

From Emotional Eating to Emotional Understanding

- **Avoid labeling yourself “an emotional eater.”** Labels become self-fulfilling prophecies. Instead, identify the behavior since unlike personality characteristics, behaviors can be explored and changed. Examples: emotional *eating*, eating when I feel stressed, using food for comfort, eating as a form of entertainment, etc. .
- **Get back to the basics.** To identify emotional triggers, ask “Am I hungry?” whenever you feel like eating. If there are no physical signs of hunger, it’s likely that the urge to eat was triggered by environmental or emotional cues.
- **Leave judgment at the door.** Guilt and shame feed the eat-repent-repeat cycle and close the door on learning.
- **Have compassion for yourself.** When you eat for emotional reasons, you are simply trying to take care of yourself. What could you do that might work better?
- **Respond instead of react.** Realize that a “trigger” is just that—a coping mechanism that you can choose to pull or not. Choose how you'll respond to your triggers instead of reacting automatically.
- **Read the need.** Your desire to eat when you aren't hungry is a doorway into your underlying feelings and needs.
- **Cravings can be clues.** The food you crave may give you insight into the underlying emotion or need, i.e. comfort food.
- **Avoid labeling emotions as *good* or *bad*, or *positive* or *negative*.** All emotions are information that you can use to better understand your interpretation of an experience and help you recognize your true needs.
- **This too shall pass.** Ride your emotional waves as if you were floating on a raft. All emotions come and go. It is futile to resist the ones that feel unpleasant; resistance only adds to your discomfort. Likewise, it is pointless to cling to the emotions that feel pleasant; just enjoy them while they last.
- **Create a self-care buffer zone.** Caring for your body, mind, heart, and spirit builds resilience to the stresses of life. When you practice regular self-care, you will be less likely to turn to food to manage your emotions.
- **Ask for help when needed.** Reach out to a counselor, coach, or pastor to help you understand and cope with emotional eating.