

# THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

*with Kirstin Sarfde*

## Ep #106: Being Vulnerable

Hi! Are you ready to get vulnerable? Are we ever really ready to do that?

I do it all the time on this podcast, but I'll tell you, I wasn't always this open about my binge eating, or really any other thing in my life that I would consider to be a weakness.

I liked coming off as a strong person who had her life together and who could do all the things.

So to do that, I kept most of my feelings, my doubts, and my insecurities to myself.

I didn't want to look like a weak person.

What's interesting was that not only was I stopping myself from being vulnerable with other people, but also with myself. I say I kept my feelings, doubts and insecurities to myself but I probably wasn't even aware of them. I just brushed past them, didn't really acknowledge them, and again, just pushed myself to be stronger without addressing why I was having struggles and not doing what I wanted to be doing in the first place.

Before I entered the coaching world, I didn't spend much time thinking about how I felt and understanding where I was coming from and why I was experiencing my life the way I was.

I wasn't being vulnerable with anyone, myself included.

It makes sense that we might not want to be vulnerable. I looked up the definition of vulnerable and it says, "Susceptible to physical or emotional attack or harm." Obviously what I'm talking about in this episode pertains to the emotional piece, not the physical.

So what happens is that we fear being vulnerable with someone, ourselves or other people, because

we're afraid something bad will happen if we are.

We're afraid that the person we're vulnerable with will say something hurtful, judge us, put us down, think differently of us in a negative way, cut ties with us, or even dismiss what we're saying.

Then you may regret telling them, you may think you said something wrong, you may have not so nice thoughts about them, you may agree with what they're saying and feel bad about yourself.

Ultimately, you're afraid of how you'll feel if you're vulnerable.

When people react to our vulnerability, we have thoughts about it and that causes us to feel a certain way.

An example of this might be if you shared how you feel with someone and they tell you to stop being such a baby. You probably have some thoughts about that that would cause you to feel bad.

Or if you tell someone about something difficult from your past and they tell you something like you're a messed up person or they don't want to be around you anymore.

This is a real possibility. This is how people react sometime.

As I was thinking about these kinds of reactions to vulnerability, I thought of a time when I reacted that way to someone.

I'm not going to get into all the specific details, but I was dating a guy and on our second date he told me about some choices he made in his past. I tried really hard to be understanding, to not judge him, and to still be open to dating him, but I just couldn't get there. I actually did that with something else he had told me about his past, I could totally look past it, but this thing, I just couldn't. So I ended it. I didn't want to be with a person who did what he had done. It really did make me question who he is as a person.

That's not usually the case for me though. I think part of why that whole thing was so hard for me was because I consider myself to be an accepting person, someone who can be understanding of people's choices, and who can feel compassion for people who make mistakes and who go through hard times that aren't their fault.

I wouldn't be able to do what I do for a living if I wasn't. Every time I talk with someone about their eating habits, their body, their opinion of themselves, their past, the people in their lives, all these things, I feel for them.

Now, as a coach, it's not my job to coddle, to condone complaining or victimizing, that's not useful, it's my job to offer different perspectives and help guide my people in the direction they want to go.

I think part of what helps me to do that is having the underlying compassion for them and them knowing this.

I'm not someone who's just going to tell you to suck it up and stop eating so much without understanding where you're coming from. I absolutely understand and although sometimes my clients and I joke about their irrational thinking and sometimes I drop truth bombs and sometimes I get

assertive, it all comes from love.

And what's also important here is that the only reason I'm able to help anyone I do is because they're being vulnerable.

I can't tell you how many times I've talked with people who have gone to therapists or coaches or someone who's there to help them and they weren't honest with them.

This was obviously not helpful. If you don't share with your helper what's really going on, then they can't help you.

It's like if you go to your doctor, and you've been having abdominal pain, but you don't tell them you've been having abdominal pain, you tell them everything's fine, because you're afraid it has something to do with your binge eating and you don't want to tell them about how you eat, then they're not going to treat it so you can feel better.

Then you're left with this pain, just hoping it will go away and just trying to forget about it when it doesn't hurt.

Had you just been honest with them, then a solution could be found.

It's when people are fully open with me that I can see their truest thoughts, their irrational thoughts, the thoughts that they think are stupid, the thoughts they think are shameful. That's when the most powerful work begins.

Now, vulnerability with other people is easiest if you're first being vulnerable with yourself. So if you have a hard time being vulnerable, open, and honest about yourself with other people, I'd question how you are with yourself.

When you're not vulnerable with yourself, what that looks like is a lot of you not acknowledging yourself. You don't look at your thoughts or your feelings, you shove them away. You don't look into understanding your actions you take that you don't want to be taking, you might just berate yourself for doing them or try really hard not to and fail because again, you're not even understanding why you're doing them to begin with.

Not being vulnerable with yourself stops you from finding out the true problems that need to be addressed.

Being vulnerable with yourself sometimes means acknowledging that there is a problem, which may lead you to feel like you're weak, which you're not, you're just a human and all humans have problems. It also opens your eyes to the work that needs to be done and you may not be willing to do the work. You may think it's too scary.

You may be afraid of what else will be uncovered but here's the thing. Whether you uncover your underlying issues or not, they're there and they're affecting you. So you might as well uncover them, face them, and get to work on them so they can stop affecting you negatively as they have been.

If you don't acknowledge that there's a problem then you won't look for a solution.

One of the biggest problems I see people face when they're not willing to be vulnerable is that it stops them from asking for help.

When you ask for help, you're admitting that you can't do something.

You may make that mean there's something wrong with you, that you're weak, that you're not good enough.

What I find to be so interesting is that we all ask for help sometimes. It may not even seem like it, but we do. Even if you're just asking someone to throw something away for you or get something out of a bag for you, that's you asking for help. You're asking for help with getting the thing or getting rid of a thing. And you don't make that mean anything about you.

But when it comes to asking for help to stop binge eating or some other behavior, to change something you don't like about yourself, asking to borrow money, asking for help with a project you're working on, you make it mean so much about yourself.

Why is that? Why can you ask for help with some things and not with others?

It really is just because of what you make the thing mean about you as a person. Like, it's no big deal if I need help opening a jar of pickles, but asking for help to pay for coaching so I can make my life exponentially better? No way, because that not only means I'm not good enough because I don't have that money and that means something negative about me, but now I'm going to share that with someone along with sharing that I have a personal problem that I want to work on. And they're going to think negatively of me. And then I'm going to feel bad about it.

So what do you do instead? You do nothing. You let your unwillingness to be vulnerable, your unwillingness to share your shortcomings, your problems, and your feelings to stop you from getting the help that could change your life dramatically.

You may think that sharing your truest self, your truest thoughts, feelings, and behaviors will make you look weak, like a bad or undesirable person, like a stupid person, but I don't think it will.

At least, not with the people that matter most in your world, yourself included.

Now, you may look back at my example with that guy I went on a couple dates with, and yes, I did think of him as undesirable once he told me more about himself. But you know what, a person who is right for him, *will* be able to look past that and be okay with it. He is not an inherently undesirable person because of his past choices, it was in only my eyes that he was, not everyone in the world.

And actually, you know what I appreciated about him in that moment? That he felt comfortable telling me about it and was able to be so open and had no problem answering all my questions. He may not have been the man for me, but I give him props for his courage. So in this case, I don't think less of him, I don't think he's bad person, but I actually think it's great that he owns what he did and had no problem telling me about it because not a lot of people have the balls to do that.

Now for you, you may have in the past encountered someone who responded negatively to your vulnerability and that's caused you to hold back and not be as open. But their response is completely on them. Not all people are going to respond how they did.

Is it a risk when you're choosing to be vulnerable with someone? Sure, you never know how someone is going to respond. But this is what I'll tell you. It's absolutely a risk worth taking.

I don't know about you, but I watch *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. I haven't always, I watched a couple in the earlier 2000s but then didn't become a regular watcher until around 2015.

One thing I've noticed from watching all that dating, is that when the contestants, or candidates, whatever they're called, open themselves up and share their personal stories, that's usually when their relationship with the suitor or suitress becomes more deep. There's also been times when the candidates are more keeping it on the surface level, not really opening themselves up and not sharing intimate details about themselves. Those people, usually get sent home and it's because it can be hard to connect with someone on a romantic level who isn't sharing their full self with you.

Now, there's nothing wrong with keeping yourself more private, and not sharing personal details about yourself, and you of course don't need to do that with everyone. I actually recommend you don't. Not everyone needs to know all about you.

But with the people you want to have ultimate closeness with, with whom you want your relationship to be deep and to feel extreme connectedness, it's vulnerability, sharing, and openness that will get you there.

I want you to think about people who have been vulnerable with you.

If you can't think of anyone, let me offer you myself! Throughout this entire podcast, I have shared a lot of stories about myself and my feelings when I was binge eating. They may be similar stories and feelings that you've experienced and feel way too embarrassed to share with other people.

And I get that. Before sharing them with all of you, they were for me only. Even with the few people I did tell about my binge eating, I didn't tell them nearly as much as I've shared with you.

So when you think about how vulnerable I've been with you, do you think less of me? How about other people in your life, people who you love, who have been vulnerable with you? Do you think less of them?

I'm going to guess you don't. For the most part, I don't think less of people when they're vulnerable with me, especially people I love and people I look up to.

I see it as one more layer of them, one more piece of evidence that they're human, one more way to understand them better and understand why they are how they are.

Not long ago, someone in my life became vulnerable with me after being very closed off for as long as I'd known them. I wanted our relationship to be deeper and I wanted to feel more connected to them. But it was hard because they weren't sharing themselves with me. I was getting just the surface of them.

But once I expressed that I wanted more, they told me why they didn't give me more and it was all because of their thoughts about themselves and that they were afraid I would think of them differently of them and not want to spend time with them anymore if I knew more about them.

It was honestly mind blowing to me because the complete opposite was true. Once they became more open with me, I enjoyed them so much more. Not only were our conversations better, more fulfilling and interesting, which was awesome, but also it allowed me to better understand why they act how they do. I learned about what they had been taught about themselves growing up, what beliefs they've been holding onto about themselves and other people, and from knowing that I was able to be so much more accepting of things they did and said because I understood it so much better.

This person being vulnerable with me opened up so much for us and our relationship has grown because of it. Had they not, I don't think I would see them as often as I do now and I may not even be interested in being around them at all.

Being vulnerable doesn't make you weak, it makes you human. It's you sharing your humanness.

You are not different from all the other humans. We all have thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that we would rather not have but, we do. All of us.

When you share them, you become more connected with the other humans.

When you share them with yourself, when you're open and vulnerable with yourself, you become more connected with yourself.

If you want to start being more vulnerable so you can enhance your life, but you don't feel comfortable sharing yourself with others, then start with yourself.

Start with being accepting, compassionate, and open with yourself. Spend time with yourself looking into your thoughts and examining your behaviors and where they stem from. Set aside time to spend with yourself to understand yourself and to face what's bothering you instead of eating to shove it out of your mind.

Is it going to feel good to do this? Probably not. But this is part of all this work, being will to feel uncomfortable so you can create more comfort and a more fulfilling life.

You go through this discomfort of getting to know yourself deeply and honestly so that you can be conscious of what's really going on with you and why you do what you do, and it's from that place that you'll be able to make serious changes.

You have to know your starting point before you can create the path toward your goals and your dreams. What's happening with you currently, what you do now, what you think about yourself and what you think about your past are your starting points. Let's know them and be aware of them. It's really good information to know.

Then, once you feel more comfortable being yourself with yourself, that's when you'll be able to open up to other people who you want to gain more closeness with.

Like I said before, it's risky to share your deep dark secrets with other people, but when that risk pays off and you get a big reward, it's all worth it.

I have a client in one of my groups who was struggling with whether or not to tell her husband that she

binge eats. She imagined how he might react and was afraid he would judge her. We coached through this and ultimately it was her decision for what she would do, and she decided to tell him. After she did, she shared with us that it felt so good to tell him and that he's 100% on board with helping her. Had she not told him she would have missed out on getting his support. And also, he would have missed out on being able to be there for her and support her. So ultimately, they both would have missed out.

Now, they both get to reap the benefits in their relationship and become closer because of it.

I see this building of closeness happen in my coaching groups often too. Some people feel a little timid about being vulnerable with the other group members. They don't want to feel judged. Which is so interesting too because everyone seriously has the same issues. You're all in there because you binge eat. There may be some different reasons why, but for each reason behind the bingeing, there are several people who have the same reason.

But what can really help is seeing other people be vulnerable. In every group I've ever had, there are always people who are willing to jump right in and share all the things about themselves. When you watch someone else do it, and you see them get great results in their lives from having done it because they're getting effective coaching because they're being vulnerable and sharing all their thoughts and feelings, and they see zero judgement or harshness from other people observing the vulnerability too, it helps you to do it too. And I'll tell you, it feels so good to be vulnerable and become a better version of yourself because of it.

I remember going to my life coach training years ago and the other people in the group were so open about their most personal problems, asking for help with them in front of the whole group.

Two things stood out to me there. One, I noticed that there were things people felt so embarrassed of that I didn't think were a big deal at all. This wasn't at all me dismissing their issues as stupid, but me just noticing that we get so embarrassed by how other people are going to judge us and they may not at all. Our problems may not be as shameful in other people's eyes as we think they are.

The second was that it opened my mind up to speaking up and sharing my deep, dark secrets.

In the training, I shared here and there with other coach trainees things I hadn't really shared much with friends or family and I began to feel more comfortable sharing myself. Then, one of the biggest, most life changing things happened to me.

I was talking to one of our mentors about who I want to work with in my coaching practice and I told her I wanted to work with women who binge eat because that had been probably the biggest struggle of my life. She asked me if I was still bingeing and I admitted to her that yes, I was. She being a person who was knowledgeable on the subject of binge eating proceeded to help me understand why I binge and how I can apply all the coaching tools I'd learned over the course of the training to help me stop binge eating.

Had I not opened up to her, had I not told her my secret that I was a binge eater, then not only would I not have been given the tools and knowledge I needed to stop myself from continuing to binge eat, but I also wouldn't have learned how to effectively teach all of you how to stop binge eating as well.

It was my vulnerability that saved my life and created my extremely satisfying career that I have now.

Then, months later, I did what was probably the most scary act of vulnerability for me. I shared a short video of me talking about my binge eating story on Facebook. I shared my most embarrassing story about myself with all my friends on there. I risked judgement and ridicule and all the negativity and all the feelings I might feel just so I could start putting myself out there so I could start the process of helping you all.

And the video was welcomed with open arms. I received so much love, so many likes, so much support, and I also received some direct messages from people who thanked me for sharing my story because they also binge eat.

And now, I don't at all feel embarrassed and ashamed of my past struggle. I'm able to be open with anyone I talk about it with and I risk the possible judgement because I know that the people who love me and the people who matter most will appreciate me sharing true self and continue to love me. Any people who would judge me and think less of me, I don't want them in my life anyway.

The reason why I was able to be so vulnerable with the people in my life was because I had done it with myself first. I stopped being afraid of my thoughts and emotions and faced them so I could work on them instead. I allowed myself to reveal my illogical, irrational, not so smart thinking and instead of criticizing myself for it, I got curious.

And that's the kind of space that I hold for other people, you all included. I hold that space for all your ridiculous and embarrassing thoughts and without judgement, I get curious so we can understand and work through it.

Being vulnerable can be one of the best things you can do for yourself.

It's absolutely a risk worth taking and if you're willing to feel any emotion, if you're okay with feeling emotional discomfort, then there really isn't even a risk. No matter how the person you're talking to responds, you can handle it.

And if the person is you, you get to decide how you respond to yourself.

Be open, be honest, don't hold back out of fear. Be your truest self and get the most amazing benefits from doing it.

Bye bye.