

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #365: One Thing You Can Do to Better Understand Your Behavior

Hi! Today I'm talking about understanding your behavior because in order to change it, you have to understand why you're doing it.

If you've ever binged, or overeaten, or said you weren't going to eat something but then you did, then this episode is for you.

In my coaching program, so much of the work I do is in helping my group members understand themselves because they've spent so much time feeling lost or confused by their behavior.

We do a lot of work around this but in this episode today, I want to talk about one of the most important things you'll need to do to better understand yourself.

And it's being a better observer of yourself.

Many of us are good at observing our past selves.

We can pretty easily reflect back and observe what we did. That's probably the easiest thing for us to notice about ourselves.

Sometimes we can look back and observe what we were thinking and feeling too. But, that can be a little more challenging if we weren't paying attention to it in the moment.

And not being aware of your thoughts and feelings is a problem because it's going to make it harder for you to understand *and* to change your behaviors.

The reason why you act as you do is because of how you feel emotionally. And you feel how you feel because of what you think.

So your thoughts and feelings are going to be what drives your actions and not just what you do or say but how you do or say it.

For example, even if you're saying the same words, you're likely going to speak differently and have a different tone if you're feeling calm vs feeling annoyed.

And when it comes to your eating, what you eat, when you eat, and how much you eat will be determined by what you're thinking and feeling and how you respond to your thoughts and feelings.

You're not continuing to eat for no reason. That behavior isn't just happening.

It might be happening because you keep thinking about wanting more, so you keep feeling desire for more, so then you give in to that desire and eat more.

It might be happening because you're thinking about how badly you want to numb the discomfort you're feeling, so you're feeling a desire to escape your emotion, so you then eat to numb and escape so you can feel better.

But if you're only observing what you're doing, and aren't observing what you're thinking or feeling, then you'll have no idea why you're doing what you're doing.

And if you don't know why you're doing what you're doing then you'll have no idea how to change it.

Or, you might try to change what you're doing without changing the cause of what you're doing, and if you're not addressing the cause, then lasting change likely won't happen.

You might be able to use willpower sometimes to push yourself to work against the cause of the unwanted behavior but, what will likely happen is that the cause will keep driving you to do the unwanted behavior.

So we gotta address the cause.

And again, the cause is your thoughts and feelings.

This is why one of the first things I address in my Stop Binge Eating Program is gaining awareness of your thoughts.

It can be so eye-opening when you're able to see exactly why you do what you do.

If you've been listening to this podcast for awhile, you've heard me talk about the main reasons why you binge – which are because you're reacting to excessive eating restrictions or because you try to control your emotions with food.

But, when we go a level deeper and understand why you do one or both of those two things, it's because of your thoughts.

Your thoughts about your body, yourself, the food, gaining weight, losing weight, your emotions, so many things.

You might think that your emotions are too painful, which makes you feel scared of them, so you eat to numb them.

You might think that you're tired of not eating what you want, so you feel an urge to eat those foods, so you eat them.

You might think that the food is so good and you don't want to stop, so you feel desire to keep eating, so you keep eating.

There are so many examples of thoughts and feelings that drive excessive eating, which I talk about in pretty much all the episodes of this podcast.

And you need to be aware of what they are for you. You need to become aware of your habitual thoughts.

Because that's what's going to help you to change.

So, you're going to start observing yourself more. You're going to pay closer attention to what you're thinking and how you're feeling.

You're going to look at yourself as if you're an outsider looking in.

Most of the time we're just reacting. We're just going through the think-feel-act process without any awareness of what's going on. We're just doing.

But what I'm suggesting you do is observe yourself just as you might observe another person.

You listen to the words in your mind, you notice the emotions you feel, the sensations in your body.

You look inward.

You observe your inner self in your mind and your body.

That's how you're going to understand yourself better. That's how you're going to understand why you do what you do.

When you can see what you're thinking and how it's making you feel, your behavior makes so much more sense.

So, here's how you can become a better observer of your thoughts and feelings.

Start by writing. Get your thoughts onto paper. Don't worry about writing the "right" thing, just write whatever thoughts come into your mind.

You can write about the food you eat and don't eat, you can write about your body, you can write about binge eating, you can write about your emotions, there's no right or wrong thing to write about.

All you're doing is trying to become aware of what thoughts are in your mind.

Usually we are just living in our thoughts. We think them and either we don't even notice them or we're just agreeing and reacting to them.

But when you write them down, you're separating yourself from them. You're seeing them. You're observing them.

For me, there have been so many times that I've been writing down thoughts and I'll observe one and immediately be like, "I think that?" I had no idea until I observed it through writing. Or, I'll observe what I wrote and it's not until I got it out of my head that I realized how untrue it is. When it was in my head, it seemed factual, so true. But putting it on paper and separating myself from it immediately helped me to see the truth about it.

This can also happen sometimes when we speak our thoughts. This happens when I'm coaching my group members. They'll say something to me and immediately recognize that it's not actually true. And this is such a huge insight to have. Because when you can observe that your thoughts aren't true, it's the first step toward believing what is true.

For example, someone might think that they can't stop themselves from eating more but as soon as they say it they realize, of course they can. They're capable of not picking up another piece of food. And now they're starting to change what they believe. Now, they may not yet know how to not pick up another piece but, at least they're making the shift toward believe they can, they just need to learn how. That's so much more useful than thinking they can't.

So, start becoming an observer of your thoughts by writing them down, without judgement. Just see what thoughts are in your mind.

Then, once you're aware of some of them, you can keep any eye out for them.

You're going to pay closer attention to what is being thought in your mind. You're going to look for at least one thought that came up in your writing.

Now, it's likely that you're not going to catch it every time, especially when you're just getting started with this.

We can't be aware of everything.

So sometimes the thought is going to slip by your awareness and you're going to react to it. And that's okay.

When you reflect on your behavior afterward, you're going to try to see if that thought was present before or during. And you might find that it wasn't, you might find another thought that will be helpful to work on, but regardless, you're going to take time to explore what you were thinking that led to the behavior.

The ultimate goal is to observe in the moment so you can redirect in the moment but, observing afterward can still be helpful because you can still become aware of what thoughts you need to work on changing and then work on it.

But if you can catch it in the moment, that's the best because you can make changes in your behavior in real-time.

And listen, sometimes you're going to catch it in the moment and not know how to change it in the moment and that's okay too. That still happens to me, after doing this work for so long, but if it does, I just do exactly what I said a little bit ago. I write about it, I reflect, I uncover what I was thinking so I understand why the behavior happened, and I get to work on the thought or thoughts.

The more you observe your thoughts, the easier it will be to understand and then change your behavior because you'll be aware of the cause.

And if you have a hard time recognizing your thoughts, then observing your emotions, how you feel, can help you. When you can acknowledge how you feel, you can ask yourself, "why do I feel this way?" and then find what you're thinking that's causing you to feel how you feel.

And now the process of changing what you think to change your feelings and actions can begin.

This is what I do with my clients when we coach. I help them to change their thoughts, feelings and actions but, before we can do that, they need to have awareness of their own thoughts.

I do help them to uncover them by asking useful questions but, so much awareness can happen on your own if you just pay attention to yourself.

You have so many answers right in front of you if you take a moment to look.

So observe yourself. Not just your behavior but also your thoughts. Observe your thoughts outside of the moment. Observe your thoughts while in the moment.

You might be surprised by what you see.

And what you see can be a helpful first step toward true change.

Alright, that's all I have for you today, I'll talk to you again soon. Bye bye.