

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #54: When People Don't Understand Binge Eating

Hi! You ready? Let's go. Let's talk about those people who have no clue what binge eating is, what it's like to binge eat, and how self-destructive it can be. They're all a bunch of jerks, right? I'm just kidding! Everyone is wonderful!

But seriously, it can be hard to try and talk with someone about something you're struggling with big time who just doesn't understand what you're struggling with at all.

When I was bingeing, I only talked about it with a handful of people. I'm trying to think of who I told and I think it was only 4 friends and a therapist. I did also tell a bunch of fellow coaches-in-training and my mentor who helped me stop when I did my life coach training.

The first friend I told didn't really seem to care all that much and most likely didn't understand the severity of it. We didn't even really talk about it much, or at all after I told her.

Two of my other friends told me that they binge too, or have binged, but I didn't believe that they did it to the extreme that I did. One might have, but I'm really not sure about the other.

The word binge gets thrown around so much and we all have our own definitions of what a binge is, so for me, it bothered me when other people said they binge and I knew it was nothing like what I did. Now of course I don't care, you can label your eating however you want and if you're coming to me for help with your bingeing, I'm going to help you no matter how much you're eating and I don't care what you consider a binge.

Another friend did seem concerned, he even encouraged me to get help but I had no idea where to find it. I had seen that therapist I mentioned but with her, it wasn't that I thought she didn't understand me, but that what she was doing wasn't going to help me. I only went to a few sessions with her before I gave up and decided that therapy couldn't help me.

Talking with the coaches was an interesting experience. I had gotten coached by one of them while we were in training who obviously had no idea what I meant when I said I binge. I talked with one of my

mentors who knew exactly what I was dealing with and how to help me which was amazing. Then on the last night, a whole bunch of us were hanging out somehow the topic came up. As I was talking about my bingeing, most of the people didn't know anything about it, but were intently listening and learning, and there were two other coaches who had definitely struggled with bingeing. I could tell by the way they described what they've done and we were relating to each other so hard.

So there have been very few people who understood me and my binge eating and many more who didn't at all.

It was hard to not have someone to talk to about it. When I finally found those coaches who had gone through it too, it felt so good to have open conversation and be able to share stories and experiences. And this was all after having no one really to talk to about it for 10 years.

For most people, they never find their people who can relate.

Most people in our lives can't relate to the experience of feeling out of control around food and like you can't stop eating and being obsessed about food.

They have no idea what it's like.

So when you try to talk about it with them and explain it, either they just don't know what to say or they give absurd advice.

I've heard a lot of people who struggle with binge eating say that people have told them to just not eat so much.

“Ok yeah! I didn't think to try that! Thank you so much for the great advice!”

What a frustrating thing to hear, right?

If only it were that easy.

Then there's the people who you tell that afterward keep encouraging you to eat when you're not hungry and over eat and eat when you tell them you don't want to and all the things that you really wish they wouldn't do. I talked about this one in depth back in episode 33 about unsupportive people.

That can be frustrating too.

Or maybe you're trying your best to explain it all to someone, and really being open and honest about it all, but they just can't wrap their mind around how this can happen or what it's like to be in that state of mind. There's only so much you can say before you have to just give up trying to convince them of how you feel. It just doesn't compute for them.

And you feel alone and misunderstood.

And one other thing. If you're like I was, maybe you binge eat, but you're not overweight or just a little overweight, so people don't take you seriously. Your eating can't be a problem unless you're obese, right?

I've worked with women who are not even close to being overweight but struggle with bingeing.

When I tell people I work with women who binge eat, a lot of them ask me if my clients are really overweight and I explain to them that that's not always the case and I tell them my story about how during most of my binge eating days, I was in the normal BMI range. Not that BMI really matters, it's obviously a flawed measurement but I say that just to give you an idea of where I was. But also at the time I took it very seriously and didn't want to be in the overweight range.

I used to get one pound below what was considered overweight and get down to business! I was able to willpower myself down a few pounds and not binge for a little bit, or maybe just binge less, and then I'd let go and end up back up at my maximum again and repeat, repeat, repeat. I white knuckled my way and dieted my way away from being overweight. That's why I wasn't bigger than I was.

But my weight was not an accurate representation of what was going on in my mind. I mean, the fluctuation and the struggle I experienced sure were, but just because I wasn't bigger, that didn't mean my eating problem was big.

So if you're someone like that and you tell someone you binge eat, there's a strong chance they're not going to believe it's as big of a problem as you're making it out to be. They think that if it was really a problem then you'd be obese.

So you got people who tell you to just stop eating so much, and along with that will probably give you some portioning tips and tricks, like you haven't tried them all already, people who don't understand the severity of it, or can't wrap their mind around it at all, and the people who don't take you seriously.

You're left feeling misunderstood, frustrated, and lonely.

You feel isolated and abnormal.

On top of that, you have no one to talk to about one of the biggest struggles you're having in your life.

And that truly does suck.

It's always nice to have someone to talk to who can empathize and understand where you're coming from with anything in life.

But sometimes, those people aren't there, at least not in your immediate circles.

They're in online support groups, and I'm over here too! But they're not your close friends, family, significant others and such.

Now, you can try your best to explain to them all the details and try to get them to understand. But they still may not fully get it.

I've had people tell me that they've told their husbands or boyfriends about their binge eating and they could tell they didn't really get it. They're supportive of them and supportive of them getting help, but it's not like they could talk about it and relate.

So what can you do?

We can't force people to understand or to care or to think about how we eat in a certain way.

So it seems like the only option is to just be upset about it and complain about it and complain about how awful it is to be so misunderstood.

It seemed like my only option back in the day! Because that's what I did for myself. Threw myself pity parties, poor me that I'm all alone here and then getting resentful of the other people.

That all didn't feel good. It feels terrible to be mad at people and we're mad at them why? Because of their misunderstanding of a problem they have no reason to understand?

I want you to think about this. Why do you want them to understand?

It's so you don't have to feel alone, misunderstood, or frustrated.

You want them to understand so you can feel better.

Well I have good news for you here. You don't need them to do anything for you to feel better.

Nothing.

You're not even feeling how you feel because of them. You're feeling how you feel because of how you're thinking about them. Or really how you're thinking about their thinking.

It's your thoughts making you feel bad, not them, not their thinking.

We can't change them and that's totally fine, we don't have to.

But we can change us and how we think about them and this whole situation.

We can allow them to be who they are, think what they think, and understand what they understand.

Imagine if you were just okay with them not understanding?

Imagine if you were just okay with knowing that there are people out there who do understand and they're just not one of them?

Although I don't binge anymore, I still deal with something similar every time I tell someone that I coach women who binge eat. Most people don't know what binge eating is and they don't know what life coaching is. I don't get mad at them or frustrated or feel misunderstood. I just give them a brief explanation.

I tell them that binge eating is when you eat a lot of food in short period of time, usually until you feel really full, maybe even kinda sick, and guilty about what you ate.

I tell them that life coaching is helping people understand why they're not doing what they want to be doing, why they're not reaching goals and living their life the way they actually want to and showing them exactly how to do it all. I know all the secrets to living your best life.

Then maybe they'll understand what I mean by all that, maybe they won't. Maybe they'll ask more questions because they want to try and understand, or we'll be done with it and move on to something else. Some people will even make insensitive jokes about it all and I won't let that bother me. What's the point in being bothered by it? They just don't know and don't understand and that's okay.

I don't have to let their thoughts affect my thoughts. My thoughts are what I choose them to be and I don't want them to be ones that cause me to feel misunderstood, frustrated, or alone.

The people who get it, get it, and it's great to have them exist in my life. The people who don't, don't have to.

I'm not going to make them out to be the villain. It doesn't feel good to do that.

There are so many instances in life where people don't understand each other and what they do, and that's okay. We can try to help them see, but it may not work and that's when we have to just accept what is and move on.

It's okay if everyone doesn't understand what you're going through. I understand you. My clients understand you. Everyone else who listens to this podcast understands you and there's a lot of you so know that.

You know what you do. You understand what it's like. And if other people don't, it's okay that they don't. Don't blame them for how you feel because it's not their fault you feel how you do. If you could be just a little more accepting of other people's thoughts then you could feel just a little better.

Don't be mad at them, don't resent them. Accept them and let them be them.

Have a great week, talk to you next time, bye bye.