

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #388: How To Give Yourself Unconditional Permission to Eat What You Want and Not Binge

Hello! Today I want to talk with you about giving yourself unconditional permission to eat what you want. And I want to talk about this because quite often, people misunderstand what this means and when they do, they are resistant to doing it, which can stop them from doing something that is going to help them to stop binge eating.

They get this fear that if they give themselves unconditional permission to eat what they want that they're going to binge, overeat, eat all the unhealthy foods, and overall just have terrible eating habits.

Basically, they think it means they are giving themselves permission to do whatever they want whenever they feel like it and have no limits, no restrictions, and no fore-thought.

And that's not what it actually means.

When you have unconditional permission, it just means you're allowed. It just means you can. There is no action taken in permission, it's just consent.

How I like to think about it is like you're invited to a party. You are welcome to come. That's all it means.

And it's important that we separate this permission from the decision that you make with the permission.

They are not the same.

You have permission to eat what you want, when you want but then, you decide what and when.

So you have permission, you're invited to go to the party, and then you decide if you're going to go or not.

Now, people tend to think that if they have permission to eat what they want, then they're going to make the decision to eat all the unhealthy food in large amounts.

And it makes sense that they would think that because they've seen themselves do it so many times in the past.

When they do give themselves permission to eat what they want, they overdo it, maybe even *way* overdo it.

They have this evidence that permission will result in bingeing.

But here's what they're missing.

When they did give themselves permission, it was either not really 100% unconditional permission or it was permission after or before a period of being overly restricted.

Let me go more in depth with those.

When I say they're not giving themselves real, 100% unconditional permission, I mean that they might be physically eating the food but in their mind, the permission isn't there.

They're still telling themselves they shouldn't be eating it, that they're doing something wrong or bad, that this food is bad, something like that. They're making themselves feel guilty about what they're doing.

And that's not 100% unconditional permission. Physically allowing yourself to eat it isn't enough, you have to also mentally allow it.

Allowing it in your mind is actually more important than eating it because that's what's going to determine how you feel about eating it.

The goal here with the unconditional permission is to remove the guilt since guilt can really mess with your eating. It's guilt that so often leads us to keep eating, overeat, and binge. It so often leads to all or nothing and perfectionist thinking where you think you've messed up and did something wrong and ruined your day so you might as well just keep eating and you'll be perfect and eat better and be good tomorrow.

So if you're allowing yourself to eat the food but are making yourself feel guilty because of what you're thinking about you eating that food, then yeah, you might end up eating way too much of it.

I have a client who experienced this when she physically allowed herself to eat a food she hadn't been allowing. She thought she was doing the right thing but after awhile, nothing changed with her eating. She just kept bingeing on the food and couldn't figure out why.

And it was because she wasn't *really* allowing it. Physically she was but mentally she wasn't.

It wasn't until she truly allowed and truly gave herself permission that things changed.

So if you've seen yourself binge on foods when you do give yourself permission to eat them, it might be because of what you are telling yourself about eating that food.

It could also be, as I said a moment ago, that when you do give yourself permission it's after or before a period of being overly restricted.

You're allowing yourself to eat the food after not allowing for awhile.

Or you're allowing yourself to eat the food but just this one time because tomorrow, you're going to be good again and that food won't be allowed.

If you haven't allowed yourself to eat something for awhile, and now you are, you might not react so calmly to eating it. You might have a build up of desire after being denied for so long and that built up desire will likely drive you to eat a lot of it.

It's like if you haven't been allowed to see your favorite person in the world for a long time. What would it be like when you finally are allowed to see them? I bet you'd want to spend A LOT of time with them. Your desire for spending time with them, and how you would react to finally being able to see them, would be so different than if you were allowed to, and did see them every day.

When you're allowed after being denied for so long, you're going to want a lot and not want to stop.

Then there's the future restriction, where you're not going to be allowed.

You're allowing the food today but, you're not going to allow it tomorrow, or for a long time, or forever. In your mind, it's going away.

So how are you going to react to that? You might want to eat as much as you can while you can.

Going back to the favorite person example, what would it be like if you weren't going to be able to see that person again for a long time? You'd want to spend A LOT of time with them.

So when you have permission to have what hasn't been allowed or what isn't going to be allowed, you're going to act in an urgent, scarcity-minded, deprivation kind of way.

And that is going to be so different than if you are always allowed to have it.

If you're always allowed to spend time with that person, you'd be so much more relaxed about it. You'd see them when you felt like it, you wouldn't see them when you don't feel like it, you wouldn't push yourself to stay as long as you can, you'd leave them when you're tired or just not feeling it

anymore for the day, and spending time with them wouldn't be such a big deal. You'd still enjoy it of course but, the feelings you'd feel and how you'd act would be so different.

The same can happen with food. If you're always allowed to eat it, you'd be so much more relaxed about it. You'd eat it when you felt like it, you wouldn't when you don't feel like it, there wouldn't be urgency to eat a lot of it before it goes away, because it's not going away, you'll be more okay with stopping eating since you know you can and will eat it again soon, and eating that food wouldn't be such a big deal. You'd still enjoy eating it but, the feelings you'd feel and how you'd act would be so different.

And I want to touch on something I just said in there.

It might sound crazy to think that you would ever not feel like eating a food that you love. But think about this. Have you ever been deciding what restaurant you want to go to and when someone makes a recommendation you think, "I'm not in the mood for that today."

You know you can eat, for example, Mexican food any time, the restaurant is close by, it's open every day, you might have even eaten it recently, and if you don't eat it today, you can eat it another time when you do want to.

That's what it's like.

When the food is abundant, available, and allowed, you're so much more relaxed about it and when you're relaxed, rather than feeling deprived, restricted, or feeling a sense of urgency, you're able to access how you're feeling about it and what you actually want.

When you're feeling deprived, restricted, or feeling a sense of urgency, your decision-making is going to be so much different because you're going to feel this need to eat it now and eat a lot of it.

Going back to that party example I gave at the beginning.

If you're invited to a party, and you like parties, and you're never invited to parties, and you don't think you will get invited to another one for a long time, you might not even think about whether or not you actually want to go. You're just going to feel an urgency to go because this is your only opportunity and you've missed parties so much. And you might even stay way longer than you want to, even if you're not enjoying it anymore.

You're not actually acting from your true wants, you're acting from scarcity.

But if you're invited to parties every day, and you go to them sometimes, and you know there will be more parties, you're so much more relaxed about it and you'll actually take a moment to consider whether you want to go to this party or not. Are you in the mood for this party? For this kind of party?

That's what it's like when you have 100% unconditional permission.

You're going to think, feel, and act so differently when you have permission vs when you don't.

And it's so important that you understand that because you need to see the difference between how you make decisions when you're feeling restricted vs when you're not.

Those people who you think are quote “normal” eaters, most of them are like this and that’s part of what makes them a quote “normal” eater.

That’s part of the reason why they’re so relaxed and why they’re able to so easily say no without feeling deprived or restricted and why they can stop at a moderate amount.

They’re living in abundance, permission, and allowance in their mind.

Now, there’s something else I want to address. The “unconditional” part of this.

And it’s an important part.

Because you’re not only going to give yourself permission to eat what you want if you’ve exercised that day, or if you haven’t eaten anything else that’s considered unhealthy, or if you didn’t binge or overeat.

The permission is *unconditional* so there are no conditions put on your permission and you don’t have to earn permission.

The permission is *always* there no matter what.

But then remember, there is a decision to be made.

As I said at the beginning, this isn’t meant to be no limits and zero restrictions.

You can have permission and choose to limit yourself or restrict yourself from a place of caring about your body and your health and your mental well-being.

You can be invited to the party, choose to go, and limit yourself by deciding you’ll only stay until 10pm because leaving at that time is what is best for you and you want to have that limit.

You have permission and you make decisions and limits based on what you want because you have the freedom to choose.

Limits can be a good thing so I’m not at all suggesting that you eat limitlessly. But you only set limits on what or how much based on what you genuinely want for yourself, based on what’s good for your body, and you make sure you love the reasons and that they’re not fear-based or a punishment.

So when you are deciding what and how much, you are going to take those things into account. It’s not just about what will taste good, it’s also about how it will affect your body and how your body will feel.

For example, say I overate on fried foods at lunch and I didn't exercise today. I still have permission to eat what I want for dinner, I still have permission to eat a snack or to eat dessert. That does not go away. I'm still allowed.

But I may choose to not eat a snack if I'm not hungry for it. I may choose to skip dessert. I may choose to eat a more nutritious dinner.

Not because I have to, but because I want to. Because, I want to feel good in my body. I may not have felt good after overeating fried foods at lunch but, at dinner I might eat foods that will help me to feel better physically.

And I may limit my eating by not eating dessert but if I'm choosing that, it's because I genuinely want to, not as a punishment for overeating and not exercising.

It wouldn't be good for me to punish myself for having overeaten and not exercised. It wouldn't *feel* good, I probably wouldn't feel good about myself, and it's going to lead me down the road of being overly restricted which is not a good road to be on. That road leads to rebellion and feeling urges to binge.

So I wouldn't. The permission stays and I make a choice with that permission.

And again, I can't say this enough, your true wants are so much easier to recognize when you have permission vs when you don't.

So please, don't take the permission away. You don't have to earn it, and you don't lose it, it's always there.

And that's the thing, it *is* always there.

If you don't have it, it's because *you've* taken it away. Not anyone else. So don't take it away from yourself. There is no good reason for you to.

Permission isn't the problem. It's actually not giving yourself permission that is the problem. And if you're eating too much, it's your decision making, not the permission, that's the problem.

I have had people tell me that they were too permissive and that's why they ate too much.

But the thing is, you can't be too permissive.

But you can make too many decisions to eat more food.

I have said in this episode that it's so much easier to make decisions that are aligned with your true wants when you have that 100% unconditional permission but I didn't say that you will always do it.

I want to be clear about that.

It's not always just restriction that causes overeating and binge eating. There are emotional factors that go into eating too much too. So that could be playing a part if you eat too much.

So for sure the emotional eating component needs to be worked on too if that's the case for you.

But regardless of whether there's emotional eating or not, the permission needs to be there.

And when it comes to emotional eating, you can eat to soothe emotions if you want to. You can eat for entertainment, pleasure, joy if you want to.

You have permission to do that.

But do you want to? Maybe sometimes you do. Maybe sometimes you don't.

And those times when you don't, you need to feel and work through those emotions by working on your thoughts that are causing them and doing activities that help you to feel better.

I say that because sometimes people do exactly what I'm recommending in this episode with the permission and they still overeat and binge and they think it didn't work. But it *did* work for what it was supposed to do. There just might be something else, such as emotional eating, and both are important.

So, give yourself 100% unconditional permission to eat what you want to eat and when you are in a place of permission, that's where you'll make such better decisions.

Permission doesn't always mean you're going to choose yes.

It doesn't mean you never give yourself limits within that permission.

It just means you have the freedom to choose.

You always do have the freedom to choose. It is always existing for you. But you're going to make sure you allow yourself to have it.

You are always allowed to have it, no matter what.

So today, give yourself permission. And I just want to say real quick that when you first do this, you might still have some residual deprived, restricted, urgency thoughts and you might be reacting to them and that's okay. This is a process and you are going to practice being permissive.

Allow yourself to go through the process, to ease into full permission, to get used to having permission, and with time, you will see the positive effects.

It will happen for you.

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