

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #167: Helping Your Kids Eat Better

Hello! I hope you're having a wonderful day so far.

So this episode is for you parents out there who are wanting your kids to eat better.

You've probably learned by now that you can't really force your kids to eat a certain way all of the time, especially as they get older.

You're also not going to be around them all the time and they're going to eat food you're not even aware of and have no control over.

It can be hard to watch your child eat in unhealthy ways, especially when you've seen yourself do the same for so long. And I know you so badly want what's best for them and for them to practice healthy eating habits.

You don't want them to go through what you've gone through for as long as you've gone through it so you want to do whatever you can to help them.

But you might be confused about what are useful and unuseful ways to handle this topic.

I think one of the easiest ways to determine what could be useful and unuseful is to look at how your parents or role models handled this topic with you.

They may have said or done useful and unuseful things that you remember either helped you with your relationship with food and your body or hindered you.

I personally don't remember my parents saying much of anything. We didn't talk about food being good or bad or healthy or unhealthy as far as I remember. I don't remember any lessons being taught.

For me, I think this hindered me as far as food went. I wasn't educated about a healthy way of eating.

But for body, I think it was useful. I don't remember having much body insecurity through my pre-teen and teen years. I knew I had friends who were skinnier than me but I don't remember wanting to lose weight until I had my senior prom dress fitting and the woman wanted to order me a size larger than I wanted to order and I told her no and that I'd lose weight. She did order a size up though and I was thankful for that because I didn't lose any weight since I had no idea how to.

But just because words were not really said in my family, that doesn't mean actions weren't taken and not taken.

I was taught a lot by example. This is where we go and these are the kinds of things we eat. Other people ate more so I learned to eat more. Other people ate dessert, sometimes large desserts, so I learned to too. Other people snacked so I learned to snack.

My eating habits were basically taught to me. I didn't put much thought into them. I learned by example.

Most likely, that's what's happened and is happening with your kids.

They're learning from watching you and they're probably seeing more than you think they're seeing.

Now, before I go any further, do not beat yourself up about this.

Do not blame yourself.

You have been trying your best and even if at times your best sucked, you were not intentionally trying to harm yourself or your kids.

It's never useful to beat yourself up for not doing something you didn't know how to do.

I wouldn't want my parents to blame themselves for not teaching me differently. They did what they knew to do probably what they were taught from their parents. That's it.

You've been doing what you've known to do. You've done what's habitual for you.

But now, you're changing. You're learning, applying new techniques, building your skills, and shifting your mindset.

And with that, you're going to be an influence on your kids.

And no matter what you've already taught them, you can begin to teach them differently and help them shift what they're doing.

I remember I was coaching one of my group members who said to me about her daughter, "She's already 7." To her, it was like it's too late. Or getting close to it.

But 7 is just a number and I don't think it's ever too late. You're however old you are and you're making

changes and there's so many more to come.

I like to think that that woman's daughter isn't “already 7,” she's “only 7.”

Her brain has barely begun to develop and learn and create habits. There's so much time and possibility for her brain to do more.

I talked in the previous episode about unlearning what you were taught at the age you are now and if you can unlearn things, so can your kid.

They learned a lot of their eating habits by example and by listening to what you're saying and you can teach them new ways of thinking by continuing to be an example of how you want them to be.

But like I said earlier, there are going to be useful and unuseful ways of doing this and you're probably aware of some of the unuseful things.

I think some of the most common unuseful things are telling a kid that they shouldn't want what they want, that what they want is bad for them, or attributing what they eat to their body size.

It's all basically demonizing food and if you're someone who does this to yourself, you know how unuseful it can be.

You start thinking things like, “Cake will make me fat.” “I want that so bad but I really shouldn't have it.” “Pasta is bad for me.”

It all sounds so truthful but it becomes a problem when you want cake or want pasta.

Now you're bad for wanting them. You feel deprived and ashamed as you're telling yourself you can't have what you want because it's wrong.

But you are not wrong for wanting cake or pasta. They're delicious, of course you want them.

And cake will not make you fat. What makes you fat is bingeing on cake. Pasta isn't bad for you if you're not eating a whole box of it.

The food itself is not the problem. It's the amount that you're eating. And with that, the real problem is what is driving you to eat a large amount.

So when you are talking about food being good or bad or food making you fat or skinny in front of your kid, they're going to learn that lesson and find morality in food and start thinking of themselves as good or bad based on what they want to eat or are eating.

As I was prepping for this podcast, a scene in a movie came to mind that portrayed this so well.

The movie is Little Miss Sunshine and if you haven't seen it, watch it, it's such a fantastic movie.

And I'm going to share a link in the show notes to a YouTube clip of this scene I'm going to talk about if you want to watch it.

And don't worry, I'm not going to spoil anything significant for you if you haven't seen the movie.

So what happens is that this family is sitting at a restaurant and the daughter orders ice cream. She's seven and she's really into beauty pageants and is actually on her way to compete in one.

After she orders, her dad tells her that ice cream has a lot of fat in it and when you eat ice cream, the fat in the ice cream becomes fat on your body. Then he says that if you eat ice cream you might become fat and if you don't you'll stay nice and skinny.

Now, she's confused about it all. She doesn't even understand what is being taught to her right now and it seems as though she's never even thought about fat or skinny or about ice cream, or any food as being a problem.

So everyone is getting a little upset and she notices and doesn't really understand why.

So her mom jumps in and says it's okay to be skinny or be fat.

Then dad comes back in and asks the daughter if the women in Miss America are skinny or fat. The daughter says skinny and dad says, "guess they don't eat a lot of ice cream."

So then the food comes and she gets her ice cream, looks at it and says, "Does anyone want my ice cream?"

And dad looks a little proud of himself. I'm guessing he thinks that what he taught her sunk in and now she's making a decision to not eat it so she can be skinny.

But then, her other family members are not okay with her not eating it because of what the dad said and they're all like, "yeah I want some, you sure you don't want any?" and they start eating it. After a moment of watching them, she finally says, "Wait! Don't eat it all," and takes a bite.

So basically, the dad thinks he's teaching her a useful lesson about what food to eat and how to look your best but what he was really doing was making her feel bad about wanting ice cream.

She could start to think she's wrong for wanting it and even start to associate ice cream with being fat and not being able to be like those women she looks up to and as you know, that's not going to produce a healthy relationship with food and body.

So I want you all to be mindful of the lessons you're teaching your kids and consider how you'd feel if someone was teaching you in the way you're teaching them.

One thing that adults do when they're trying to be supportive is call out behaviors as they're happening.

Have you ever told someone about how you want to be eating and then when you're not eating that way they say things like, "I thought you weren't going to eat that," or "Are you sure you should be eating that?"

It feels awful and you feel so bad about what you're doing! It's not going to help you to stop or change your ways. It just makes you feel ashamed and guilty.

The same will go for your kids, or anyone else you're wanting to change.

They're going to start feeling self-conscious and might even start eating in secret or hiding food because they're learning it's bad to eat them.

But then you also have to watch out for what my parents did which was not say anything and just allow me to eat all the crap all the time.

That just got me into the habit of overeating.

So then what the heck are you supposed to do? You're damned if you say something and damned if you don't.

Here's what I suggest you do.

First and foremost, you work on you.

You get your thoughts about food and eating and your body to where you want them to be.

Because once you do, it will be so easy for you to simply show up as an example for your kid.

So often I hear people who have unhealthy relationships with their body and food get all confused and panicked about how to teach their kids to have healthy relationships with food and their body.

They don't know what to say or do and are afraid to say or do the wrong thing.

But when you know what works for you, and what makes you feel good, you'll know what to teach them.

Imagine if I had no idea how to stop binge eating and have a healthy relationship with food and then I tried to teach all of you how to do it. This podcast and my program would be total messes.

But because I've been through it and I know the thought shifts I've made around so many things, and I know what thoughts feel good and feel bad to think and what will be useful and not, it's easy for me to teach you all.

It's going to be so much easier for you all to just be an example, showing up doing what you know to do and thinking what you know to think instead of coming up with scripts for what to say and not say.

Now, I do want to say that it might not be useful to just go around telling your kids what to do and not do based on what's worked for you.

Maybe that will work but it might not.

What I have found to be more useful is for you to just share what you're doing. You speak your thoughts out loud, speak your reasons for doing or not doing something, and share what you're deciding.

So let me give you some examples of what this looks like.

You're eating and you decide to stop when you're full even though there is still a little bit of food left on your plate and still more food available on the table. You say out loud, "I'm full and I'm going to stop eating, even though there is still food leftover, because I'll feel better if I do. I don't want to feel too stuffed."

So you're teaching them that it's okay to not finish your plate. You're also teaching them about stopping when you're full because it feels better than stuffing yourself but, you're not telling them they have to do it too. You're just showing them that you find it to be useful and once they see how you are after eating, assuming you aren't feeling weighed down and are looking like you feel good, they will make the connection that stopping when you're full equals feeling good.

Another example is just simply not commenting about how your body or anyone else's looks. And if your kid asks about body sizes, you can just tell them that you think all bodies are good bodies.

But again, if you're already doing body image work, you won't need a script about what to say to them if they ask about bodies. You'll just simply tell them what you believe about bodies.

Here's another example. Talking about feelings. You say things like, "I feel sad and it's okay to feel sad." Or, "I feel sad and I know eating isn't going to make me feel better."

Do you believe those now? If you don't, those are definitely thoughts to work on believing. It's too easy for all of us to learn that eating feels better than feeling some feelings but we all need to learn that it's not really a solution and you're better off going through the sadness than binge eating to feel temporary relief.

One thing I think is really useful is talking more about how you feel physically when you eat certain foods or eat certain amounts of food.

"When I eat vegetables, I feel good." "When I eat too many cookies, I don't feel good."

Then you can ask them how they feel. You can open up a conversation about feelings without telling them what's right or wrong. You can help them understand that for themselves.

Then they can begin to learn to associate foods and amount of foods with how they feel physically rather than attaching morality or emotions to it.

Which is ultimately going to be a useful way for you to think about food and eating too.

So do your thought work now. Work on believing what you want to believe about food, eating, feelings, and your body.

Then share what your thoughts are and you can ask what your kid's thoughts are. Ask them questions about what they think and share what you think.

I honestly believe that so many of the most profound changes happen when we come to realizations ourselves rather than when people tell us what to think.

It's like the idea of learning from your own mistakes rather than others. Yes you may learn from other's

mistakes but when you make your own, I feel like the lesson hits a little harder.

It's like if I told you, "Don't eat a half dozen donuts. You're going to feel awful. Trust me, I've done it."

If you've never done it, you may believe me or maybe you won't. But if you go and do it yourself, you'll know first hand how bad it feels in your body. Lesson learned.

So instead of just telling your kids what to do, you can share what you do and why, and ask them about themselves. If you notice they've overeaten, ask how they feel. If you notice they're saying something not nice about their body, ask them how it feels to think that way about themselves. And the opposites too. If they say something nice about themselves, ask how they feel. If you notice they ate what you'd consider to be a reasonable amount of food, ask them how they feel. Doing this can help them to begin connecting their thoughts to their emotions and connecting food to how they feel physically.

That's going to be a great lesson for them, helping them connect with their bodies.

Alright, you go work on being your best self so you can be the best example you can be. And then do more question asking then telling them what to do. Talk to you next time. Bye bye!