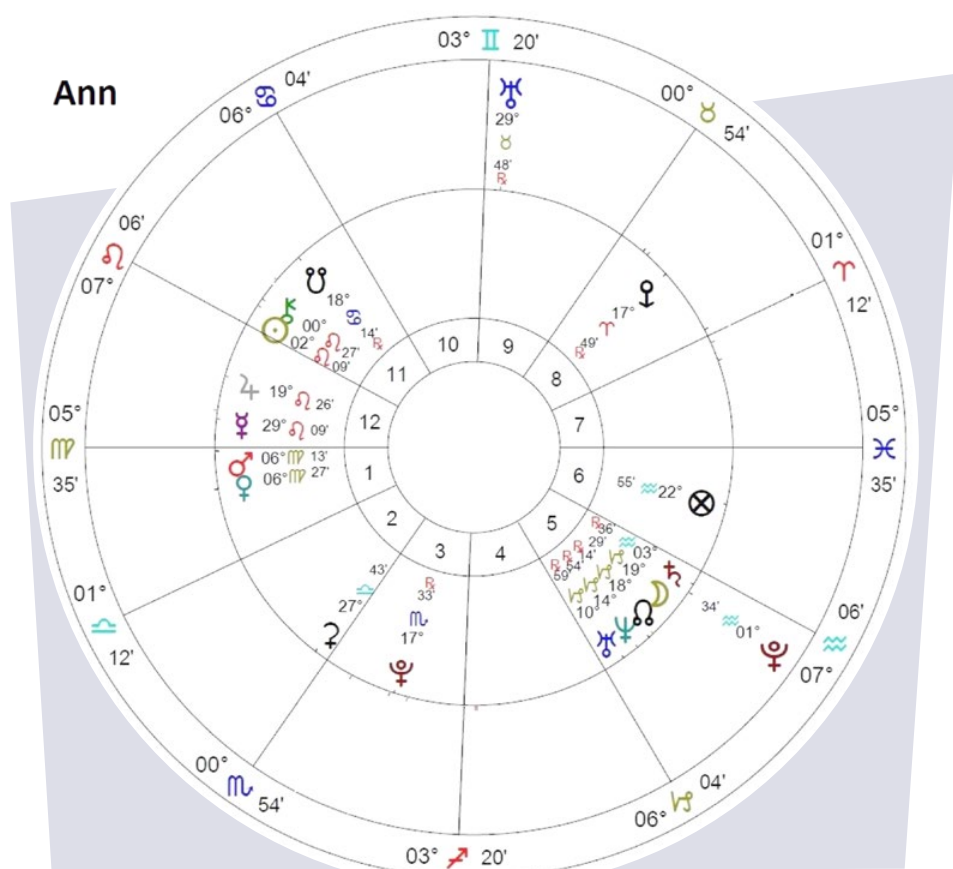
It is often difficult for people to distinguish between having a feeling and the automatic self-condemnation that accompanies it. Telling oneself "I shouldn't have this feeling" is a sure recipe for unwanted feelings to persist. Even Pema Chödrön (2026) said that it took her decades of meditating to relate to her suffering with kindness and acceptance!

Our culture's superficiality shames people for legitimate suffering instead of offering real help. There is a pathway out of suffering, but it is not by fighting with it or denying it.

## Grieving as Soul Work

Therapy is a good place to learn to tolerate pain. A large part of therapy involves working with the pain of undigested grief. Ours is a grief-phobic culture, and yet there is never a time when grief is not present. As Francis Weller (2023-2024) states, "we have to become skillful in the art of loss." His mission is to teach people to create a companionate relationship with grief so that it walks alongside us. This view is not exactly what the "have a happy day" culture teaches.

James Hillman (Weller, 2023-2024) said that people do not come to therapy to have what is broken fixed, but to have what is broken blessed. What beautiful wisdom from someone born with Chiron conjunct the Sun and Moon! Hillman was born on April 12, 1926, at 10:20 am (EST) in Atlantic City, NJ.



CONLON

## Astrology Illuminates Grief

"I am fearful of unleashing a sadness I know I haven't acknowledged and its consequences." Joan, a 76-year-old client, was dealing with depression and the many losses in her life. At the beginning of our work together, I told her that at times life is too much for any of us to bear alone, and that we need someone to carry the load with us.

When she began working with me, transiting Pluto was tightly square Joan's Venus/Mercury conjunction in Libra. At the same time, Uranus in Aries opposed the duo. Both planets were strong in Joan's chart, with Mercury as Ascendant ruler and Venus as solar ruler. This was a dramatic activation of her chart during the transiting Uranus/Pluto square of 2012 to 2015.

Mercury was crossing her Moon during our first session, an added synchronicity, and the path opened to talk about her feelings.

Working with elders has taught me about the wrenching losses of aging—both the loss of health and the loss of friends. Joan had led a rich and interesting life, but one with many hardships and losses. Her first marriage failed after she discovered her husband was gay and had been living a secret life away from her. Despite her bitterness about this marriage, she was passionate about gay rights.

Her second husband, the love of her life, died after 23 years of marriage. A decade on, she still grieved him and the fact that she had felt shut out of his dying process. In addition, she had two daughters with him, one of whom was disabled with a mild case of cerebral palsy. The losses and hardships mounted for this "salt of the earth" woman I admired!

Joan's chart, with Saturn on the South Node in Aries and at the apex of a T-square with Mars and Pluto, is not the stuff of a light and easy life. Saturn ruled the 5th House (5H) of children, and there were heavy responsibilities there, as well as great pride.

Joan had big issues with religion, as you might expect, with Saturn in Aries conjunct the South Node in the 9H and Mars and Pluto squaring the Lunar Nodes. "I cannot be involved in organized religion!" she declared. She was, however, open to an astrological perspective and, through our work, developed a more authentic spiritual orientation.

Her chart is a good example of how Steven Forrest (2019) views Libra's evolutionary task—attaining peace and calm.

Paradoxically, her karmic past was anything but, as symbolized by a Saturn/Mars/Pluto T-square. Joan wished for less responsibility for her disabled child and said, "My soul wants peace and quiet."

Knowledge of Joan's chart held me through the slow digestion of her accumulated losses. Astrology's capacity to hold the therapist cannot be underestimated. The transiting square of Uranus/Pluto clearly outlined the task at hand. It required a co-regulating other to help her feel and unpack the most significant losses of her life. I helped her create a compassionate space for the profound losses she endured, which had been so unintended, so that she could bring more ease to her remaining life.

This is astrological alchemy, where the therapist helps cook the blocked-up material of a life. This is also Pluto's imperative.

## Working with the Body

There is a powerful evolution in the field of psychotherapy to work more directly with the body and its wisdom. The long reign of the mind/body split in therapy is coming to an end. Eugene Gendlin (2007), the creator of *Focusing* and an influence on many somatic approaches, said, "Feelings

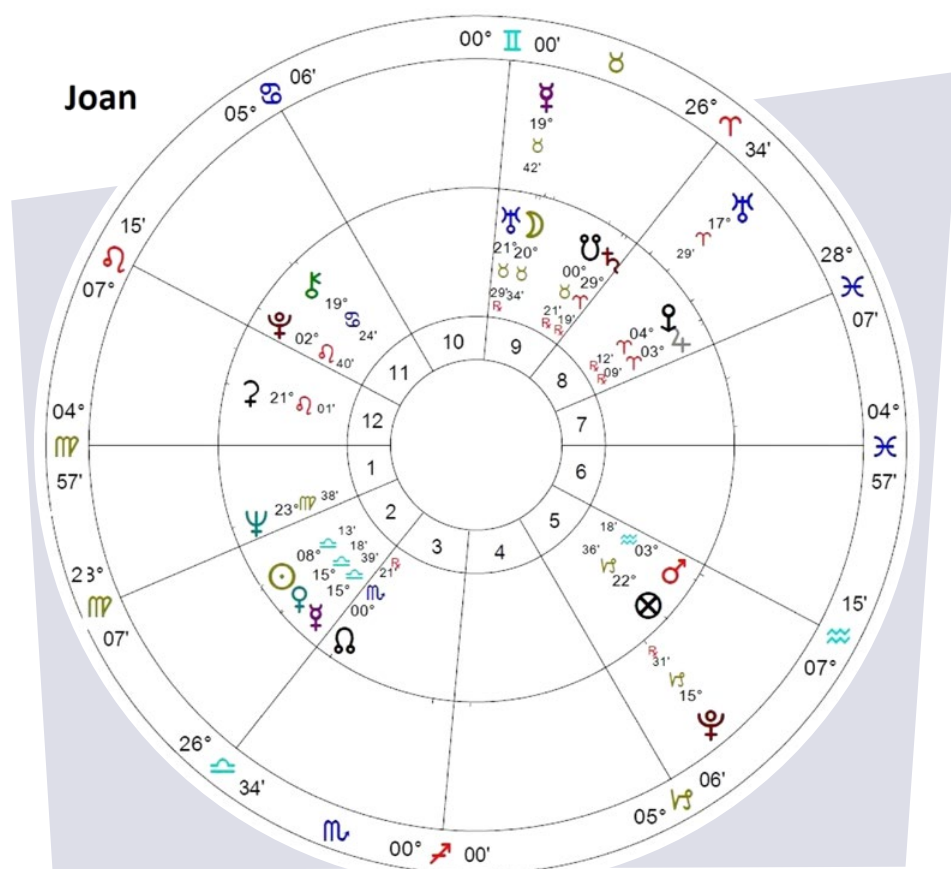
and troubles are not just concepts or ideas: they are bodily. There has to be a physical process of steps into where the trouble is felt in the body." Change happens when a person offers presence to the body's sense of troubles and thereby allows a next step, a living forward to emerge.

## Grief Seeks Co-Regulation

As social beings, human nervous systems attune with others through the biological process of co-regulation. This is the source of empathy and compassion. Co-regulation is also the foundation for self-regulation, or the capacity to bear and regulate a feeling life. This plays an important part when working with someone's grief.

Susan came to me seeking support as she grieved the death of her mother four months earlier. The death occurred with transiting Uranus only minutes of arc from an exact conjunction with her 8H Moon in Taurus. The literalness of this aspect astounded me! I could feel the emotional shock of this transit for her. Susan's grief was raw; it needed empathic presence and holding—or co-regulation.

Contemporary culture has largely lost the capacity to work with the archetypal



reality of death and grief. In her case, Susan felt that others in her life were growing impatient with her process, even though the death occurred less than six months ago!

Her birth chart pictures a Moon/Jupiter conjunction in Taurus trine Venus in Capricorn. It would be hard to find a more beautifully aspected Moon, one which reflects love and generosity shared with the mother. Although this relationship was not flawless, it was apparent that Susan grieved a mother she genuinely loved. This is not always so, and many grieve what they never had in this most primal of relationships.

Seeing the power of transiting Uranus guided my language. I felt drawn to mirror

the emotional shock of having her deepest need—the steady, secure base of her Taurus Moon—disrupted and taken away. Transiting Uranus to the Moon can seem so cruel to the vulnerable lunar needs. And yet, I could also hear Uranus' instructions that the ultimate truth of this life is impermanence and change. One cannot hold on to anything except, perhaps, the soul's growth.

The Taurus Moon in the 8H adds layers of meaning and gravity to this transit. The 8H, traditionally the house of death, speaks to deep psychic bonds and the powers of necessary transformation. This was not only the loss of her mother's physical presence that her Taurus Moon had always counted on, but a confrontation with the impermanence of bodily existence. I sensed this was Susan's initiation into helping others going through these kinds of passages.

The co-regulation that astrologers and therapists provide is a form of spiritual care. It is not about trying to avoid or deny these feelings, but about being fully present with them. And, as the body has much more capacity than the mind to work with something this primal, Susan's feelings needed to be witnessed and experienced in the

body. Together, we kept this grief company through its needed time.

## Conclusion

The drive to be understood runs deep in us. To be seen from an astrological point of view can provide the deepest kind of affirmation and mirroring, especially when we receive this from a co-regulating other.

The tool of astrology is a superpower in the everyday work of a therapist as they intuitively engage with their client to regulate emotions and calm reactivity. Yet this work demands more than astrological knowledge alone. It requires therapeutic training and the willingness to sit with another's pain without turning away. The beauty of this synthesis is its capacity to hold both the symbolic and the lived experience simultaneously.

For those of you in the astrological community who feel called to this deeper work, I encourage you to seek out the therapeutic training that will allow you to serve in this way. And for those already doing this work, may you continue to trust the profound wisdom of this synthesis.

**Author's Note:** Chart data has been withheld to maintain client confidentiality. Biwheels include client's natal chart on inner wheel with relevant transits on the outer wheel. Charts calculated in the Placidus house system.

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Susan

