

THE STOP BINGE EATING PODCAST

with Kirstin Sarfde

Ep #389: Doing This Work as a Mom with Pam Howard

Hello! Today on the podcast I'm going to be having a conversation with Mom Coach, Pam Howard.

She is a Master Certified Coach, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, a former school counselor, and a mom herself, who helps mothers achieve calmer, more connected, and confident parenting.

Someone once asked me to talk about the nuances of navigating eating and doing this work when you have children. And I have worked in my program with so many moms that ask questions about this too.

And I thought about just doing an episode about it on my own but then thought it would be even better if I talked about it with an actual mom. So I'm talking about it today with Pam!

I have helped many moms navigate this work, even though I'm not a mom myself, but I thought it would land a little differently if you hear from a mom, and even better, a coach for moms!

So, today you're going to hear from Pam and also, after our conversation, you're going to hear some thoughts from me. After our conversation so many thoughts came up for me that I didn't think of while she and I were talking so, I'm adding those in at the end.

So, if you're a mom, I hope you find this episode to be helpful!

Here we go!

Kirstin: Hello, Pam. Thank you so much for being here with us today. So fun.

Pam: Hello. So happy to be here. Thanks for inviting me.

Kirstin: Yes. Yes, of course. So today we're going to be talking about being a mom. So I'd like to just start with you telling us a little bit about yourself and a little bit about the work that you do and why you do the work that you do.

Pam: Yeah. So I am first and foremost a mom to two incredible kids. They are 16 and 20. And when I first became a mom, I was a social worker. I had gotten my degree in social work. And I loved working with kids. I thought I was going to be the greatest mom ever. And because I always wanted to be a mom. That was a dream of mine. And lo and behold, like so many of us, we become moms, and then we're like, "Oh no. I have no idea what I'm doing." That was me. And I had never held a newborn in my life. I had never changed a diaper. I wasn't the type of kid-- I don't have a lot of cousins and family nearby. And I didn't even babysit as a kid. I don't know. I didn't have any idea what was going on. And so then fast forward to when my daughter was like two or three. And when they start talking, they start talking back. So then I had to deal with, what do I do in those situations? And I had promised myself that I wasn't going to raise my kids in the same way that I was raised. In other words, I wasn't going to be a yeller. I wasn't going to be authoritarian. I wasn't going to sweep their feelings under the rug. Well, I found myself doing all those things and thinking again, "What's going on? Why is this happening to me?"

So, of course, I went to my own therapist and got some help, and I started reading all the books. And I listened to one book in particular called "Scream-free Parenting" by Hal Runkel. And in that book, he said, "The only person you can control is you." And I know to say that out loud and to hear that is like, of course. We hear that all the time. But to me, as a 30-something-year-old, it hit me in a new way of, "Oh, here I am trying to control her and get her to behave a certain way. All I have to do is make sure I behave a certain way. That's so much easier," right? So I felt so empowered and so relieved to be able to do that. I actually went and studied with Hal Runkel and became a Scream-free certified leader and then became a coach and decided, this is really what I wanted to help moms do is to learn how to have control over themselves. And when you do that, it just everything flows so much more easily because you don't feel the need to control your kids because you know you've got your own back. You know that whatever they do, you can handle it. And so I love what I do. I help moms stop yelling at their kids primarily and just really enjoy motherhood again. And so I have a podcast called, "Less Drama More Mama." And that is the title of my book as well. And yeah, that's a little bit about me.

Kirstin: Yeah. Awesome. Okay. So one of the questions that I hear come up for moms that feel like they do not have time because they're spending so much time working and on spending time with their kids and on their kids' activities and just all the other things they have going on, how can they make time for themselves to better themselves when they have so many other obligations going on?

Pam: Yeah. Well, it's a good question. I mean, I think that, first of all, we have to decide that we are worth spending time on. I think so many moms feel like spending time on themselves is selfish. They feel like to be a good mom, they should be spending more time with the kids, and I just never subscribed to that myself. I was like if I'm going to be a good mom, I need to be okay. I need to feel my best, and so that's my top priority, and I guess some moms might feel like that's sacrilegious to say, right? I'm the top priority over my kids. But again, if I'm not taking care of myself, I can't be the best

mom that I want to be for my kids. So if it means not going to some of the soccer games or saying no to your kids about going to that birthday party they want to go to, or whatever it is, I always try to keep the long view in mind. So it's not just about what my kid wants in this moment or even what's easiest for me in the moment. It's what's the result of this decision tomorrow, next week, in a month, whatever it is? So to answer your question more succinctly, right, it's decide that you are worth it and you will find-- you will make the time.

Kirstin: Yeah, yes. I love that. But I do hear a lot of people talk about mom guilt. They feel guilty that they're saying no to their kid, and they feel guilty that they're not showing up at the game, and they feel guilty that they're not spending more time with their kids, so how can they overcome that guilt?

Pam: You know what? I understand that. I used to feel-- I used to feel that way, too, when my kids were young. I think you need to feel the feeling, feel the guilt. The guilt is not a sign that you're doing something wrong. It's what we're conditioned to believe is that we're doing something wrong, but that's not true. So it's feeling that guilt and doing it anyway, and over time, when you see the results of taking care of yourself, and you see the effect that that has on not just you, but your kids as well, that they're going to-- they're going to get over their disappointment. They're going to get over being upset. And you feel better because you've taken the time for you and then they get the benefit of that. Over time, you're going to see, oh, this is worth it. I don't need to feel that guilt because I see that it's paying off. So again, it's that long view of this is really helping my child, and so they're going to be upset in the short term, and I can handle that, and they're going to be okay.

Kirstin: Oh, I think that is such a great perspective that, yes, it may feel bad in the moment, but over time, you're going to see the results, and I mean, isn't that just a life lesson, in general, that sometimes we do things that don't feel great now, but it actually gives us such a better result in the end than had we done that thing that we felt so guilty about not doing?

Pam: Right. I mean, just think about like exercise, right? We don't want to do that in the moment [laughter], but we know that if we're consistent with it, and we keep showing up every day, and we do the exercise that it's going to pay off.

Kirstin: Yes, yes, yes. And you were talking about, with the guilt, that it's not a sign that you're doing something wrong. I feel like if I coaching somebody on this, I would have them look at why it's the right thing. Because we get so caught up, and I'm doing something wrong, because I'm saying no, because I'm not going, all of the things. But it's not just that. There's also a good reason. There's also a reason why this is the right thing to do. And I think that that's important to be looking at, too, right?

Pam: Absolutely. I mean, well, we know that your feelings are caused by your thoughts. And so if you're thinking, and you've grown up thinking, "This is selfish, this is wrong, I should be doing that," you're going to feel guilty. But what you're saying is, what are some other thoughts that we could be thinking that would lead to feeling good about your decision?

Kirstin: Yes.

Pam: That lead to feeling more certain or more - I'm trying to think of what I would feel - more confident, I guess, about your decision to do something for yourself.

Kirstin: Yes, yes, yes. I love that. So can you talk about tangible things that people can do to make more time? So I'm thinking, like-- obviously, I have a podcast. We're on it right now. And I had

somebody comment that it all makes sense, and it's all really great. But how can they make the time? And I know that you have a program, and I have a program, and that you need to spend time on these kinds of things. And yes, you need to believe that you're worth it. Yes, you need to prioritize. But what about when people are just having such a hard time making the time to sit down and journal, or watch a video, or do a worksheet, or listen to a coaching call, or make time for a coaching call, or whatever it is? Do you have any tangible tips for how people can make more time for themselves? Maybe some of the things that your clients do?

Pam: Well, first of all, some of my clients will literally schedule it into their calendar, right? So block off time to watch the module, do the worksheet. That's one thing that we can do. You can multitask by listening to the module while doing something else. A lot of my clients do that. I have told clients, I don't know about you, but I have told people, like, if you only can do one thing, this is what I recommend you do. Like, come to the coaching calls. That's my preference. If you can't, literally can't, make time to watch the videos or do the worksheets, at least come to the coaching calls, because that's when I can personally help you. And you're hearing other people get coached, you're being part of a community where people don't judge you, and you can hear other people's stories and get support from them. So there's prioritizing things, but also, when the kids are sleeping, that's a good time to do some work. I think, personally, for me, what I need to do, because I'm a part of other people's programs too, is scheduling it in my calendar and literally making the time for it. And there is time in the day. If you were actually to sit down and write out every single thing that you did that day, and how much time you're spending on social media, or the things that they do relax us in a way, but there's time there if we really look for it, so.

Kirstin: Yeah, yeah. And one of the things that I've recommended to some of my clients, too, is delegation. So maybe we think we need to do all of these things, and we don't have time to work on ourselves, because we have to do X and Y and Z. But really, maybe maybe we don't have to do those things. Maybe someone else can do those things. Especially at work, a lot of people take on a lot more than maybe they need to take on. And there is somebody else that could do it. Or at home, maybe your partner can do more things than they're doing--

Pam: Or even your kids.

Kirstin: --but you just keep taking it on. Or your kids. Yes, yes. When I have clients that have kids that are old enough to do some chores or just help with things, to ask them to help.

Pam: Kids love to help. I mean, they're naturally really good helpers, but it's the moms and the parents who squash that in them because we want it done a certain way. We want it done our way. And so we say, "No, we'll just take care of it. We'll just take care of it." But you know what? It gives kids such a good feeling. It gives them a sense of pride and ownership of things if they are able to help. So, I mean, when my daughter, who's now 20, when she was like 14, she started to bake and to cook, and she loved to cook. And I was admittedly very nervous about the mess that she was going to make and about if something didn't turn out well, then that was money down the drain and all this stuff. But I let her do her thing. And it got to the point where she was making dinners every night. And not because I was like, you have to make dinner, but she was like, "Can I do it please? I love to cook. I want to make dinner for the family." And I'm like, heck yeah, of course you can. So that was something I didn't even have to think about. And when she got her license, she would even go grocery shopping and pick up things. I mean, yeah, your kids can do so much if you just let them.

Kirstin: Yeah. And I'm thinking of even other chores around the house that maybe they're not going to love it as much as cooking, but maybe they don't mind. Maybe we think of it as such a chore. But if we ask them can you sweep the floor? Can you take the dishes out of the dishwasher or whatever, they may not hate it.

Pam: Yeah, it's so funny because my younger daughter, who's 16, when given the choice to either empty the dishwasher, or clean the dishes in the sink and put them in the dishwasher, she'll choose washing the dishes and putting them in the dishwasher, which I find so fascinating because I'm the opposite, right? So it works out pretty well. But yeah, exactly. We project so much of our stuff onto the kids.

Kirstin: Yeah. And also, you're raising soon-to-be adults. Isn't it good to teach them how to clean and do chores and cook and do laundry and those kinds of things so that they don't turn 18 and then are completely lost?

Pam: All of it. All of it. It's so great. Again, my kids feel so good about themselves that they know how to do so many things and their friends don't. Not all their friends do. So, yeah.

Kirstin: Yeah, yeah. I love that. I love that. And the other thing that I usually talk with my clients about, too, who are moms is just taking an assessment of what is actually urgent and what is not, because we tend to think that I have to have all of the dishes done before I go to bed. And I use this example with my clients a lot, because I do not think that way. I will leave all the dishes in the sink all night. And I will do them in the morning, because I don't mind doing them in the morning. And I really do not want to do them at night. And they don't need to be done at night. It's okay to leave them undone, right?

Pam: Yeah.

Pam: Yeah. Yeah. I had a client once who was similar with the laundry being folded and put away. And I remember saying something to her like, "Well, what if your laundry just needs to sit for a little bit before it gets put away?" That's just how we do things around here. It needs a little bit of time to sit first. [laughter] But the funniest thing happened because when she started thinking about it that way, she actually put it away sooner because it wasn't this shameful, heavy thing that she was supposed to be putting her laundry away right away after it got folded. Instead, she kind of had a little bit more self-compassion. And then she ended up putting it away. So funny how our brains work. Yeah.

Kirstin: I know. I know. [laughter] So being a mom and taking care of so many things, there's usually a lot of stress that happens for moms. So what is your advice for moms that experience a lot of stress? And I ask this because stress eating is a thing that happens for a lot of people. When they feel the stress, they just go to eat to try and relax and calm themselves down. So what is your advice for handling stress as a mom?

Pam: Yeah. So I'm assuming that you teach this, too. But I don't want to-- I don't want to assume completely that. When there's an issue with eating, especially when it comes to emotional eating, it's really a sign that you are underfeeling your emotions, right? So I'm just ending a certification in somatic work. So I will be certified next month to be a somatic practitioner, which basically is looking at the nervous system and looking at how we feel our emotions and what we experience in our bodies when we have an emotion. And so my take on it is that when you're stressed, you need to feel what you're feeling. You need to, first of all, understand how your body responds to stress. So the nervous system has different states. Fight or flight is something that most people are familiar with. And then

there's also freeze and fawn. And so if you know that your body often goes into fight or flight when you feel stressed, can you slow down enough to notice that, first of all, and then kind of work with your body to get you back to a more regulated state? So that's all a lot of mumbo-jumbo, probably to some people. But what it means is that-- people have probably heard the term regulation or dysregulated, right? So your nervous system, when you're stressed and overwhelmed, is dysregulated. And so how to bring yourself back into regulation so that then your logical thinking brain can come back online and say, "Wait a minute. We're not hungry here. We're just stressed." And we need to feel what's going on in our bodies and what's underneath that stress and pay some attention to it, because that's what it needs versus eating a pint of ice cream. And then the more you can do that, the less you're going to reach for that ice cream because you know that that's not really what's going to help long-term, again, right? Long-term, that's not going to help. What's going to help is you listening to your body and feeling what's actually-- what's true for you, what's actually there, which is maybe some anger, maybe some sadness, maybe some right? A lot of my clients, as moms, you feel helpless a lot of the time. So letting yourself feel that rather than trying to escape it with some food.

Kirstin: Yeah. So feel it and then do something that's actually going to help you to feel better, which, as we know, eating food does make you feel better momentarily, but it's not really handling the stress. Like you were saying, it's not really regulating the nervous system. It's calming you down, sort of, in a way, but not really.

Pam: Right. Right. It's not addressing the source of the issue.

Kirstin: Exactly. Exactly. Now, what would you say to someone that says, "I don't have time for that. I don't have time to feel my emotions. I don't have time to regulate my emotions. I got a whole entire list of things to do."

Pam: Yeah. Well, I would say you don't have time not to do that because when you do that, you will stop feeling so overwhelmed and feeling like you have to do all the things that you think that you have to do. So, I mean, nervous system work is very slow. It forces you to slow down. But that's a really good thing because when you're always go, go, going, that's a trauma response. That's a way that your body is really trying to escape negative emotion. And so slowing down is really the answer. We really resist that. But then once you do it and you get good at it, you're like, "This feels so good, and I'm never going back. I'm never going back to being that crazy, busy person who doesn't make time for herself and is constantly running around like a crazy person."

Kirstin: Yeah. So at first, it might feel uncomfortable, like we were talking about with the guilt and saying no.

Pam: It's the theme of this whole call.

Kirstin: Yeah. Yeah. It's going to be uncomfortable at first. It's something new. It's something different. It's something that you've been telling yourself for however long that is wrong and you shouldn't do it, or that you can't do it, right? I can't slow down. I can't make time.

Pam: Right, right.

Kirstin: And it may be uncomfortable at first, but once you start doing it more, it gets easier, and it just becomes a part of how you are, and then you're so much better off for it. And I would question, when we talk about slowing down and actually feeling the emotion and working on the cause of it, which is

your thoughts, how long this actually takes. A lot of the times when we talk about processing your emotions and feeling your emotions and working on them and all of this, people think that they have to sit down and do an hour's worth of work in order to get this done, right? It's like, "Oh, I got to feel a feeling. I don't get time for that. I don't have an hour. I don't have a half hour."

Pam: It's not something that takes hours. It's done in little bite-sized pieces as you learn how to do it, and then it just becomes like second nature.

Kirstin: Yeah. I would just say that for people in general, moms, not moms, we tend to think that feeling our emotions and working on our emotions is going to take way longer than it actually is. So I would not just run into, "I don't have time for that." Do what you can with the time that you have. One of the tricks that I like to give people is go to the bathroom. Now, I know that a lot of moms say that they can't even go to the bathroom because their kids are banging on the door and trying to get in or whatever. So maybe that won't work all of the time. But it's just finding those little pockets of times where you can close your eyes and take some deep breaths, or even just jot something down really quick that you're thinking about something, whatever you can do. One thing that really helps me is to think there are so many moms in the world, and there have been so many moms in the world. If all these other moms have made it through-- you know what I mean? Even if one other mom has made the time to do a program, it's possible, right? It's possible. So instead of asking yourself, "How am I going to get this done," with that kind of tone in your voice, you can ask, "How am I going to get this done?" What needs to happen in order for me to get this done?

Pam: And so when you ask the question in a different way, it opens up the possibility, and your brain starts to look for the answer to that question. So I remember even when I wanted to become a full-time coach, and I remember thinking, "How am I going to find the time for that?" Right? And I was like, "There's just no way because I had a full-time job." And I was like, "I don't know how I'm going to do it." But then I changed the question or changed just the way I was asking it with the tone of my voice. I was like, "Okay, how am I going to make this work?" And it was like, "Oh, I can do nights. I can do weekends. I can do half-hour sessions instead of hour sessions."

The ideas started coming to me more and more of how I was going to make it work. And before I knew it, I was like, "Oh my gosh, I'm coaching, and I have a full-time job. I can't believe this is happening." Because literally, I remember thinking there's no way, but there was.

Kirstin: Yes. It's making the shift from problem-focused to solution-focused, and actually being open to there being a solution instead of just shutting it down. Yeah. So let's talk about kids and eating. Now, we know you're not a nutritionist.

Pam: No.

Kirstin: But you are a mom yourself. You have worked with a lot of moms. And I would guess that this does come up from time to time in your coaching. So I just wanted to ask you a couple things about eating with kids and all of that. So the first question is how you can eat mindfully while eating with kids. So kids may be throwing stuff. They may be screaming. They may be complaining. And it can be really hard to focus on you and focus on what you're eating and pay attention to whether you're full or not, actually enjoy the food. So what are your thoughts about eating mindfully when you're eating with kids?

Pam: As much as we can take out drama from mealtimes, if your kids are throwing things, if they're complaining they don't like the food, I think, again, it goes back to you controlling you. And first of all,

not taking any of that personally, which I know, it's easier said than done, right? But knowing that they're kids, of course, they're throwing things. Of course. I love this of course mantra, I use it all the time. Of course, they're going to be complaining, right? That's what they do. But it doesn't mean anything about me. It doesn't mean anything about my parenting, my cooking, any of that. And once you're able to get to a place where you can separate that that's their thing and it's not about you, then you can actually focus more on the mindful, the mindfulness of your experience.

Kirstin: Yeah, so that's part of what I have said to actually a client recently, of just allowing your kids to be them, because she was saying that her experience would get ruined because they're acting this way. And then she's getting frustrated. And then she's just thinking it's chaos. And her thoughts about her kids are actually taking away from her experience. And we got to the place of thinking, "This is dinnertime with toddlers. This is how it's supposed to be," instead of getting upset that they are acting exactly as they're supposed to be, because when you can just let them be how they are-- and of course, take care of things. Don't just let them run amok, but also just allowing them to be how they are and not getting yourself so worked up about it.

Pam: Yeah, totally. Yes. Right. And I like what you said too. You're not going to let them just throw everything and make a huge mess. You're going to set limits and you're going to have them take responsibility. For example, if they throw something and they make a mess, if they're old enough, they clean it up. Right? That's a logical consequence, as opposed to, "I can't believe you would do that," and making it bigger than it needs to be. Yeah.

Kirstin: Yes. Yes. So speaking of setting limits, one of the questions I get asked a lot from moms is what kinds of limits you should set with your kids. Now, I know you're not a nutritionist, but you are a mom. And I'm curious if you've had any experiences with food restrictions with your own kids.

Pam: I did make a lot of the food decisions and choices when my kids were younger. And one of the things that I did was we had dessert night once a week instead of every day, because I found that when we had dessert every night, they were rushing through their meal or they weren't wanting to eat their meal. They just wanted dessert. So I said, "You know what? We're going to do-- one night a week, we're going to have dessert night." And for a long time, they loved it. They couldn't wait for dessert night, and they would plan what they were going to eat, and it was kind of whatever they wanted for that one night. But looking back on it, then when they got a little bit older, it kind of backfired on me because I feel like they were so restricted about desserts that then they just kind of went crazy with when they got their own money and when they had a car and they could eat whatever they want. So I take full responsibility for that.

And now that they're-- one's an adult and the other one is soon to be an adult, they do eat whatever they want. And I think there comes a point-- at least this is just what I feel, is that there comes a point where they're going to have to learn what feels good in their own body and what doesn't feel good in their body. And I can educate them about nutrition, but I don't-- and I had to learn this the hard way. I don't like talking about food as good or bad. I myself have had to rethink a lot of things about food. And for a while, I didn't eat any sugar or flour for years, and then I reintroduced it, and at first it felt like, "Oh my gosh, I'm being bad by eating bread." And I've had to relearn a lot of that stuff for myself. So I think just focusing on letting them learn what feels good in their body and maybe even talking about it with them. "Oh, I've noticed that after you ate that candy bar, you got really sleepy. Did you notice that?" Or if you don't want to bring it up with them, you can say about yourself. Like, "Oh, I notice after I eat peppers and onions, like, "Oh, I have such a bad stomach ache. I don't like how that feels. I'm not going to eat that again." You know what I mean? So talking to them about your experience, having conversations about it, I think that's really smart.

Kirstin: That is one of the pieces of advice that I give often is to talk about yourself and share your experiences. Because we know that the kids are paying attention to us, and they're learning from us. And they see what we do. I've had so many people that say, "My kids are starting to notice. I can tell that my kids are noticing that I'm sneaking food or that I keep going back for more," or whatever it is. And one of the pieces of advice that I share often is to do exactly like you said, "Oh, I notice that when I eat this way, this is how I feel," or, "This is what happens." Or, "Oh, I'm going to stop eating now because my tummy's full." And sharing it like that, instead of telling them, "You shouldn't eat that. And here's why. You have to eat this food. And here's why." Because that's going to start putting the pressure. That's going to start, like you said about the dessert, making them feel restricted. And you also said at some point they have to learn what feels good in their body and doesn't. We can start that sooner than later.

Pam: Right, right. Absolutely. Yeah.

Kirstin: So many of us are learning that way too late.

Pam: Yeah. And the somatic stuff that I do is also about tuning into your body and knowing what different feelings feel like. So it's all kind of related.

Kirstin: Yeah, yeah. I mean, we're trying to create a good mindset around food in general. Like you said, not talking about foods as good or bad. I mean, I talk about that all the time because it really messes with us. And so many people that I work with who binge eat, their restrictive eating started at a very young age. And I think it's so important that we allow more autonomy as early as possible. I feel like we're all born with such intuitiveness. And we lose it along the way. And a lot of parents take it away from us.

Pam: Yes, it's so true. My daughter, my younger daughter, is so good about stopping when she's full. And I almost couldn't believe it [laughter] because it would be like she'd have like one bite of a cookie and then be like, "I'm good." I couldn't believe it. And then on the other side, I remember my mother actually saying to one of my kids at one point, like, "Are you going to eat all of that?" Or something like, "Oh my gosh, you ate how many servings?" And they shut down. They completely shut down when someone says anything like that to them. So it's really important that we are mindful about what we're saying. It's just there's so much that we don't even-- we don't even think about it because of the way we were brought up.

Kirstin: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I love what you said [laughter] about her just having one bite of cookie. And you couldn't believe it. And I think that that's a huge part of it is that we see how we eat, and we have this idea of what's going to happen. But if we actually allow the kids to be more intuitive and less restricted by our rules and what we think they should do, you might be surprised. People think, "If I allow my kid to have a cookie every day, or if I allow my kid to have a cookie for lunch then they're going to want cookies for lunch every single day. And it's like, maybe they won't.

Pam: Right. Right.

Maybe not. I had an interesting experience the other day, too, now that I'm thinking about it. So again, my 16-year-old, she's a junior in high school, and she hasn't had exams this past week. And so she got herself some-- what are they called? Energy drinks. And she stayed up late, and she had a couple energy drinks. And the next morning, she goes, "Mom, I feel like I'm going to be sick." And I was like, "Yeah, I bet." And she was like, "I don't know what-- can I go to school?" And I'm like, "Well, you got

to take your exam." So she went to school feeling really, really sick. But she got over it. She didn't vomit or anything like that. But I thought, what a great lesson for her to have had at 16. Yes. And don't we learn lessons so much better when we experience them ourselves?

100%. Yeah, yeah. I am always saying that to my clients, too. Like, what helped you learn the lesson that being on time was important? Was it your parents lecturing you about it, or was it when you missed that plane because you were late? It's those experiences for sure.

Kirstin: Yeah, yeah. So do you think that it's better to allow the kids to make maybe some more decisions than some parents are allowing them to make?

Pam: Yeah, I think absolutely, as kids get older, and it's one of the hardest things that you'll ever do as a parent, is to let go of control. But as they get older, you slowly, slowly have to be doing that all the time so that by the time they're an adult, you feel so confident in their ability to go off and do their own thing instead of, oh, my gosh, like trying to hold on tight to them because you're afraid that they're not going to make it on their own. All these little decisions that you're making for them or all of these things that you are currently controlling, you got to think about, "How can I let go just little by little so that they can feel more confident?" I remember not even wanting my daughter to go out to the mailbox to check the mail on her own, right? And I was like, "No, she's going to go to the mailbox and come back." And that was the very first step. And then when she learned to ride a bike, it's like, "Okay, okay, she's going to go around." We live on a circle. She's going to go around the circle one time, and then she'll be back. But holding my breath until she came around the bend, and she was back at our house. So yeah, it's not easy, but we got to learn how to do it. Yeah.

Kirstin: Yes, yes. And I think about that with eating. I talked with a client not long ago when Halloween was happening, because she was concerned that she was being too restrictive with the candy. And then she found one of her kids hiding the candy and finding wrappers. And so we talked about the idea of just allowing them to eat as much as they want and seeing what happens. And something that I talk about with restriction with people that binge eat is that maybe at first, you eat too much of it. But like you were saying about the energy drink, maybe they learn pretty quickly that that's not what they want to do. That doesn't feel good. And they start to learn what feels good in their body, how much feels good in their body. They start making more decisions. And it may surprise you when all of a sudden they're like, "I don't want candy today." Yeah. But it's allowing them to go through that process and guiding them, of course. Like, if you see an issue happening, then of course, we have to address it. But yeah, allowing them to do a little bit more maybe you've been allowing them to do can be a good thing.

Pam: I agree. Yeah.

Kirstin: So is there anything else that we haven't talked about yet that you're dying to tell people about being a mom, about moms and eating and moms and their kids eating, or just moms and making time for themselves, moms and emotions, anything? I know we did cover a lot, so.

Pam: One more thing that I want to just leave your listeners with, whether they're a mom or not, is just about having self-compassion. I think that is something that every mom that I work with and myself included that we struggle with giving ourselves grace, having self-compassion, speaking to ourselves in a way that we would speak to our best friend or our sister or our partner, someone that we love dearly. We need to learn how to consistently talk to ourselves in the same way because we think that we're going to learn our lesson by punishing ourselves or beating ourselves up, and it's the exact opposite. So that's what I want to say is just maybe every day you tell yourself something kind. You speak to yourself the way that you would speak to your best friend. When you make a mistake, when you do

something that you wish maybe you hadn't done, that you just say, "You know what? I forgive myself. It doesn't make me a bad person. And next time I'll make a different choice."

Kirstin: And it does not make you a bad mom.

Pam: Right. Right.

Kirstin: You do not have to be perfect to be a good mom.

Pam: Right. I'm living proof. Yeah. No, nobody is. Nobody's perfect. And your kids don't even want you to be perfect, because then they feel like they have to live up to a certain standard. And they want to know that you're human. You're so much more relatable when you are imperfect.

Kirstin: And they want to know that it's okay to make mistakes. I mean, because if they see mom making mistakes and having compassion for herself and forgiving herself, then they may not put so much pressure on themselves or be so hard on themselves.

Pam: 100%. And when you can show your kids that you're not perfect, when you can be vulnerable, that is what connects you with them. Right? It's what connects all of us is-- I can put out a post on Instagram of how well behaved my kids are and blah, blah, blah, and how great they are, which I do. But when I put something out there of like, I did this and I messed up big time, and here's what happened, that's when people are like, "Oh, my gosh, thank you for posting that. I can relate. This is so helpful because everybody is feeling the same." So your kids included.

Kirstin: Yes. Yes. So allow yourself to make mistakes. Forgive yourself. Have compassion. You're a human. You're a mom and a human at the same time.

Pam: Yes.

Kirstin: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for being here and for talking with me and sharing all of your wonderful wisdom with my audience. So if people want to find you, where are the best places to find you?

Pam: So Instagram is number one. I'm @lessdramamama and Facebook. And my podcast is called Less Drama More Mama. And yeah, those are the places.

Kirstin: Awesome. Awesome. Well, thank you again. And you are just so wonderful. Thank you for being here.

Pam: Thank you. It was so fun talking to you. I love your energy. And I feel like we'd be really good friends. So maybe we should talk more.

Kirstin: Okay, yeah, we're friends officially. It's happened. This interview has made us friends.

Pam: Yay.

Thank you Pam! I thought this conversation shared some really great insights for what you can do, both mentally and physically to make more time to work on yourself. So often I think we block ourselves by just saying we don't have time rather than, like she was saying, exploring how you can make time and how you can make it work. So let's work more on being solution focused and exploring what options you might have.

Also, after our conversation I remembered another idea that I don't think we talked about that I wanted to share – trading time with other parents. Maybe you could have another parent watch your kid or kids while you do something for yourself and another time you could watch the kids. It could be a really great, and free way, to get some extra help while also making it fun for your kids too because they get to play with their friends.

Or you could trade pick ups and drop off with other parents who live nearby that have kids that go to the same school or do the same activities.

You can consider how you and other parents could help each other out to give each other more time.

Just wanted to put that idea out there.

I also wanted to share some other thoughts of my own that I didn't think to share during our conversation, like I mentioned at the start of this episode. I thought about doing another episode to share these but decided it would be good to just include them here while we're already talking about doing this work as a mom.

So, I totally understand the concern about passing on bad habits to your kids. You've seen what your eating has been like and how it's affected you and the last thing you want is for your kids to go through what you went through with food, eating, and weight. I've had so many parents share this concern with me and ask me what they can do.

And I wanted to share with you what I tell them.

The best thing I can think of for you to do is to do your own work on this.

It is so much easier to teach your kids how to have a healthy relationship with food when *you* have a healthy relationship with food.

When you don't have one, you might be questioning what's right and wrong, what you should and shouldn't do because you don't know from experience what's the best way. You might not know what to tell them if they ask questions because you're unsure yourself. You might be fearful that you'll tell them the wrong thing.

But think about this. What *do* you feel confident about? And I'm not even talking about with food, I mean in general. I bet you feel confident teaching them about whatever it is because you have experience with it.

So do this work for yourself, gain experience with having a healthy relationship with food.

Then, you can just model your behavior.

As Pam and I did talk about in our conversation, you can talk about what you're doing, and how you feel, and why you make your eating decisions.

You can talk about you, rather than only trying to tell them what to do with food because, we all know what it's like to be told how to eat.

I'm not saying you should never set limits or never have guidelines or never educate, of course you should, but you can help them develop a healthy relationship with food by not being overly strict or restrictive with them.

I've heard countless stories from people I've worked with who grew up in strict-eating households or who were put on restrictive diets at a young age and it's no surprise that their binge eating, and their secret-eating, and their food noise, started not long after.

Had they not, they may have continued to be the intuitive eaters they were born to be.

What I want for all of your kids is for them to find the balance, that I've talked about so many times through the episodes of this podcast. The balance of mostly eating for both body and mind, and sometimes just for the mind and sometimes just for the body.

So allowing them to eat foods they want to eat rather than being too restrictive and telling them those foods are bad, teaching them what you know about nutrition, teaching them what healthy balance looks like, and talking about how their body feels when they eat certain foods and amounts.

Now, there's another component to this too. Because, as you know, or as I hope you know, binge eating isn't just about restriction for some people.

It can also be about emotions as well.

If you relax on the restrictions and you see your kids eating too much, rather than putting more restrictions on them, it could be much more helpful to talk to them about their emotions.

Because it's likely that's what they're doing – they're emotionally eating.

That's why I put on weight in high school and freshman year of college.

My home growing up was not restrictive at all. My parents never restricted me from snacking after school or eating dessert after dinner or from eating any particular foods. I ate all the foods I wanted to eat.

And as a side note, one of the most popular lunches at my high school was pizza and french fries. So healthy, right? Of course I ate that plenty of times but I also remember making ham and cheese sandwiches and bringing my own lunch sometimes...because I wanted to.

I don't remember all the details about why I did that but I really don't think it was to eat healthier or to restrict pizza and french fries or to manage my weight.

I just sometimes wanted the sandwich, and whatever else I brought, and sometimes I wanted pizza and fries.

Also, sometimes I would buy the delicious cookies in the cafeteria and sometimes I wouldn't. Sometimes I wanted them and sometimes I didn't.

Because I didn't have a restricted mind, I didn't have diet mentality. That didn't happen until after I went on my first diet my sophomore year in college.

So I never thought I was doing anything wrong by eating when and what I was eating – which was a good thing.

But, I did eat emotionally, and that's why I ended up putting on weight.

I ate when I wasn't hungry way more than I should have. I also ate more according to what I wanted to eat rather than what my body would prefer...ya know, like pizza and fries for lunch. So more for my mind than for my body.

So for me growing up, restriction wasn't the problem, emotional eating was.

So I didn't need to work on food allowance, I already had that. I needed to learn how to manage my emotions.

Which, like most of us, I was definitely not taught how to do.

I definitely ate out of boredom, for entertainment, and to feel good. So that's what I would have benefitted from – my parents teaching me about emotional management. But, also like most of us, they didn't know how to teach me that or that it was even a problem for me.

We hear about emotional eating but we don't really hear about what to do about it. The solution is usually more restriction, which doesn't address the problem and of course leads to more eating and more problems.

So my advice to you, if you notice that your kid or kids are eating a lot, is to not restrict them more but to talk to them about their emotions more.

And if you're at a loss for what you even talk about or what to say or how to help them, then this goes back to what I was talking about before – you learn to do it for yourself first. Then, you can model emotional management to them.

I have many podcast episodes about emotions and if you work with me in The Stop Binge Eating Program we work on emotions a lot in there too and I can work with you directly to help you get better at emotionally eating less and handling your emotions better.

And, if you join Pam's program for moms I know she works with her clients on this too.

So no matter how you decide to learn how to do it, learning emotional management skills for yourself will make it so much easier for you to teach them to your kids.

And there's just a few more quick things I want to mention.

The first thing is, I know many parents get very concerned about their kids being picky eaters. I was for sure a picky eater, and so was one of my brothers, I don't really remember how my other brother ate.

But my parents did a good job of finding what vegetables and nutritious foods we did like, and served us those. And I don't remember them forcing us to eat foods. They would even make us our own special salads when we'd have cookouts at our grandparents house, for him it was just cucumbers, for me it was cucumbers and green bell peppers, while everyone else ate the full salad.

Then as I got older, I expanded my palate. I tried new things and now I eat so much more variety than I used to.

My brother though, not so much.

But, he's healthy. He's okay. And so am I.

I share this as an example because I see so many parents worry about what will happen if their kids are picky eaters and it's *possible* that they will be fine.

The next quick thing is about compromising and this is something I recommend you do for yourself too.

Rather than just flat out saying no when your kid, for example, wants a cookie for lunch or candy at breakfast, you could try to fit it in. So maybe compromise by having the cookie, or half a cookie, whatever amount likely won't fill them up, and also having some broccoli and chicken or whatever. It's making room for everything.

That's just one idea you could play with to not be too restrictive while still teaching nutrition and healthy eating habits.

And as I said before, you're allowed to set limits, just like you're allowed to set limits for yourself, and I encourage limits, but when making them, considering if it's *really* a big deal if they eat a cookie with lunch today. And not making the cookie as a reward for finishing the other food but genuinely making it part of the meal.

Just remember that half a cookie, or one cookie, doesn't have to mean that you're opening the door to eating only junk food for meals. You have no idea what decision they will make tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. They might not care about cookies tomorrow....because if they're allowed to have them, they might not push for them.

You have to remember that the obsession that you might have experienced likely came *from* excessive restriction. We think so much differently about food, about anything, when it's not restricted vs when it is. So let's not jump to conclusions about what they are going to want every single day forever.

And if it does get out of hand, you can make gentle limits.

And again, this is not just for them, it's for you too. And when you learn how to allow and make healthy limits for yourself, it will be so much easier to help them do it too.

Another thing I want to talk quick about is body talk. Do your best to keep body talk neutral.

When we do restrict ourselves, like *I* eventually started doing in college, which is what I think started my binge eating, it almost always comes from a desire to control our weight.

And you can help your kids to not go in that direction by being body neutral rather than making comments not only about their bodies but other people's bodies too.

It's not always direct comments that get people thinking about their own body size. It can also be comments that they hear you make about other people's bodies. They start to think things like, "I don't want them to think that about me so I have to be very careful about what I eat." Or, "I look like that person and they're saying this about them, so that must mean I should stop eating whatever foods and eat way less to lose weight."

And *again*, this is not just for them, but for you too, as with all the other things.

You can practice more neutral body-talk with yourself as well, which will help *you* to not be overly restrictive and help you to feel better about yourself.

And finally, the last thing I want to say. I talk sometimes about creating a more fulfilling life with more fun and pleasure so you're not using food for that as much.

I get that when you have kids so much of your life revolves around them so doing fun and pleasurable things for yourself can be challenging.

But I want to suggest a couple things.

One, is that you can try to delegate kid time, whether it be with your partner or other parents like I mentioned before. You could try to make more time for yourself, and remember, guilt-free, by letting other people help you.

The other is that when you are with your kids, you can still create more fun and pleasure.

I was talking with a mom client of mine not long ago about appreciating her kid-time. So much of the time that she was with her kids, she was thinking about her to do list, or work, or wishing she was doing something else, or just thinking about what she's not doing that she wants to be doing.

And that took away from the pleasure, fulfillment, and fun she could be having with her kids in that that moment.

Having more fun doesn't always have to mean you're doing what you enjoy and your favorite hobbies or activities or adult stuff. It can also mean just appreciating the time you're spending with your kids, doing whatever it is you're doing, and being present.

That can be so fun.

And, you can also explore ideas for kid-friendly activities that you do genuinely enjoy.

I think of my brother and the things they do as a family. He has an almost 7 year old and they go to a trampoline park, which he enjoys too, and they go kayaking and hiking and swimming and to water and

amusement parks and skiing and play video games, so many things, and they've been doing this stuff with their kid for years now. As soon as he was 3 or 4, as soon as he was old enough to do the things, they were doing them.

Now, I do believe that he has been very lucky that his kid enjoys the things he enjoys and I know that not every parent experiences that.

But, I bet you could find something. I bet there is something that you both would equally enjoy. Even if it's just coloring, or drawing, or crafting, or walking, or reading.

So I encourage you to find the ways you can make the fun and be intentional about how you're thinking during the more mundane moments.

You can still get a lot of joy in the mundane if you're thinking appreciatively, gratefully, and joyously.

And of course, that's going to be even easier to do if you're finding ways to make time to take care of yourself and to incorporate the things you enjoy.

So that's it, that's all I have to say for now.

So I hope the conversation with Pam gave you some useful insights as well as my thoughts after our conversation.

You can do this work as a mom, you can help your kids to have a better relationship with food than you did, and you can help yourself to have a better one now too.

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