

SESSION 10 REASONS WE EAT

When we are babies, our emotional responses are somewhat limited. If we become unhappy for any reason we express this unhappiness by crying. Our bewildered parent checks us to make sure that our diaper doesn't need changing, and that a safety pin is not sticking us, or that some other physical unpleasantness is not causing our wailing. Finding no obvious cause, what almost always comes next (?) we are offered food!

Perhaps we were unhappy because we were bored. We woke up in our crib and, little egocentric beings that we are, we are displeased that no one was there to tend to us. Mom picked us up and stuck something in our mouth. We learned to pair the association between food and mother's love, both of which were pretty darn good.

Later on, when we came home from school, disappointed because of something that had happened academically or socially someone was there to offer us soothing words of comfort and divert our attention....by.....you guessed it....giving us some cookies and cold milk. Maybe we had a parent who believed everyone had to be a member of the clean plate club and we were punished, either physically or verbally, for not eating all of our supper...even if we were already full. This really put us in a catch 22. On one hand, food was being associated with pleasure, while on the other hand overeating was associated with avoiding pain. We were actually being rewarded for over eating! In addition, sometimes we were being taught, even unintentionally, that we were not the best judge of our hunger. We were full, yet some times our parents told us, we weren't finished until the plate was empty. So we learned not to trust our bodies. After all here were our loving parents, the very people we trusted to care and love us, telling us we weren't finished yet. So we ate! And we learned to over eat. And later that habit worked against us very badly.

That's not the end of it either. No indeed! Holiday celebrations were always centered around food...weren't they!? Of course! Thanksgiving dinner, the Fourth of July picnic, or the chocolate bunny and eggs at Easter. As we grew into our teenage and adult years we gathered with our friends at the drive-in restaurant, or we took our dates to the fanciest restaurants we could afford. We had food associated with wedding and baby showers, and would stop by the local pizzeria after the basketball game. When we got married, we had a rehearsal dinner, and reception featuring a ceremonial cake and other foods. When our parents or grandparents retired they were honored at a company dinner. Many people even bring food to funerals and wakes.

Food is an integral part of our existence and has taken on many symbolic roles for us. Add to this the many messages from our parents and peers about eating and it's obvious that our eating behavior is a very complicated and complex issue.

Exercise:

Think about why you feel the way you do about food, and what things you can do in your own life and daily habits to change those beliefs. Remember to use some of the tools you have learned in previous weeks to help change your habits, such as affirmation, changing the way they store food, making new list for the grocery store, etc.