

The Done Bingeing

PODCAST

EPISODE 84: THE GENTLE ART OF FEELING FEELINGS

What do Chandler and Sam, *Friends* and Mordor, have to do with you and binge eating? Keep listening!

Welcome to The Done Bingeing Podcast. I'm Martha Ayim, Internal Family Systems Level 3 Practitioner.

If you've tried everything to stop binge eating, but nothing's worked—or worked for long—maybe it's time for something different.

IFS is an evidence-based model recognized by SAMHSA and it's taking the world by storm. Why? Because it understands how overwhelming experiences like bingeing can really feel. IFS doesn't ask you to ignore, fight, or reason your way out of anything. Instead, it meets you exactly where you are—with genuine curiosity and compassion for every part of you involved. If you're looking for an approach and a host that totally get you, then listen in, my friend. This podcast is for you!

Well hello and welcome back!

If you've been following along since Episode 79, you know we're not just talking about binge eating—we're laying the groundwork that makes lasting change possible.

Over the past few episodes, we've been exploring ten surprising foundations that can begin to shift bingeing—and none of them have anything to do with food rules or workout plans.

We've covered understanding how your bingeing makes sense, why you're someone worth caring for, rest, hydration, joyful movement, addressing stress, and, last week, the untapped power of having fun.

Today, we're leaning into something tender: dipping into a feeling. Just a dip—not a dive.

And after this, we'll explore the last two foundations: being real and giving yourself time.

These foundations so important because they do something prescriptive regimens rarely can: they help settle the inner storm.

When I was in the thick of my bingeing, one professional after another ripped diet sheets and thought records off their pads before escorting me out of their offices.

What I sensed as I exited was that something had been checked off for them.

Perhaps it was that they'd followed their training or protocol, they'd done their duty.

If I got stuck, which I invariably did, I sensed that they felt stuck, too. It seemed hard for them to watch me struggle under the structure I'd been given.

I sometimes felt like Chandler on *Friends*, trying to heave Ross's new couch up the stairs, hearing Ross shout, "Pivot! Pivot! Pivot!"

Ross had a sketch of what should happen, but it didn't happen.

No matter what diet was given—a set of rules so restrictive I was hungry most of the time, or a set of rules so generous I wasn't hungry at all—every diet ignited an inner storm.

The restrictive diets panicked my bingeing part, who used food a way to soothe my anguish.

And generous diets scared the part of me that feared I'd never lose the hundred extra pounds the bingeing had piled on.

No matter how many thought records tried my thoughts for treason, when court was adjourned, the parts of me that didn't respond to reason felt more bereft than before, unmoored, drifting further away from shore.

What happened next depended on the professional.

Some snapped that I hadn't worked hard enough to apply their techniques.

Some asked if I actually cared about getting better at all.

Some didn't say much. It was their fear that was pronounced. Fear for me or them, I wasn't sure. Perhaps neither. Perhaps both.

I couldn't understand why almost everywhere I'd go looking for help and relief, I'd ultimately leave feeling more alone and conflicted.

What I did know was that every professional I turned to cared about me and wanted to help me. But they didn't know that their sketches started or stoked wars inside me, which served to progressively worsen my bingeing.

In recent episodes, we've been exploring how healing doesn't have to feel so conflicted or always revolve around what we eat. How we tend to ourselves in myriad ways matters more than we know, including how we tend to our emotions—and *that* is the topic of this episode.

If the idea feeling your feelings sounds scary, you're not alone. And I can assure you that I'm not among the countless coaches who'll tell you to grow the fudge up and feel them anyway.

I do honor that that tough love approach has worked beautifully for some people and was all they needed.

But what I hear from many of my clients who come to me afterward is that the agenda to just feel no-matter-what added a layer of shame when it couldn't be done.

What followed probably won't surprise you: The bingeing came to take the shame away.

And no wonder. Shame is one of the hardest emotions to endure.

Remember what renowned Canadian addiction and trauma expert, Dr Gabor Maté says: "The question is not why the addiction. The question is why the pain."

It is normal and human to seek comfort when we are in pain.

To be clear, I'm not advocating for running from feelings, because that wouldn't be helpful either.

It's that I don't believe that the inability to stay with emotions is a sign of immaturity, weakness, or lack of commitment.

It's a sign that something else is here that needs tending.

When you're afraid of something, has it ever *not* been helpful to have a courageous and compassionate fellow journeyer with you? Like Sam sticking with Frodo all the way to Mordor, having someone by your side when things get intense can make all the difference.

I'm inviting you to consider that you don't have to cannonball into the deep end of your emotions. You don't even have to swim laps. A gentle dip with a gentle guide can do.

I swam competitively one summer, as a teen, for a Southern Alberta swim team.

Breaststroke was my jam, and there was a rhythm to it: my head dipped under for a moment, I'd pull my body through the water, glide, then surface for air. Dip, pull, glide, breathe. Dip, pull, glide, breathe.

Some days I had it in me to stay under longer. Some days I didn't.

Being with emotions can feel the same way.

You don't have to stay underwater, submerged in an overwhelming feeling until you run out of air.

When I was racing, I wanted to pull hard and glide far. Chasing the win, I wanted to reach the pool edge as fast as I could, so I could tumble, turn, and push off as hard as I could. I wanted to do it again and again, and I needed to ignore the pain as I did.

But none of that striving is needed here. Nothing needs to be ignored.

You can dip, notice what's there, and come up for air. Even a few seconds can be enough for the parts of you that fear emotions to notice that you may be okay to be with some of it, even a few moments of it, at a time. And sometimes, a moment or two is enough.

Why? Because several things happen in that short span of time.

Let's say a part of you feels angry. And another part of you is afraid to *let* you feel angry. And the part of you that solves for inner distress by bingeing is waiting in the wings, watching closely.

If the part of you that fears the anger will agree let you dip into the anger—and it doesn't have to be the molten core of it—your part might learn that a) short stints with the heat is okay and that b) that the intensity can be negotiated.

When we can ask your scared part for enough space to let you be more present with the anger, you may notice you have the presence to say something like, "Please don't go away, Anger. I know you're here for a reason. I want to get to know you, but if you flood me with anger, it scares other parts of me and my bingeing part rushes in to douse your flames. I don't want to extinguish you, I want to know you. Will you please ease the intensity back even a little, so I can be with you?"

Parts that hold intense emotions that are regularly shunned—emotions such as rage and deep sadness—are often profoundly lonely. These parts will often agree to try dial back their energy a bit so that they don't completely fill your experience, and more of you can be with them.

When these parts feel your care, it soothes them to notice they don't have to work so hard to get your attention. There's something powerfully settling about being seen.

When I came up for air in the pool, I could hear the frenzied screams of my team on deck, "Pull, Martha, *puuuuuuuull!!!*" Their presence carried me through the burning until it was over.

Your emotions may not need a screaming team, they might just need a quiet ally by their side, one who whispers, "I see you. I'm right here." That ally can be you. Your presence can be with them, perhaps not to the end, but perhaps to a place that feels complete enough for now. Complete enough to know that someone was there, someone cared, someone came.

And if it turns out sometimes that you aren't able to reassure the part of you that fears the anger or other emotion to let you go that emotion, does it make sense to you that you would a part that fears the feeling?

If it does, let them know. Again, there is something powerfully settling about being seen. Your understanding can be very soothing for fearful parts.

If the fear of emotions doesn't make sense to you, that's okay, too. It might be helpful to consider a few things.

We can have parts of us that fear that an emotion will overwhelm us and decrease our capacity to get through the day.

I get that, and if you get it, too, you might want to let your parts know. You may even want to thank them for trying to protect you from an overwhelm that could risk that outcome.

See what it's like for your part to have you understand and appreciate it.

Often parts relax when they feel a caring connection with you.

When this happens, you might want to gently invite them to notice that when they won't let you feel emotions, although there is the temporary relief of not going there, the emotions don't actually go away for long. They come back, and sometimes bigger, like shadowy shapes in the dark.

As brilliant as your parts have been in trying to protect you from overwhelming emotion to ensure your ability to function in the world, they're left in an untenable position—they must always be vigilant for signs of pain, an endless job that doesn't ultimately help to *address* the pain.

There is a way to help the pain, and this is part of the vast beauty of the Internal Family Systems approach. If you're curious about how IFS can help, I offer free 30-minute consultations at holdingthespace.as.me/free30. That's holdingthespace.as.me/free30.

Often parts that push away pain carry a younger energy.

My part was a young teen who completely freaked out when the pain came. This part didn't have a clue how to deal with a cavern of loss and anguish that knew no bottom. How could my part have possibly known?

Now that I'm older, I can let my part know that some things have changed from that time, in ways that really matter. That I have learned things and have resources and resilience at my disposal that I didn't have back then.

Sometimes, an update like this is enough for parts to be open to trying a brief experiment where they let you be with a small amount of an emotion for a short amount of time. Your part can even stay close and watch if it wants, but it doesn't have to. It may want to take a break and go to an imaginary place where it feels safe.

If we get this permission to take just a moment to notice—to name the feeling, to trace where it is in our around our body, to track how we experience it, and to stay long enough, perhaps a minute or two, to see if anything shifts—it's like turning on a soft lamp in the corner of what's been a dark and frightening room.

Suddenly, the shapes are clearer and gentler.

Maybe it's tension in your chest, thickness in your throat, tightness in your jaw. Maybe it's sadness behind your eyes or nervousness in your belly. If you can gently bring your awareness to just one sensation in your body for even a brief moment, you've already begun something powerful.

Sometimes when I practice this, I notice something interesting.

At first, I may hear a part worrying, "This looks like bad news, Martha. Maybe we should go the other way," and it can be tempting to stop there.

But if I slow down, breathe, and gently follow my breath inward like a breezy bridge down into my heart, what I find underneath is very different. Maybe underneath there's a quiet sadness asking to be seen, or a tiredness that's longing for rest. Underneath the fretting is often a tender truth about something I need to hear.

One of my IFS consultants, the legendary Robert Falconer, says that the longest journey we ever take is the 18 inches from our head to our hearts.

This is courageous work, my friend. I see that and I see you.

If it feels right, you might want to try to perhaps follow an inhale down to your heart centre and ask for some stillness so you can notice what's there.

No judgment, no pressure to do anything. Just a gentle willingness to be with what's been waiting for you for some time.

You might be surprised to find that just noticing your emotion and gently being with it for a brief moment begins to calm the feeling and ease the fear about having it.

Emotions, even the big ones, become less frightening once we earn the trust of our other parts to let us be with them one breath at a time.

Remember, there's no need to stay submerged in them.

Just a gentle dip—enough to know it's safe, enough to offer care—goes a long way.

If that feels right to you, give it a try. Notice how your body responds. Notice what shifts, even a little. You might find that your emotions—and your parts that hold them—are more willing than you imagined to meet you halfway.

Sometimes our parts have been left alone with their emotions for so long that they can rush the gates when they sense that there is a presence willing to be with them.

Ask your parts that hold intense emotion ahead of time not to overwhelm you. Think of it as kindly asking a passionate musician to dial the amplifier down a notch—not to silence the music, but so that the melody can be heard clearly.

If you can let your parts know that you really understand their urgency, that can help them to feel understood and to soften. Let them know that if they crowd you out with the intensity of their emotions that they'll still feel alone even though you want to be with them. Let them know that they'll be able to feel you more if they can dial back the intensity by a few percentage points.

Notice again that this isn't about telling them they're too much or about asking them to do what would likely be impossible like cutting their intensity in half. It's about asking them to give you *enough* space for you to join them.

If they aren't able to agree not to overwhelm you, let them know that you understand how holding such emotion alone for so long is a very difficult thing. Let them know that for now, you see them and have a sense of what they carry. Sometimes even this much can help them feel more settled. And having an experienced IFS practitioner or therapist by your side can offer important support. Please don't take this journey alone, if it feels too much.

Because you're not alone, my friend. And neither are your parts.

That's it for Episode 84. Thank you for listening! Remember, if you want to learn more about how Internal Family Systems can help you heal binge eating, why not sign up for a free consultation with me? Just go to holdingthespace.as.me/free30. That's holdingthespace.as.me/free30!

Thanks for listening to The Done Bingeing Podcast.

Martha has the highest-level training in both the evidence-based Internal Family Systems approach and in life coaching, and she's available to help you stop bingeing. You can learn more about her programs by going to www.holdingthespace.co and clicking Programs.

Stay tuned for the next episode on freeing yourself from binge eating and creating the life you want.

References

Falconer, R. <https://robertfalconer.us>