

## Chapter 2

### Developing a Self-Nurturing Plan of Eating and Activity

Solutions exist, but they are different for everyone. We are individuals. Why should someone else's approach work for us? It's time to find our own approach—and while we are at it, we might also find a new part of our Self. We may find a self who knows how to make decisions, create personal boundaries and set personal limits in all aspects of our lives. We will discover that as we change our relationship with food and our bodies we will also begin to change the relationship we have with our self, others, and with life. As we set personal boundaries with food, we may notice that we are setting personal boundaries with people. As we stop restricting ourselves from the foods we love, we may find that we also stop restricting ourselves from new pleasurable, adventurous activities and people. We cannot possibly separate the way we eat from our self as a whole. It is insane to think that we can. We have been duped. The diet industry has set us up to fail and convinced us that it is our fault if their simplistic solutions do not work.

If we want to discover a solution that works we need to take a good look at those who don't struggle with food or body preoccupation. What goes on in the mind of someone who does not consider food to be a problem, likes their body fairly well, enjoys moving their body and enjoys eating when they are hungry and stopping when they are satisfied?

Early in my own recovery, I recall eating dinner one night at a local restaurant with my then twenty-year-old daughter. We were both very hungry and as usual, while deciding what to order, we began discussing food issues. I wanted to understand the mindset of a young woman at peace with her body and food. I asked my daughter when she last ate a meal. "I had a late breakfast," she said, "and I wanted to wait to eat because I knew I was coming here tonight and wanted to be really hungry." She continued, "I don't like to eat between meals because food tastes really good when you're hungry, and when I start eating I don't like to stop until I am full." Wow, what a concept! I felt pleased that I had given my daughter the tools to think with such self-awareness and personal esteem concerning her beliefs about food and eating but realized too that she had developed an individualized way of thinking that was unfamiliar to me. I noticed the way she ordered her meal. She knew exactly what she wanted. She asked me if I wanted to split a blueberry cobbler *ala mode* for dessert before we ordered our meal, as she loved homemade cobbler and this was a specialty item at the restaurant. She ordered a large chicken salad, with home fries. She ate about half of the salad and a few of the home fries and then split the cobbler with me for dessert. She knew instinctively exactly when she was full. She dropped her spoon in the partially full cobbler dish, leaned comfortably back in her seat and took a deep breath. "I've had enough," she said, as a smile crossed her lips and she relaxed comfortably into her size six, strong athletic body. "Gee", I thought, "All of those positive affirmations I used to do before bedtime about loving my body and being my ideal size must have somehow slipped into her unconscious mind a

lot more than they slipped into mine.” I finished off the cobbler and nibbled on the remainder of her home fries before they brought the check to the table. I was already aware that my thinking had a great deal to do with my eating and body issues and noticed the mind talk in my head as I continued to eat beyond a comfortable level of fullness. “You ate too much” my mind criticized, “Your daughter doesn’t have any problem stopping; How come you do?” “Those home fries are probably loaded with fat. I wonder how many calories I just ate. I should probably just eat fruits and vegetables tomorrow, or maybe I could try those diet shakes again. I feel so fat.” I continued to nibble on the remainder of the food until only a few potatoes remained on my daughter’s plate. I thought I might as well finish them, since I already blew it, and tomorrow I will just eat less. On the way out of the restaurant I told my daughter I wanted to get some good bran muffins from the bakery for breakfast so I would have something healthy in the morning. Based on my mind’s continued chatter it was fairly clear why I ate one of the muffins in the car on the way home. My daughter, on the other hand, wouldn’t have dreamed of eating more. Food seemed almost repulsive to her at this point.

A normal eater’s mindset and self-awareness of your thinking patterns are two key ingredients you need in order to make healthful, pleasurable food choices and consume healthy portions. Your mind has many parts. Healing involves awareness of the different parts of your own thinking process. You need to learn how to hear your thoughts, identify and change them in order to make the food choices that your healthy “food-body identity” really desires to make. You can change the thinking patterns that have shaped your unhealthy “food-body identity” in the past.

Usually, you have two voices in your head competing against each other. One voice I call the unhealthy eating disorder voice and the other voice I call the healthy food-body image voice. You need to learn to hear and recognize your voices. They may be fairly unconscious at the present time, but as you learn to identify them you will become more aware of them. At first, when exploring the mind-talk in your head, you may hear only one voice. This is the voice of the unhealthy eating disorder voice. Once you hear your unhealthy mind-talk, it may actually sound louder in your head. But this is what you want it to do. You want to turn up the volume so you can hear it and change it forever. Only then can you learn to eat as a normal eater and come to enjoy your physical self. Because you have been so accustomed to this voice running your life and relationship with food your body and exercise you may not even think it is there in the beginning of your recovery. It is there however, and it eventually becomes loud and clear. Keep in mind: the more entrenched your negative mind-set and the greater your problem with food, weight and body image, the harder it will be for you to recognize your unhealthy eating disorder voice. Your inability to hear this voice occurs partly because you cannot imagine that you would treat yourself so horribly in your own head and if you really admitted you were treating yourself this badly, would need to change. If you allow yourself to change permanently it means you choose to let go of an unhealthy pattern of life that has been in your life for very good reasons, for a very long time. This can feel overwhelming and at times even terrifying. This is why many of you may find that you cannot go through your

recovery process entirely on your own. So as you recover remember, you don't have to do it all by yourself and it is ok to need. It is important that you allow yourself to lean on other people who understand the nature of your problem as you go through your own healing. When you allow yourself to lean on people you trust and understand you will be less likely to lean on food and self-destructive thinking and behavior patterns

## **Transactional Analysis Mind-Talk Analysis**

It is helpful to understand the “voices in your head” by examining what your inner voice may say to you from moment to moment throughout your day. I have found that examining and understanding the different parts of my thinking mind can be easier to grasp by having a basic understanding of the Transactional Analysis model created by Eric Berne through his well known book, *Games People Play*. This model examines personal transactions (communication patterns) between people. It can also be used to examine the different communication patterns that control your thinking within your own mind. Know that when you start to hear your unhealthy mind talk you are not going crazy. You are actually becoming saner. You act insanely with food when your unconscious communication pattern within your own head is outside of your awareness. This is why it sometimes feels as if binge eating or an unhealthy eating or activity pattern just happens. They do not just happen. The self-destructive behaviors occur because you unconsciously set yourself up on a psychological level within your own mind. You want to make your thinking conscious. It is only then that you can change it.

## **Healing Lesson #2**

When you read the following examples of different thinking states (also called ego states), try to understand how each of these different parts of your own mind speaks to you. Do a written self-analysis concerning these thoughts. Write out examples as you imagine yourself in different situations involving eating and activity. The more you write personal examples the more conscious your unconscious thinking will become. Write as you did with the previous lesson, doing stream of consciousness writing. Put yourself in the role of the Nurturing Parent. If you do not hear a Nurturing Parent voice in your head, then you may need to create one. It is possible that you have become so enmeshed in talking to yourself from your Critical Parent or become so stuck in your rebellious or adapted Child ego states that you have never created a self-nurturing voice. Now is the time to do so. We cannot heal without a strong Nurturing Parent voice as well as a strong Adult voice. When you approach the adapted and/or rebellious Child part of yourself as well as the Critical Parent part it is important to write from the very core of yourself. This is when you discover voices in your mind that sound depressed, lonely, and filled with shame. Write these thoughts down without censoring them. Write as Natalie Goldberg *Writing Down the Bones* would say “directly from the bare bones” of your inner self.

Examples of Ego State voices from the Parent child and adult states of consciousness

### **The Parent Ego State:**

The parent ego state is composed of two parts: The nurturing and the critical parent.

#### **Nurturing Parent:**

- “It might be helpful to eat ice-cream with a nutritionally balanced meal; because, I have noticed when I eat it on an empty stomach it makes me irritable and depressed.”
- “You have diabetes; maybe sugar free ice-cream would be a better choice for you.”
- “You seem to be less anxious about food when you eat three meals a day and one snack; you might feel happier if you wait until your dinner to have the mashed potatoes.”
- “Maybe you could call someone from your support group instead of eating right now.”
- “You ate the cookies when you were not hungry. I know that’s disappointing to you because your self-nurturing food plan does not include emotional-non-hunger eating. Maybe it would help to spend some time journaling about what’s really going on.”
- “I know, it’s been six months since you binged and you binged again and you thought you would never do it again. Maybe it would help to sit down and figure out what led up to the binge both emotionally and physiologically.”
- “Maybe you could call your therapist (or sponsor/support partner); maybe she can help you with this.”
- “Have you noticed that when you move your body around more you feel more energy and seem to be happier?”
- “When you did physical activity for five days last week you seemed to think less about your body. This would probably be a nice thing to do for yourself every week.”

#### **Critical Parent:**

- “What a pig! You ate the entire pint of ice cream. You look so gross and you will never overcome this problem. You are just too screwed up.”
- “You can’t ever eat cookies without eating the entire box. You can’t ever have another cookie. Your friend can have cookies, but you can’t because you’re too fat, and on top of that, sick and crazy.”
- “You’re too fat to go out tonight. You should be embarrassed to even be in public.”
- “All you do is sit in front of the TV and eat. You are lazy. No wonder you’re so fat. When is the last time you even walked around the block?”

#### **Adult:**

- “I feel better when I don’t eat sugar as my main food group. I notice I am less preoccupied with eating when I don’t eat between meals. I feel happier with my life and healthier and more energetic when I don’t over-eat and when I exercise regularly.”
- “I notice I have fewer digestive problems when I don’t eat between breakfast and lunch.”
- “I feel happier and healthier when I just eat dessert on special occasions instead of every day. Chocolate gives me diarrhea; I think I will eliminate it from my diet for a while. I wonder what would be a good substitute for chocolate that would satisfy me just as much and not make me sick.”
- “I feel more comfortable and confident in my body when I am physically active.”

### **Rebellious Child:**

- “I want ice-cream right now! I don’t care what you say. I’m mad and I need it right now.”
- Who are you to tell me how I should eat! I’ll eat what ever I want whenever I want it.”
- “Screw the so-called consequences. He said I needed to lose weight. He’s an egocentric male factious pig. I’ll show him. I’ll just pig out on everything and gain more weight. That will shut him up.”
- “It’s either you give me the chocolate cake or you get a black eye buddy!”
- “I hate exercise and I am not going to do it and you can’t make me do it. I work hard enough already and it’s boring”.

Another part of the rebellious child may be the Adapted Child.

The Adapted Child is the part of you that goes beyond rebellion. It is a part of you that can become very depressed and at times, not even want to live. It’s as if we get stuck in our rebellion, recognize our hopelessness, and become emotionally and/or physically immobilized. A voice from our wounded Adapted Child may say, “You’re completely worthless. Why don’t you just die, no one wants you anyway.” The adapted child may at times feel too depressed to move. This may be when it is necessary to have a good cry before we exercise or while we are exercising if we need to. Sometimes expressing our feelings can help us break through the emotional barriers that cause us to resist physical movement.

### **Free Child** (here and now, spontaneous):

- “This pork chop sure tastes good.”
- “The home made fudge tasted so good. I can still taste it.”
- “I’m hungry. I want some chicken, salad and cookies.”
- I’m satisfied. I think I’ll go for a walk in the woods now. It’s a great day to be outside. There are so many fun things to do in life. What would be fun right now?”
- “I’m not hungry. I think I’ll dance instead of eat that would be fun.”
- I’m lonely, I think I will call Julie.”

For the next several weeks, we will become more familiar with the different thoughts in our head as they are now, and as we wish them to be. We will work to change the thoughts and to understand them. From the understanding we learn regarding the way we think, as well as what we would like to achieve--free of external influences--we will each begin to formulate an individual self-nurturing plan of eating and physical activity.