

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #117: Working With Your Brain

Hi! Welcome back. Last week here on the podcast I talked about working against your brain in order to change habits and change how you think.

That one and this one are kind of a two-parter so if you didn't listen to that one, I suggest you do before listening to this one.

If you did listen, good job there listener! And here's a a brief recap for you.

If you want to change your behavior habits, you must begin with changing your thought habits since all actions being with a thought.

A problem that you face when you try to do that though is that your brain doesn't like to change. It likes its habits.

So when you try to do things differently and think differently, it may resist.

To remind you, when I talk about your brain and you, what I'm really talking about is your lower brain and higher brain, just so we're clear and you're not like, well, my brain is me and all that. I'm just trying to make it easier to articulate and understand.

So when you're trying to make big changes in your life, there will most likely be resistance so it's important that you hold your ground and keep being consistent.

So that's working against your brain in a nutshell. I start there so you can learn to accept resistance as normal and so you don't freak out when it's challenging. It's just how it is.

Now onto working with your brain which is you having an adult relationship with it.

I feel like a lot of people don't have healthy, adult relationships with their brains.

They get mad at them, fight with them, blame them, so all the things that we wouldn't want someone to

do to us and all the things we know wouldn't cultivate a good relationship with other people in our lives.

Whether you like it or not, you and your brain are in this together, for life, so it's time you learn how to work together to make this life the best it can possibly be for you.

So let's think about what a healthy, adult relationship looks like. Just some of the things that come to mind for me are communication, trust, understanding, listening, compassion, and of course so much more.

We could all come up with lots of answers for that, and we'd probably have different answers for what is the most important, but I think most of us would agree that one of the most important is communication.

Without good communication, a lot of problems arise.

When people have problems with whoever they have a relationship with, and I'm talking about with romantic partners, friends, family members, any kind of relationship, and they don't communicate those problems, then the other person can't help solve it.

When people don't listen to each other's sides of the story, there's no understanding and compassion.

It's also harder to find a compromise if both sides aren't communicated and heard.

When we just stay in what *we* think and don't share what we think or listen to what the other person thinks, then tension can build up in a relationship and undesirable actions may be taken.

But when communication is good, not only can problems be solved much more easily, but you also get to know the other person better, feel more connected to them, and understand how they work.

From there, there's more harmony, love, and ease when working together.

When it comes to you and your brain, just like in relationships with other people, it's not always going to be easy street, there are going to be disagreements, but when you communicate and work together toward a common goal, it's going to be easier than if you're just arguing, fighting, and not listening or understanding.

You and your brain have common goals. You both want to stay alive and live a pleasurable life.

The difference though, is in what that pleasurable life means to each of you.

For your brain, it's just thinking about pleasure now. To your brain, the best life is one filled with all pleasure and no pain.

For you, you may think that's what you want too, but it's not really. You want more than that and with that comes equal amounts of pain and pleasure.

You want the pleasure of having a healthy body, a healthy mind, of freedom, of achieving goals, and so much more. You want those things, and with them comes frustration, disappointment, failures, all the

things your brain does not want.

So here you are both wanting to feel good, but your brain doesn't want the pain part. Now, you may think you don't either but if you knew that that was just part of the deal of feeling at your best, that in order to feel your best sometimes you're not going to feel so good, would you still choose it? If you want it badly enough you will.

Because here's the truth. You can try live that 100% pleasure-filled life like your brain wants but, it's just not going to happen. Your brain is being unrealistic. No one lives that life. Not Oprah, not Beyonce, not Meryl Streep. They maybe be super successful and look so happy but they also feel down and negative sometimes too.

You're the logical one here. Your brain is not. You want that life with the balance of 50% negative and 50% positive because that's realistic. And it sure is better than having the higher percentage of negative that can come with trying for the pleasure all the time, aka eating a lot of food whenever you feel pain, discomfort, urges, bored, or whatever.

So, you have a common goal, to get as much pleasure as realistically possible, without getting so much that the pain starts showing up more than the pleasure.

This understanding is important. From this place, you can have conversations with your brain so much more easily. You understand its intentions and it's blind spots, what it's not seeing because your brain is short-sighted. It isn't looking into the future, it's looking only at right now.

It's your job to communicate the consequences of the future.

I talked in the last episode about working as an employee at a restaurant. I said that had the management communicated with us more thoroughly about why they were making changes and how they think it would better the restaurant, then we might have been more on board with the changes than we were.

We could have had more understanding which could lead to less resistance.

When it comes to making changes with your brain, the more communicative you are, the less resistance you may experience. It may not go away fully for awhile, but it can be less.

What that looks like is being clear about what you want, why you want it, and how you expect to benefit when you get it.

Then, listening to all the resistance your brain has. It's going to have some questions and some arguments. Hear it out. Understand why the brain is resistant.

From there, you can help it see why it's going to be okay and even better.

You can listen to its reasoning and then give your reasoning for why you want to do things differently.

It's about having an open conversation, not an argument.

Again, you both want the same thing, you want a pleasurable life, so explain to your brain how that will

happen doing what you want to be doing.

Explain to your brain how pleasure is on the other side of the uncomfortable thing and it may be less resistant to doing the thing.

I experience this all the time. It's bed time, my brain says to continue sitting on the couch watching tv and I tell it why it's better if we get ready for bed. It's after dinner, my brain says to go relax and I tell it why I want to do the dishes before doing that instead of putting them off.

If I had a boss, I'd be much more willing to make changes if they explained to me why the changes were happening and I could see their side. I may not fully agree with it, but they're the boss and since I see some logic behind it then I could get behind it.

They are the boss after all so in the end, what they say goes, and you're the boss of yourself so what you say goes. It's just going to make it an easier transition for your brain if you're open and explanatory with it.

It really a compromise. "Yes brain, you can have the pleasure, it will come, but we're going to do this thing first."

But with compromise, sometimes comes smaller changes than you'd like.

For example, you may want your brain to just naturally think and believe that one is enough, that you love your body, that you love yourself, that you'll never binge again, all the things that you don't ever or rarely think, that you don't believe at all, or things that you just don't think and believe enough.

Trying to get your brain to make this big change from thinking you're never satisfied with one to thinking one is enough is a big leap. Remember, our brains don't like big changes, they like habits and ease. So this is where the compromise comes in.

You find a common ground. You find somewhere in the middle, or that's even closer to what the brain thinks, that the brain can get on board with. Sometimes with my group members we make the smallest shifts to working on thoughts like, "I'm working on not thinking I'm not satisfied with one" or "I can become a person who is satisfied with one."

It's a starting point where a small change is being made that's going to move you in the direction of where you want to go. You're helping it take smaller steps instead of trying to change too much too soon.

It's like if you're teaching someone how to make Nintendo Switches instead of Classic Nintendo's. They'd be able to make changes more easily if you teach them how to do just one thing a little differently at a time instead of just giving them the whole new process and saying go. Helping them see the little changes and how much better those changes are will help them be less resistant to doing them.

Your brain will start to see the difference in how you feel as you take that smaller step. It will see the pleasure that comes from it and therefore, it will be more likely to repeat it.

But again, you gotta show your brain why this new way of thinking will be better and how the old way of thinking isn't. When you can see the effect of how you're thinking, and the result isn't a desirable

one, you're much more inclined to change it.

You gotta show your brain what happens when it thinks you can't be satisfied with just one. It's going to feel out of control, therefore not even try to only have one, and create pain by eating too much.

Communication and compromise, that's how you make progress together and when I talk about communication with your brain, that could be you writing down all these thoughts and ideas or you could say them out loud to yourself if you wanted to. There's no wrong way.

Then there's the brainstorming. This can actually be fun if you're doing it right.

Your brain has lots of answers, more than you know it has, and when you ask it questions, it's going to come up with some if you allow it to.

One problem people face though is not looking for the answer. They leave their questions unanswered and that's where a lot of the food chatter can come from.

You ask yourself, "Why did this happen?" which can be a very useful question, but then you don't answer it. You just say, "I don't know."

That gets you nowhere and it's not entirely true either. I bet if you took a moment to think about it, you would be able to find an answer. It may not be the full answer, you may not entirely know why you did it, but you would be able to think of at least one reason why. Did you not pause and think about what you were doing? Did you react to an urge? Did you justify a binge? I'm sure you can find something.

Saying "I don't know" is unacceptable. I don't allow my group members to answer with it and you shouldn't either. If anything, you "don't know yet" or you're "going to figure it out." Don't block yourself from an answer. There is one and you can find it.

So when you ask yourself a question, allow your brain to find the answer.

But also, make sure you're asking useful questions.

Too often you all are asking yourselves questions like,

"Why can't I do this?" "Why am I such an idiot?" "What's the point?"

You know what's going to happen when you ask questions like these? You're going to get some terrible feeling answers. Your answers are going to be things like, "Because I'm broken." "Because I'm a screw up." "Because I'm not good enough." "Because I'm a lost cause." "Because this is just who I am." "There's no point."

You'd be much better off asking yourself useful questions that will give you answers that will actually help you get somewhere good.

"What can I do better?" "Why did this happen?" "What do I want and how can I get it?" "Why am I not doing what I want to be doing?" "How can I do better at this?"

These kinds of questions can help you uncover the problem, which you need to know if you want to

find a solution. They can help you brainstorm new strategies.

What's awesome is that you ask these questions and your brain will give you answers.

You and your brain together, when you ask useful questions, can come up with some amazing insights, ideas, strategies, and solutions.

So much of what I do with my group members is asking them useful and powerful questions that they don't think to ask themselves and that alone can sometimes help them realize so much about themselves, their blind spots, what the problem really is, and also to help them see a solution so clearly.

It can be easier for someone on the outside, a coach like myself, to find the useful questions to ask, but you can absolutely do it on your own as well.

Question everything. Allow your brain to answer and work together as a team to find strategies and solutions.

Your brain is a pleasure hungry beast, but it's also very wise. Give it a chance to show you that.

Bringing it back to the employee boss scenario, bosses aren't all knowing and sometimes employees have good ideas. But you have to ask the right questions in order to get them. Don't ask them why they keep screwing everything up, which then you might just get a whole bunch of complaints about the systems, the other employees, and how things are, and ask them what their ideas are for what would make things better and their ideas for how you all could make that happen.

Be solution focused, not problem focused.

So there's communication, compromise, asking useful questions, and then there's the last one. The most fun.

It's celebrating! Reward your brain for a job well done and celebrate it when it follows through on a new thought habit, when it just naturally thinks a certain way or when it doesn't put up a fight at all, or for too long.

Positive reinforcement is very helpful with habit changes.

If your brain gets rewarded with a pleasurable reward it's going to be more likely to repeat what it did.

However, do not make it a food reward! At least not all the time. There's no problem with rewarding yourself with food sometimes, but if you're rewarding not eating food with eating food, it just doesn't really make sense.

There's so many other things you can reward yourself with. And if you're not sure what, ask your brain and get brainstorming with it to come up with ideas. Don't just say I don't know and continue to use food as your reward.

So that's how you're going to work with your brain.

You're a team, so act like one. Have an adult relationship with each other. But also don't forget, you're

the team leader, so act like one. This may mean that sometimes you're going to have to just be the authority, take charge, and go through the discomfort of having your brain resist, but the more you can communicate with your brain about why you're doing it this way, the easier it will be.

Now you go build that relationship with your brain and work together to create that most realistically pleasurable life you can have.

Bye bye.