THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #352: Being With Yourself

Hello! How are you doing? I am amazing. I just got back from one of the coolest experiences of my life and I want to tell you a little about it because it relates to today's episode topic.

I went to Scotland and, it was my first ever solo international trip. I've done plenty of solo traveling in the states and I feel very comfortable doing that but, to do it internationally was something I was nervous to do.

I'd only done one other international trip on a plane, when I went to Ireland in 2022 but when I did that, I was with a tour group so I had guidance and I was driven around on a bus. This time, I was all on my own.

So I was going to be figuring things out and navigating things on my own, and what scared me the most was driving on the left side of the road for the first time, by myself, down narrow, winding roads, and sometimes in the rain.

As I was planning the trip, I actually didn't want to go by myself. I've traveled alone before but, not for that long, and again, never internationally, so I didn't know what it would be like. I invited 14 people to go with me and once they all declined for various reasons, I did think about not going and doing it when someone could come with me.

But I decided that I didn't want to wait for anybody. Especially because waiting might mean either waiting a long time or never going at all.

So I did it, and I couldn't be more happy that I did.

It was such a cool experience, the places I visited were incredible, and I actually really enjoyed doing it alone.

And, I didn't feel lonely. The only time I did was when I got a group text from a friend back home planning a fun get together while I was gone and I felt left out as everyone was saying yes to the invite and I had to say no. But, and I'll talk about this more a little later, I soon got over it as I went along with my day, took in the scenery and chatted with a local.

Other than that, I really enjoyed being with just myself.

Now, I did actually connect with other people a lot. I chatted with so many locals and other tourists so it wasn't like I was entirely alone the whole time without any human connection. I actually don't know if I would have been as content had I not.

But, there was this balance of being with myself and being with other people and when I say balance, it definitely wasn't 50/50, I was with myself much more than I was with other people.

But it felt balanced to me because I wasn't urging for time alone or urging for time with other people.

And I was thinking about why I felt so content being alone so much on that trip.

And I think a big part of it was because I enjoy my own company. I like myself and I like being with myself.

I noticed at one point that I also enjoyed sharing experiences with myself.

Yes it's great to share experiences with other people, of course, but there was also this appreciation of sharing it with just myself.

I was so happy to be there, so happy I was getting what I wanted from the experience, which was to see beautiful and cool landscapes, and it was nice only having to think about myself, to not have to compromise, to not have to be "on."

And, it definitely helped that I was not lacking in things to do and that for the most part, the drives were scenic. So, my days were full and doing so much driving, I drove a total of 860 miles on that trip, which would usually bore me after awhile, wasn't boring.

Now, of course being with yourself while having so much to do, and while being somewhere you've never been before, can be different than being with yourself at home.

But, I bet there are some of you for whom it wouldn't be different.

No matter where you are, you've not content with being with yourself, or at least not for long or not at certain times of day.

And I get that. I'm not gonna say I'm always content with being with myself. There are definitely times I feel lonely when I'm home alone or even if I'm not home alone, and my boyfriend is home too but he's in the other room playing his video games. Side note, I don't think I mentioned it on the podcast

yet but we're living together now, he moved into my place about 8 months ago and it's going great. Yay!

So just like most people, I feel it too and I get bored too.

And while I was on my trip, I was thinking about why.

I think it's an important topic to explore for us because I've worked with many people who binge or overeat because they're not content with just being with themselves.

They eat to escape themselves, to escape their thoughts, to escape their feelings, to basically forget that they're only with themselves.

And from what I've observed, so much of the lack of contentment with being with yourself usually stems from four main things.

Not liking yourself, not knowing how to handle your thoughts and emotions productively, not having enough connection with other people, and not doing enough things you enjoy or maybe it's actually not appreciating what you do do.

So let's talk about those.

If you don't like yourself, you're not going to want to be with just yourself just like you wouldn't want to spend time with another person you don't like. You're not going to want to spend time in your own head. And so much of the time, the reason why people don't like themselves is because they're so mean to themselves and so negative.

I wouldn't like someone who is mean to me, that keeps telling me I'm not good enough, I'm not doing enough, I'm a loser, I'm a failure, I'm disgusting, I'm unattractive, etc. I wouldn't want to spend time with someone who says that stuff to me.

So if you're mean to yourself, you put yourself down often, are hard on yourself, it makes sense that you wouldn't want to be with yourself.

And if you don't want to be with yourself, but you are in fact alone, that's when you might eat to quiet your thoughts, change how you feel, and ignore and distract yourself from yourself.

So if that's the case for you, working on your self-talk is going to be so helpful. You don't have to be so mean, critical, or hard on yourself. You have options for what you can say to yourself.

I'd recommend you choose compassion, understanding, curiosity, kindness, and encouragement instead.

Wouldn't it be so nice to be with someone who treats you *that* way?

You'd likely be okay with being with that person. And you can be that person.

Next, there's not knowing how to handle your thoughts and emotions productively.

Many of you have no idea what to do about your thoughts and emotions.

So what ends up happening is that you get consumed by them, your thoughts keep on swirling around in your mind over and over, your emotions either just keep on existing or they intensify, and at some point, you get so tired of the noise and the discomfort that you eat to quiet it all and comfort yourself. You eat to get away from them and to distract yourself from them. And you may eat a lot because the longer you're eating, the longer you experience the quiet and comfort.

But as you know, once you stop eating, the thoughts and feelings will resurface because nothing has been resolved.

So often I ask people, "If you don't eat when you have those thoughts and feelings, then what would you do?"

And they're at a loss. They don't know what else to do. And that's why they keep turning to food. It's what they know to do, and it works, even if just temporarily, it gives them relief.

But there is something you can do that would be so much more helpful and that would actually quiet the thoughts and help you to feel better.

It's facing and observing your thoughts and then changing your perspective.

When I read through that group text about my friends' plans that I couldn't attend, I had thoughts and feelings. The thoughts swirled about being left out, about me being alone rather than being with friends, about missing out on future inside jokes, about so many things.

And the emotions were there – lonely, sad, disappointed, isolated, regretful.

And I let it all happen.

I didn't eat to get away from it.

I ate because I was hungry and it was breakfast time, I had read that group text soon after waking up, but I was just eating to fuel my body, not to distract, numb, or quiet myself.

I did wonder how long I would feel that way and how long I'd be thinking about it. Was this going to last all day? Was I not going to be able to get out of it? Was it going to ruin my day or the rest of my trip?

And the answers ended up being no, no, and no.

It didn't last all day because I observed and addressed my thoughts and I changed my perspective.

I was aware of what I was doing with my thinking. I saw that I was throwing myself a pity party. I saw that I was worrying about missing out on connection while they were all connecting and feeling envious. I took time to look at my thoughts and understand them rather than trying to push them away and rather than just letting them run rampant in my head.

And then I had a little chat with myself.

I was in freaking Scotland. I was doing something really cool. I was having experiences I'd never had before. And, it's okay if I miss one night with friends.

It will be okay. I will be okay. My friendships will be okay.

And I felt better.

That's why my thoughts and emotions didn't affect me all day. I worked on them. I resolved them.

And yes, when more texts came through, I felt a twinge of what I'd originally felt but, I brought myself back to my helpful thoughts and felt better.

You don't have to be a victim to your thoughts and feelings. You can do something about them.

Running from them by eating food may be quicker but, it won't resolve anything. So instead, take that time to observe yourself and have a conversation with yourself, and self-talk it out as you would with another person.

And I do want to say, that I understand it can be hard to do that for yourself, especially if you're not used to doing it.

You might not know how to have a different perspective when you're feeling anxious or worried, or when you're feeling lonely while you're alone and in the mundane, or when you're stressed about life stuff. I totally get it. It can be hard to see other options besides what you're currently thinking.

This is a skill I teach my group members in my program, and when I'm coaching I'm helping them to change their thoughts and feelings because it's not always easy to do it on your own.

But, you can still try to be a good friend to yourself. You can listen to yourself, and writing down your thoughts can be super helpful with that because it can create a separation between you and your thoughts and it can help you to be an observer rather than just being in it.

And you can explore other options for perspectives for yourself and how you can think about things, just like you may do when you're trying to help someone else.

When you're a better listener and a better friend to yourself, and you actually process through and work on your thoughts and emotions, you will be more willing to be with yourself.

You don't have to escape with food. You can change what's happening in your mind on your own.

Next, there's not having enough connection with other people.

I've definitely been guilty of this.

I've lived alone for a lot of my adult life, and I love having alone time but, too many times I've found myself being alone too much.

I didn't have that balance like I was talking about earlier.

And I do believe that a lot of my bingeing was related to that.

I liked being with myself but, at some point I'd crave connection and instead of reaching out to someone, I'd eat a lot of food because I thought it would be fun and something to do.

But obviously food wouldn't satisfy my desire for connection and after eating it all, I'd feel more lonely and isolated than I did before I ate.

And a problem I kept running into was that I sometimes didn't want to be proactive about planning to spend time with people. So often I'd want to have a day to myself, thinking it was what I wanted and needed but really, it wasn't. It sounded good but after a few hours, it wasn't what I wanted anymore and when I'd feel the desire for something else, I'd get into thinking things like, no one is going to be available because they probably have plans already, or I don't know even what we would do or have any ideas for activities if I did reach out, or some other defeating thought that stopped me from reaching out to someone.

So I'd just eat food instead because it was easier and I thought it would be fun.

When I think back, I think I thought I was craving fun, which I probably was but, I do think that on a deeper level I was craving connection.

It's important to know what you're really wanting if you're going to satisfy your desire.

And food was never going to satisfy what I was really desiring.

Us humans desire connection. And we're all different, and that's why it's important to find what your unique balance of being alone and being with people is for you.

Because when you have that balance, you'll feel more fulfilled and you'll be able to appreciate your time with yourself more.

You'll be getting a good balance of what you want – connection with others and connection with yourself.

It can be challenging to enjoy alone time when you do too much of it. I know from experience.

So if you're not enjoying being with yourself because you're alone too much, and you're craving connection with other people, be intentional about connecting with other people, even if it's on the phone or Zoom or Face Time or whatever.

And I recommend being proactive with it. This is something I've been working on for myself actually.

Make plans ahead of time. And listen, if you're really not up for it when it's time to meet up with the person or people, it's okay to reschedule and take care of yourself. But make sure you're aware of and like your reasons for rescheduling.

I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to reschedule because I just didn't feel like it but then went and was so glad I did. I think there's a fine line between having the desire for the comfort of

staying home and not socializing vs genuinely needing to rest or genuinely not being in an emotional space for socializing. Overcome that desire for comfort because it will most likely be worth it.

And the fourth one I wanted to talk about is not doing enough things you like to do with yourself or not appreciating what you do with yourself.

When I was in Scotland, I spent two nights on an island, The Isle of Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides. I loved it so much, the landscapes and beaches were incredible, and I highly recommend it.

And one thing that got me thinking was how remote it was.

There was one small town on the entire island, Stornoway.

Other than that, it's villages that are basically land and houses with a random shop or cafe here and there.

And I was thinking about what it would be like to live there. Whenever I drive through places in New Hampshire and Maine that are pretty remote I always think I could never live there. I'd be so bored.

But after chatting with some locals on the island, and just seeing people who live there, maybe that's not true.

Maybe I could be content there if I was more content with less.

That's something I got from the few locals I chatted with. They seem to be content with a simple, slower-paced life.

I think so many of us aren't. We're so often looking for the excitement, the stimulation, the highs.

But what if we slowed down, appreciated our surroundings more, appreciated what we have more, appreciated just spending time with people we like more, and just letting ourselves "be" more.

I think so many of us, especially with smart phones and social media, and with expectations of what we should be doing, feel dissatisfied with the simple things, like they're not enough.

And we then cover up that dissatisfaction with food, and try to create excitement with food.

Now, I'm not saying you should have zero excitement and stimulation. I think this is something that's also good to have a balance with, a balance between having big fun moments and natural emotional highs and then having moderate, content, chill pleasure.

And I think too many of us aren't finding that balance for ourselves and what I see happen to people is they're not having enough big fun, so it's hard for them to appreciate the simple moments.

They're spending too much time doing things for other people, and not enough for themselves, or too much time and mental energy working that they're drained and don't have the energy for pleasure.

And I get it that some of you have responsibilities and obligations that take up a lot of your time.

But it can be helpful to be intentional about the time you do have with pre-planning so you're not at a loss for what to do or default to eating food, and also to delegate where you can to help you create more time for yourself.

When you are enjoying what you're doing, and you're engaged with it, are appreciating it, and when you have things to look forward to, you just might notice that food isn't even a thought in your mind because you're not looking for something to make this moment better.

It's already a good enough moment.

The more you appreciate the things you do with yourself, the more contentment you'll feel.

It's when you are telling yourself it's not enough or you should be doing more that you're taking away your contentment, and then you may eat to try and feel contentment, joy, or to distract from your boredom.

And again, just like I talked about with connecting with people vs time with yourself, having the balance of moderate pleasure and big pleasure can be so helpful.

So, if you want to be more content with being with yourself, you could work on your self-talk and your relationship with yourself, practice handling your thoughts and emotions more productively, connect with other people more so you have that balance, or do more things you enjoy and appreciate the things you do.

And then, you won't think about food so much when you're with yourself.

You'll be getting what you're wanting, so you won't be thinking about eating food to get it.

You'll be okay with being in your own head so you won't be thinking about eating food to help you escape.

And you'll be more content, so you won't be thinking about eating food to make you feel better.

You can be okay with being with yourself.

If you're not now, explore why. Consider the four reasons I talked about and consider if maybe it's something else that's going on with you.

We are all going to be alone, with ourselves sometimes. It's so important to have a relationship with ourselves that makes it easier for us to do that and helps us feel content with it.

And, it can definitely help you to decrease the excessive eating too.

Alright, that is all for today, I'll talk to you next time, bye bye.