

# Sumner Brooks & Amee Severson

## How to Raise an Intuitive Eater

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, I don't shame my own body because I wouldn't shame someone else's body because that's not, what's important here

Okay. That was Amy Severson and Sumner Brooks on psychologists off the clock. We are three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work, and health.

**Debbie Sorensen:** I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high, Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of ACT Daily Journal.

**Yael Schonbrun:** I'm Dr. [00:01:00] Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the upcoming book Work, Parent, Thrive.

**Jill Stoddard:** And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of be mighty and the big book of act metaphors.

**Debbie Sorensen:** We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

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## Marker

**Jill Stoddard:** I'm here with Debbie to introduce today's episode with Amy Severson and Sumner Brooks.

And we are talking today about the topic of intuitive eating and how to raise intuitive eaters. And I just want to start this episode by acknowledging that this can tend to be a bit of a controversial, like sort of touchy subject and there can be a lot of different opinions, a lot of strong opinions. And I think I just want to share, like, what I [00:03:00] really took away from this that has been the most helpful for me is really recognizing, like, whether you go full on intuitive eating and follow all of the different steps or whether you borrow bits and pieces from it to try to help your kids have a healthier relationship with food in their body.

What I think really strikes me most is the more we try to exert control over our kids. Diets, the more that tend to backfire. And that, for me, like what I've really been trying to practice doing more of is just letting go a little bit and trusting them to make their own decisions, to trust their own bodies.

When their body says they're full or their body says they're hungry, irrespective of what time it is or whether we're going to have dinner in just an hour. , and I just want to acknowledge that. It is not easy. It is not easy. And Debbie, you and I were talking about how you had an experience related to this kind of like when you let your kids choose [00:04:00] their food, how that can be stressful.

**Debbie Sorensen:** Oh, yeah. I mean, it's just so hard and I think I can so relate to this just how hard it is in my own life. I think, you know, I have two daughters and they're approaching. Tweens and teens. And so I'm very concerned about just helping them have a healthy body image and a healthy relationship.

Food is really important to me, but I really struggle sometimes with how to handle it and how to respond. And I have so much. Fear around it, which I'm sure is deeply embedded in my own history. But just as an example, they went to a birthday party recently. And I, I stuck around at the party to kind of help out a little bit.

And I watched, as they sat there and they had multiple pieces of pizza, they had soda that they kept refilling and they had multiple sodas and they had multiple pieces of cake. Both of my kids did. And I. I didn't say anything I know better than to, you know, and all the kids were doing it. I was not going to say anything to them, but [00:05:00] internally I was just sitting there freaking out a little bit about the amount of sugar and all that.

So we don't normally keep soda in the house. And so I'm sitting there thinking like, oh, they're having so much sugar. And I noticed even the next day, I was really a little overkill with the vegetables. , I think I was almost trying to like undo it a little,

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. You're like secretly controlling their eating without them knowing it. Yeah.

**Debbie Sorensen:** And it's like, I mean, I mean, on the one hand, it's just like, I mean, I think I really resonated.

This idea of control and just how diet culture is so sneaky and pervasive. , I mean, I just think that I, over time, I'm more aware of this in my own life. Just the cultural attitude around diet culture, and fat shaming and how it's so subtle. And I think even sometimes it's really packaged as like, Healthy and wellness, and it seems so good for everyone to be, you know, eating the kale and taking really good care of your fitness and [00:06:00] your health.

I think as an adult woman, it's like, that's just all around us and it looks like a healthy message, but there really is such an underlying kind of toxic message around. You know, fat, shaming and stigma around certain kinds of bodies and you have to look a particular way. It's just very insidious. And I think over time, I've just become more and more aware of it.

, it's very eye-opening I think when you start to pay attention to it,

**Jill Stoddard:** Right. I mean, I think even a lot of the misinformation that's out there, there's an assumption that, you know, body size or BMI is directly and linearly related to all health outcomes. And it turns out. Not entirely true. And we talk quite a bit about that in the episode. , and you know, I, I asked Amy and Sumner some of the difficult questions, but there was so much to unpack.

We didn't get to half the questions that I wanted to ask. And I'm hoping we may be, can even invite them back. So if you know, for [00:07:00] listeners right now, as you're listening to the episode, if, if your questions are getting triggered, if you find yourself saying yeah, but yeah, but I would love to invite you to reach out to us.

You can email us. At off the clock, [psych@gmail.com](mailto:psych@gmail.com). And if we get enough questions, I'd love to invite Sumner and Amy back. So, you know, we can all kind of learn together how to try to fight diet culture, help our kids have healthy relationships with their body and food. So we hope you enjoy this episode. Hey everybody. It's Jill here and I am so excited about my guests today. I have some Gnar Brooks and Amy Severson here to talk about their book, how to raise an intuitive eater. And this is a topic that is near and dear to my heart. So I've been really looking forward to this interview.

Sumner Brooks is a mom and licensed registered dietitian nutritionist based in Oregon, who has spent over 13 years working in the field of nutrition and eating disorders. Her experience includes providing nutrition therapy for [00:08:00] adolescents and adults, public speaking, and pursuing advanced training and trauma informed weight, inclusive health care.

She is also the founder of the online training platform, eating disorder, registered dietitians and professionals. Amy Severson is a registered dietitian in the Washington state with a private practice outside of. Amy specializes in eating disorder, recovery healing, and preserving food body relationships and focuses on gender inclusive and LGBTQ plus affirming care, . She is a certified, intuitive eating counselor and a certified body trust provider. Welcome to you both. I am so happy to have you here on psychologist's off the clock.

**Amee Severson:** Thanks for having us. We're super excited to be here.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah, So I thought we could start with a tiny bit of self-disclosure because on the very first page of your book, you say you often ask clients how old they were the first time they realized their body wasn't accepted. it's often before age 10 and [00:09:00] this was like right on for me. So when I was young, growing up, my parents who were otherwise like very kind people would call me Tubby little Tibet, Tubby Tubby two by four, and put me on a diet when I was nine, they offered to pay me a dollar for every pound I lost.

And, you know, I'm sure my story sounds exactly like all of the people that, that you work with and I'm gen X. So of course there was the clean plate club. , you know, where you had to eat all the food on your plate, even if you weren't hungry anymore. , or because there were starving children in some other country.

, and you know, I was just sharing with Amy right before we got on that several years ago. I read the intuitive eating book by Evelyn Tripoli and Elise rash. , And I think probably the most helpful thing I got out of that was how to prevent making the same mistakes with my own kids. And I am not perfect.

And I have so many questions to ask, but I've been really grateful for that. And, you know, I'm just excited for our listeners who I [00:10:00] think will get so much out of hearing about how to do that from the two of you. So thank you for being here. Why don't we start with just like a brief definition of intuitive eating for listeners who maybe haven't heard this term before.

**Sumner Brooks:** Yeah, sure. So we are really aware that intuitive eating is becoming a little bit more of a popular term, kind of hitting pop culture more and more over the last few years. And so I think there is some understandable, miscommunication sometimes misunderstanding about what intuitive eating is, and there are different ways to describe it.

I'll start with what a simple way of looking at it is, , which is that it's the way we are naturally born to be as eaters. We are born with a really incredible and complex system in our bodies, which consists of hormones and [00:11:00] neurochemicals and nerves and our emotions and our thoughts, which all come together to help. Identify when we need to eat, seek out the food that we need to get satisfied. And we inherently know when we've had enough and we know that this is true because we witness it every day. When babies are born from the moment they are born, they are already capable of crying for food, crying for

milk when they're hungry and turning their head away when they've had enough.

And so intuitive eating is about either fostering that within us, as we age and mature and develop or helping someone heal and bring them back to this natural way of eating that doesn't rely on all the external noise of nutrition, facts, and sugars, and good, good food and bad food and labels and diets and all of that. [00:12:00]

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah, , thank you. And it's when I first read about this, it seemed so obvious, right? Like, like common sense. And yet, you know, we've spent our whole lives eating by a clock and being told that there are good foods and bad foods and, you know, , it's complex. , so what I wanted to talk about the first tenant of intuitive eating, , and I don't know if you would agree, but like maybe the most important is to reject diet culture.

So can you maybe talk a little bit about like, what is diet culture and why is it so problematic?

**Amea Severson:** , I would say I agree that that is probably one of the most important tenets for sure. , and I guess a brief description of diet culture that isn't the first third of a book like ours is. , it's, it's the thing that is briefly all around us. It's it's what we live in. It's everywhere. It's like Sumner was saying [00:13:00] that the sheds, the rules, the clock, , it's the rules that tell us, we need to choose food based on our body size or the goals we have for our body size or even the like goals we have for our health, or we have for, , expectations of what is right and wrong. Good and bad. Okay. And not okay. In those circumstances. It's the thing that takes us out of our body.

It takes us out of our own instincts that we have and makes those decisions for us. And it is everywhere. We are mired in it day after day.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah, well, and I think there are some obvious places in terms of , the media, for example. , , but I think part of where this becomes really challenging is it's even our own doctors, right?

Like, you know, I've had physicians, I've gone to the doctor for like a sore thumb. You know, strep throat to get medicine or an ear infection [00:14:00] and been lectured to about exercising. You know, I had somebody, one doctor say, I'm a physician and I'm a mom. If I can find time to exercise. So can you, and this like very shamey way I had another doctor say, , well you just, you just have to go vegan and stick with it for 30 days.

And I was like, oh, that's going to solve 30 years of a complex interplay of psychology and culture and society and genes and everything else. Thank you so much. It's like when somebody do you have anxiety and someone says, just relax. Oh, that's, that's really helpful. So, you know, it's, it's, we're not just fighting against the.

Ideal body messages out there in the media entertainment culture, but it's like our very own doctors. And I was really surprised by some of the research you guys cite that, you know, that like it's so fat phobic to think like, oh, Well, if your body is bigger, there's a linear relationship between the size of your body and the likelihood you're going to die early.

And that's [00:15:00] absolutely not true. So can you maybe like bust some of the myths around body size?

**Sumner Brooks:** one of the things I love that you're pointing out Jill is, you know, because we're swimming in this diet culture, it's hard for people, especially in the beginning to really see that, you know, diet culture. Isn't just this, oh, this one thing that when we hear about diets and we hear about food rules that like, we need to shut that down.

You know, that's not diet culture, diet culture is actually this confluence of really, really influential factors that bring us to this like socially constructed way of thinking about food and body. And those factors are, like you said, the medical industrial complex that, , you know, has been on really a track of, of getting us to diet culture and the thin ideal for hundreds of years.

, it's also [00:16:00] the wellness industry. It's the beauty and the fashion industry and the nutrition and the parenting, right? So it's this layer upon layer and everything kind of meets in the middle. And there's all these sort of like social agreements about the thin ideal and that thinner equals healthier and that thinner equals more beautiful or more attractive.

, and there's all of these messages that we get from diet culture. And one of the biggest things that we are learning very early and that we are continuing to perpetuate for kids is that body size is indicative of health or disease risk. And just like you said, because some of that messaging comes from our trusted medical community.

We have a very, very difficult time of, , [00:17:00] challenging those beliefs, but that is a really big part of breaking down diet culture and rejecting it to bring it back to intuitive eating.

**Amee Severson:** , I think what, another thing that, another layer in there that is really important to you in some way, Sumner kind of insinuated it a little bit is it's. I think there's also a piece of not only is like thinness the pursuit we're supposed to be. Pursuing, but it's also a choice and something that we should be choosing to engage in.

And I think that another aspect of diet culture that is sometimes harder for some people to see or sit with or be okay with is that health is also a personal responsibility and a choice. And that's like what the nutrition and the doctors and everybody like insinuates and, or very blatantly says that, you know, if you're doing these things wrong, quote unquote, then you are [00:18:00] choosing to not be healthy.

And there is a connection to size and, , shape in that space. And also it's just, there's also a straight, you are either choosing to be healthy or you are choosing to be unhealthy. And if you are unhealthy and it's your choice,

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. And it really ignores the complexity of the issue, right? That there are so many factors that go into both body size and health. And, you know, you, you talk about in the book, how , the research has sort of, led us to believe that, like, it's all about BMI.

And of course, newer research has shown that BMI is pretty much useless in many ways. And that that fitness is far more important than fatness. So to speak that like cardiovascular exercise is this right? Tell me if I'm getting this wrong is much more important than a person. Body size and you can be small and, and have health risks and you can be larger and be [00:19:00] perfectly healthy.

And that there's, you know, a lot of those factors that are being ignored when it comes to these kinds of diet culture messages.

**Sumner Brooks:** Yeah, I think when you're looking at, , you know, data around medical risk, morbidity and mortality, we definitely have very strong evidence to support the body size, , does not predict those outcomes. And not only that, but one of the graphs that we felt really important to put in the book was around how those who are actually in that middle range and higher, , BMI categories have better health outcomes than the.

Lower BMI range. And that's very surprising to a lot of people too, because it's just, it's very oversimplified, this connection between thinness and health. , and some of the, you know, most educated, smartest people [00:20:00] in the world

don't have that connection because, because of the way, health is socially constructed in our culture.

**Jill Stoddard:** You know, if you guys have that article, I would love to put that in the show notes because I bet there even people listening say, no, that can't be right. And even admittedly, when I read it, I thought, wait, what? I mean, this goes against everything I've ever learned. So it was that that BMI is not associated with mortality, unless your BMI is 50 or above.

And that if you look at the chart, what they, whoever they is called overweight and obese actually have lower mortality rates than people in the normal weight and underweight categories, which is like mindblowing. Right. And, and I bet you people will like me sort of hear that or, or read that and go, wait, what?

So it would be great to be able to put that article right in our show notes. If people write. To see that themselves, but it really does go against so much of the messaging that we hear in my gosh. You two must be working really hard to undo that messaging. [00:21:00] As I think most people in the, in the intuitive eating community are.

**Sumner Brooks:** Yeah, I think thankfully, , understanding is growing and slowly but surely. And I think the more, , health providers and professionals and researchers and, you know, teachers and parents, and really, really everyone, the more who, the more people who are open to hearing and learning about, , you know, the emerging.

Research the better, but also pointing back to what Amy was saying about this being a choice. You know, the other part of the conversation is that we are so obsessed with health in our culture. , and yes, I think most people would agree that they want to be mindful and aware of their health and wellbeing.

But with this obsession, with health, particularly how it is, you know, currently [00:22:00] we are not helping anyone's wellbeing. We are seeing some pretty detrimental consequences when it comes to mental health because of the obsession with food and body.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah, I think the other sticky point. So, you know, as I, as I said, I I've struggled with this issue personally, really my whole life. And, you know, there have been periods where my body.

has been quite a lot larger and it would be hard for me to exercise. My joints would hurt. I would be out of breath very easily.

And so, you know, irrespective of mortality in these other things, like it felt to me, like if I could take some weight off, it would be easier for me to, to be able to be more fit, because it would be easier for me to be active and to exercise. But the other piece about the diet culture is that diets don't work right.

That like there's the honeymoon phase and people lose weight, but I don't remember the percentage, but it's like in the [00:23:00] nineties, 98% of people when they do lose weight through dieting, gain the weight back and then some, right. So you have this sort of staircase of life. Losing weight and then gaining more back and losing weight and gaining more back.

And so I think people feel really stuck because they may have health-related or fitness-related reasons to want to lose some weight. And that may not be a terrible thing if it's for the right reasons, but that it feels really challenging to be able to do that.

Given what we're told about how you're supposed to do that two thoughts about that.

**Sumner Brooks:** I think, I think it's an opportunity to point out as well that, , you know, your own personal, , scenario that you just shared, we, because of how we've been conditioned to think about, wait, the conclusion. That people come to is I need to lose weight to feel better. However, what, what is so rarely really [00:24:00] acknowledged is that if someone, maybe isn't feeling strong or, , comfortable in their body, that they can choose.

If they want to work on strength and flexibility and fitness, if they want, , you know, joyful movement, things that feel good for their body and that those things could very much bring increased wellbeing and increased body comfort and increase physical ability without weight loss at all. That. The fitness part of it is not about weight.

The fitness part of this is about, , strength, maybe endurance, flexibility, , physical therapy, right. Taking care of one's body, but it just, again, becomes really simplified to, oh, if I lost weight, I would feel better when, , that's, that's a really big message we're trying to get out. Is that well, is it that you need to lose weight or is it that [00:25:00] strengthening your, your current body would, would really feel good for you?

**Jill Stoddard:** Will you?

talk about how the, you know, the goal of intuitive eating is to promote a healthy relationship with our bodies and with food. And so, you know, the goal would never be about weight loss, though. It's possible that if people engaged in intuitive eating, that's something that may happen, but that it's really more about, , getting rid of these kind of pathological relationships that come up around food and body size and, , , everything that comes with that.

Let's talk about, you talk about how there are three keys to raising an intuitive eater. We've been talking a lot just about intuitive eating in general, but the book is really about it's really for parents, , in terms of how we can raise children to be intuitive eaters. And so you talk about these , three keys, providing unconditional love and support for your child's body, implementing a flexible and reliable feeding routine, and finally developing and using the intuitive eating voice.

So can you kind of [00:26:00] briefly unpack, you know, this is a very big book and I know I'm asking huge questions that took you hundreds of pages to write, and the book is so good. And I really recommend for anyone listening, who wants a deeper dive, because we would need hours to talk about all of this and we only have one.

So I do really recommend the book, but can you talk a little bit about, , those three keys to raising an intuitive.

**Amee Severson:** Yeah. The first one is probably what, the one that's closest, nearest and dearest to my heart, which is, providing unconditional love for your child and for your child's body. , and I think this one I feel really passionate about in particular, because it feels kind of obvious. Like we just say that, that in the name of the key, it's really easy to be like, well, yeah, like of course we should provide unconditional love for our child's

**Jill Stoddard:** Wait. So like

we shouldn't call our kids Tubby and little Tibet and Tubby Temi T before. Is that, is that inconsistent with the first case?

**Sumner Brooks:** Okay.

**Amee Severson:** a little, [00:27:00] it feels like I'm working for feels so obvious. And like you said earlier, like with your parents, they didn't, they weren't necessarily trying to cause you harm. And I think that's true for most

people. I think there are exceptions to that rule, but. I think for the most part, parents truly want to do what's best by their kid.

And sometimes that means it feels like trying to protect them from whatever being in the quote unquote wrong body is. And by doing that, we put incidentally accidentally, we put conditions on our love. We feel for this kid. And the truth is, , actually saw this on Instagram earlier today. And I think it's so incredibly important that kids experience whatever it is that we give them as love.

There is nothing we can point to in the world that says, that's what love is. That's what you need to aspire to. So whatever it is that we give them is what they believe is unconditional [00:28:00] love, which is what parents should be giving kids. And when we accidentally put these conditions on it, like, I love you.

And wouldn't you feel better if your body was smell. Or do you really want to wear those clothes? I think some of the sneakier ones can even be wouldn't you rather go like join the soccer team than read a book. , do you really want to have another cookie? You know, these little conditions we accidentally put those on there and kids start to recognize that as not only the love that they're going to receive from other people, but the love that they're allowed to give themselves.

**Jill Stoddard:** So in addition to not saying these kinds of harmful things that are not, you know, the unconditional love and acceptance of the kid's body, should we even be talking about bodies at all? Should we be saying like, wow, look, how strong your legs are that you were able to run up that hill without stopping, like focusing on the things your body does, or like, should we just not be talking about.

**Amea Severson:** think because there's so much. There's so much talk about bodies, no [00:29:00] matter what we do, it's everywhere. It's, it's like diet culture that it's going to be encountered at some point. So I believe that yeah, having teaching gratitude for bodies and what bodies can do, what they, , what they can provide for us is, is great.

, while also not like putting conditions on that either because, you know, you never know when you're going to break a leg or become disabled or whatever that is. , and also just like, you know, providing love for the body as it is your meat suit, you know, it's the thing that carries, it, carries your soul through the world.

It's the thing, like, we love it because of that. Like who cares, what it looks like or what it can truly do. I love it because it's you and I, I love everything about it. Represents who you are

**Jill Stoddard:** My kids always make fun of me for having a flat, but, I mean, I'm like, I know I got a crack in my back and like, I love my flat, but leave me alone. and.

that's, you know, it's like, I just like, [00:30:00] I can't stop them from making comments about bodies, but I can try to model, which is something you guys talk about as being really important.

You know, that like, I love my flat, but I'm not going to apologize for it. It's just part of my body. It's how I was built. All the women in my family have flat butts, you know?

**Sumner Brooks:** I think that's so important because one of the, one of the ways that I think about this a lot, , and when you have kids, you know, bodies come up every day, all the time. And I think, , That if we don't talk about bodies, if we don't acknowledge bodies and the neat stuff about bodies, the confusing stuff about bodies, the curious things about bodies, our kids are going to seek out and find their own answers to their own questions and other places away from us.

And so I try to really. Really make it like a normal, everyday thing to talk about bodies, what they do, how they sound, how they smell, how they look. , and with those conversations [00:31:00] over time, you know, the message gets repeated. We don't judge bodies. We don't, we don't think somebodies are good and some bodies are bad.

, I don't shame my own body because I wouldn't shame someone else's body because that's not, what's important here. Right? Those aren't the values that we need to be instilling. And I recently had a couple conversations around even like being naked in our bodies and the messages that we send to really young kids about how we are, , portraying our own comfort in our body when we're naked.

And I mean, that is a private thing. That's happening at home with families. I do think that kids are so perceptive, they can tell when there is no hiding and shame and secrecy around bodies and where are they supposed to figure out and fulfill their curiosity if we can't help them with that at home. So I think it's an important thing for parents to be aware of with body [00:32:00] positivity as well, , is like breaking down some of the mystery.

Right. And the shame around bodies in general, not just with size.

**Jill Stoddard:** that's a great point. That's a really good point. So that, that second key is to implement a flexible and reliable feeding routine. So, so what is that and how is it different from when we're not practicing intuitive eating?

**Sumner Brooks:** . Well, I will start with that. For any person of any age, whether you're a child or an adult, , having a connection and being, , attuned to your hunger and satiety signals, , does rely on having regular access to food. So for an adult who may be restricting or dieting, they're probably not having regular and consistent access to enough food as a result of the dieting.

There may also be. , a person of any age who doesn't have [00:33:00] regular or reliable access to food at all, due to food insecurity. That's another way we get interrupted from being able to be, , naturally tuned in. So for children, one of the most important things that we can do is support them with that regular and reliable, adequate access to food by providing the meals by determining when the meals and snacks are happening and by doing our best to provide a variety of different food groups so that children are well set up to be able to eat according to their natural, intuitive eating abilities when these meals and snacks are provided.

So that really is the basis for. The need for the flexible feeding routine. It's not about over control or about, this is my job and that's your job. And you can't take any of my job, which is sometimes unfortunately how this is talked about, but it's really about what we're doing is we're consciously and [00:34:00] intentionally knowing that our kids need us to provide this food because that's going to be the most accessible way for them to be intuitive either they don't have the developmental capability to be the decision makers around what's served all the time.

And when it served.

## Marker

**Jill Stoddard:** You talk about the importance for parents of modeling, which with, you know, I think that piece is like pretty self-explanatory and we've touched on it a little bit, but you just mentioned control and a big piece of this is avoiding negative parental control. And I suspect that that is probably one of the biggest issues that parents encounter because of fear, because of living in diet culture.

So can you talk a little bit about what that means, and what should we be doing instead?

**Amee Severson:** I think, , a good example of negative parental control comes in. , like during meal times, like someone had mentioned, you know, we can provide a variety of food groups that kids can intuitively choose [00:35:00] from. , that includes like fruits and vegetables, fish. I'm thinking of the things that kids don't generally love, you know, on a regular basis.

, and we can provide them and then they can choose not to eat that. And that negative parental control can kind of seep into this conversation when we start to have. But how about you have one bite of the broccoli, but you're not going to try any of the broccoli, but I made you fish and you're not going to eat the fish.

And kind of whether it's a little bit of a guilt trip, or if it's a directive, like no week, we take a bite of this food before it's taken off the table, you have to try a bite of everything on your plate. You, you

**Jill Stoddard:** you can't have

dessert unless you eat this, that or the other.

Yeah.

**Amee Severson:** All these things that we do again, in that attempt to. Be as helpful as we can is, you know, in the same way we do it, you know, I know, and a parents see this in every way with kids, because I know, I see it so often in so many different ways with my kid, when we try to over control is [00:36:00] when they're like, excuse me, like, you're telling me what to do.

I'm going to do the opposite now. And that extends to food. You know, when you tell your kid to just put the broccoli in your mouth and eat it

**Jill Stoddard:** it's that psychological reactance, right? Which there's a whole lot of research on. . We all like, and even as adults, you tell me what to do. I'm going to dig my dang heels in and do exactly the opposite.

**Amee Severson:** and that's a really big way that it really seeps in because it, it feels urgent. It feels like what you need to eat eventually. Like you haven't had a vegetable in days. Like I think my kid is at a point right now where she eats peas. I think that might be the only vegetable she is willing to eat right now.

**Jill Stoddard:** So, what do you say to parents who say, okay, but if I just let my kids eat, only the things they liked, they would eat processed bags of chips and chocolate every minute of every day, for years on end. And like, I, my pediatrician told me they have to have more vegetables and dah, dah, dah, like how. Respond to that.

And I think that, like you're saying, Amy, it comes from this well-intentioned place. And [00:37:00] also like maybe a fear and anxiety place. Like, oh God, I'm going to ruin my children's insights. And I'll say like, one of the things that I worry about is not their body size, as much as you know, there is some research coming out that like processed food.

Isn't great for your brain, your energy, your, , your mood, right? Like that. And so when my kid doesn't want to eat breakfast and only wants to eat, you know, we're saying there's no bad foods, but they eat these foods that I, they seem to have an impact on their irritability or other kinds of things. And I want them to be in the best position to be able to like succeed throughout their day, socially and academically, and their nutrition seems to impact that.

So how do you respond when you get these like kind of fear driven? Yeah, Habits from parents.

**Sumner Brooks:** that's such a good question. So, , look there, there's not one way that this looks across all families, right. And we always [00:38:00] know that. In any given scenario, there's a lifetime of context behind it. Right? So when I hear a parent saying that my child would never choose strawberries, if I put strawberries on the table, I hear and at no fault of the parents, because my parents don't know this stuff.

That's why we, why we wrote the book. But I, here, I have no trust in my child's ability to feed themselves. And so that then indicates maybe this has been going on for a long time, where very early on, because of that over control, we sort of took away that ability, that natural ability of the child to be so self-directive to eat a wide variety of foods because they might be available.

And I have to back up there because not every child is [00:39:00] going to eat a wide variety of foods, but very likely more than just candy or chips, but it's the candy and chips that are provoking this high anxiety response from the parents, because the context there is that they also have a lot of feelings about candy and chips, and there's a whole lifetime behind that, right?

So this is the point of the conversation where we recognize yep. Pretty complex here. And the way that our child is eating is a result of how they then kind of conditioned to, or model two or however it is evolved. This is their relationship with food now. And so when I'm talking to a parent that may be very weary of the permission and the trust that we talk about in the book.

We want to kind of take a breath and remember, okay, this is about a relationship with food. So what kinds of [00:40:00] things can we do to support our children, to have a positive relationship with food? Not just with chips, but with food, like all food. And does that mean that maybe we need to change some of the things we're doing at home to, to build back some positive relationship with fruits and vegetables.

If my child maybe is totally kind of running the other way from all fruits and vegetables, and maybe that's really connected to how things have been happening for them in their life with fruits and vegetables, what do we need to do to make this a more positive interaction?

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah,

**Sumner Brooks:** I'm wondering if that starts to kind of open up how you might think about responding to a

**Jill Stoddard:** it doesn't and I suspect too, it's re it really takes a lot of patience on the part of the parents, because this isn't something that is going to be undone overnight. And, you know, to give that freedom and trust there, you know, like in [00:41:00] psychology, there's that extinction burst, right? Where like the there's an increase in behavior before there's a decrease.

And if all of, if a kid who's never been allowed to have sugar is suddenly allowed to have sugar, they may go crazy on this sugar before they start to kind of heal that relationship. But the other thing that comes to mind, you know, And maybe it sounds a little paranoid, but thinking about this, like capitalist, at least in the United States, you know, we live in a very capitalist country.

Supposedly there are chemists who have been hired by food companies like Doritos, right. To have like the exact right combination of ingredients to make them essentially addictive, you know, using that term broadly sugar, same thing. So I think there's fear there, but it's like, but the more I let them eat it, the more they're going to want to eat it.

And like, what if that just never stops? And so what you're saying is like, trust that at some point they're probably not going to feel naturally very good. If this is all they're eating. And as long as they have a variety of other kinds of food available [00:42:00] over time, they'll gravitate toward a variety of chips and chocolate in addition to fruits and vegetables and proteins and grains, and to like trust that that.

will happen over time.

As long as it's made available to them in a reliable way.

**Sumner Brooks:** Well, I think trust is definitely one part of it. And another part is also like the relational aspect of feeding and that like, food is not just food with. Humans attached on either end of it. Right. What's happening with food is, is what's happening at the table amongst family members what's happening with food is how involved is your child in, , you know, the menu or the cooking or the shopping, or, you know, these experiences with food.

And, , I love knowing that this book is available for people who maybe have babies or are pregnant and can kind of start this from the beginning, because it is true that after years and years of over control, [00:43:00] your child has developed, some core beliefs about food. And that is a really hard place to be when parents see that and they see, okay, you know, we're gonna have to turn this ship over time.

**Jill Stoddard:** Right. And there's, there's like no delete button when it comes to learning, you know, there's no unlearning, there's only new learning and that, that can take time. And especially, you know, I think about, this has been a little bit of a challenge between my husband and me because, you know, I have read the original, intuitive eating book, and now I have read how to raise an intuitive eater and he hasn't, and it's difficult for me to try to be practicing this with myself and my kids while also trying to like, teach him.

You know, so I'm going to make him listen to this podcast episode, but there's no way I'm going to get him to read two big giant books. And so that feels a bit like an uphill battle too, because if you're in a two-parent home, you both have to be on, on board.[00:44:00]

**Sumner Brooks:** Yeah. It's like a lot of, other, , mental health topics, you know? Right. There's there's not quick fixes. These are big issues that definitely take aligned caregiving to be most successful. And I do think it's important to

communicate with the other influential caregivers about, you know, what, what approach you want to take?

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. Did you have something you wanted to add? Amy? ,

**Amee Severson:** yeah, I was going to say that, , That fear that yeah, we're going to eat one food forever. Like we're going to, we're going to be, or only eat processed food or, or never have that like big variety of fresh fruits and different things because of that addictive nature of these foods, , is it's a very real fear.

It's very common. Like, , I hear it a lot from a lot of people. And I think one of the things, you know, intuitive eating the book itself, talks about this. We talk about this, the idea of actually eating that one food forever is [00:45:00] unlikely. , like I, for one eating Doritos exclusively sounds awful. , even eating Doritos and chocolate exclusively sounds awful.

, like after a snack of that, I'm like, all right, now I'm ready for like something else. You know, I'm ready for anything other than Doritos and chocolate. And I think. Like you said with that extinction piece, like it's going to be, there's going to be a big burst of wanting this food because they have access to this.

And for kids, I think a really good example is, is like the day after Christmas or the day after her birthday, when they have 500 new toys and they are obsessed with them and you know, are in love with every single one of them. And then like two weeks later, you could probably go through and donate half of them.

Cause they wouldn't even realize that they're gone because they've just lost their excitement over it. And food is not much different. A lot of the addiction piece comes from the deprivation. And that's what a [00:46:00] lot of science is starting to show is that it's not about the chemical makeup of the food itself.

That is addictive because it's truly not, it's, can't be addictive. It's something that we need it. We could be reliant on it because we are, we're also realizing.

**Jill Stoddard:** Um,

**Amee Severson:** and water and that's normal, but, but we, we're not addicted to it any more than we are with toys, you know?

**Jill Stoddard:** I think what you're saying is so important that it's about deprivation. And in fact, I, I did, some individual intuitive eating sessions with Evelyn Tripoli who wrote the first book. And one of my homework assignments

was like literally to fill my freezer with ice cream, like to buy all of the ice cream and sort of do it as an experiment.

And that when you stop restricting and deprivation is no longer a problem, there's sort of this like magic thing that eventually happens where you're like, oh, well I can have it anytime. Do I really want it right now? Not really. and I, and I think that's really what you're speaking to here. [00:47:00]

**Sumner Brooks:** bodies want to, to stay in homeostasis, you know, from a blood sugar perspective, , and when you can stop being, , kind of sidelined by the problems with deprivation, like, like anyone who's, who's been on diets knows that like your thinking becomes consumed by your hunger, by the inadequate nutrition that you're getting.

And by just cravings, right? Because cravings are complex, but it's tied to our, our physiology. And when we can kind of disconnect from that deprivation and the thoughts that come up from that, and really think about food and eating from a place of how do I want to feel? Am I satisfied? What will feel good for me?

, then we get this opportunity to trust our body because we can remember. Oh, I can check in with how I am feeling. And that gives me the answer of do I need more chocolate or not, not whether or not I'm allowed to have it. And with [00:48:00] kids, we don't have to teach them to check in necessarily. We, you know, we can prompt a little bit, but it's not a cognitive process.

Raising intuitive eaters. It's more of a fostering and allowing them to be led by their natural, intuitive, eating ability.

**Jill Stoddard:** Hmm. . . , well, so there are 10 principles of intuitive eating and we're, we're not going to go through all of those, but again, I really recommend people do get the book and it is, they're all listed in there and then talked about in detail. But if, you know, you just sort of alluded to this seminar, but one of the questions I kept having as I was reading is, you know, if I want my kids to be more mindful about eating or, you know, I want them to think about like, am I really hungry or am I just bored?

Do I want something hot, cold, sweet, salty? Like, is, are there things I should be saying to get them to start thinking in that way? Or is this something we assume just kind of unfolds naturally if we're providing a variety of foods on a [00:49:00] flexible and reliable feeding schedule, what are your thoughts on that?

**Amee Severson:** I think it, kinda, it tends a little bit on the age of the kid that we're working with. , cause I think that is a really important thing because textures and sensory experiences are very real and tangible experience. Yes. Yeah.

And, And, we, as kids get older, we can ask more questions. We can, we can get a little bit more in-depth with it, but having like, you know, asking if they want something hot or cold, , do you want some saucy chicken tonight?

Like I re there's a pasta I refer to as cheesy chicken because it's the only way my kid knows what it is. And we'll ask that like, do you want cheesy chicken? Or do you want teriyaki chicken? You know, we'll ask like these little differences and she can have an opinion on what thing it is. And we can do that.

Like we can be like, do you want something cold for a snack? Or do you want something hot for a snack? , especially when a kid. I don't know what I want right now. , I'm hungry, but I'm not sure what it [00:50:00] is. Okay. Don't think crunchy. Do you want, you know, , we can, we can ask those same questions in very simplified ways, but it allows them to kind of explore their own sensory experiences and the way that food can kind of relate to those sensory experiences.

And actually that is technically the age appropriate nutrition education to give a kid is this is a crunchy food. This is a, this is a juicy food. This is saucy. This is red. You know, we can be really basic about it and we can kind of have let them have that experience with it. And they will, we don't have to tell them that's how they choose food, but that's how we can help them.

**Jill Stoddard:** Right.

Get in the habit of thinking about those things. Yeah. And like giving them credit too. I mean, My my daughter's only 10 and she will say something like, oh, I'm really craving something savory And I remember the first time she said it, I like my head like whipped around.

I was like, you know what savory means You know, I had no idea that she [00:51:00] even knew.

I don't think I had ever used

that

**Amee Severson:** dinner. So it's fine. I'm like, that's not.

**Sumner Brooks:** And it's, I'll just add too. I'll add to that. , this is also where the modeling piece comes in and if you just, we stop and think about the difference between, a child who frequently hear things like I can't have that, or I'm so bad for having that, or I'm going to have it because it's a cheat day or I'm only eating KIDO this week.

Or, you know, if we think about a child that hears comments like that, about food versus being in an environment where they're hearing, Ooh, yummy, I'm so excited for this. I'm so hungry for this, or, you know what? That looks really good, but I feel full. I'm going to have some later or, oh my gosh, this is the most delicious. Soup I've ever had because [00:52:00] of blah, blah, blah. Right. If we are modeling, being in touch with our own sensations, our own food enjoyment, our own hunger and satiety, that is so much information for a child to be exposed to when it

comes to how they are going to relate with.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. That's so powerful. Like it, you know, even if I just say, Ooh, I'm really in the mood for something crunchy and salty, and then I eat something crunchy and salty versus like, oh, but chips are bad. I can't have that.

That, that,

like, just in that one tiny little interaction you're learning so much. Yeah.

**Sumner Brooks:** start to notice that our, you know, Amy and I have daughters the same age and they're just about eight, eight ish at this point, I mean, wow. At some point you just realize this child is. Me and these moments where I'm like, you know, they just do, they, they modeling is huge.

And so I can imagine that a [00:53:00] parent who reads intuitive eating and who might be very much, , you know, on their own journey might think though that it would be important to sit a child down and talk about, let's say the 10 principles or hunger fullness number scale or something. And I think it's important to just state clearly that we don't need to do those things, , with kids, especially younger kids.

Yeah.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. Yeah. That's so helpful. Well, I, one of my favorite things about the book that I was surprised when I stumbled upon it is that you guys talk about acceptance and commitment therapy. And my co-host and I are all act therapists. We all use act in our own daily lives and our, head-over-heels in love with this.

And you talk about the importance of psychological flexibility in practicing intuitive, eating and raising intuitive eaters. So can you talk a little bit about the role that mindfulness and values play in raising intuitive eaters?[00:54:00]

**Sumner Brooks:** absolutely. , I'm also a huge fan of act at, and I feel like it personally changed my life in a lot of ways. And, ,

**Sumner Brooks:** , the way that we kind of opened readers up to it in the book is that whenever you are kind of on a journey towards behavior change of any kind, mindfulness is going to be an important part of that process.

Right. , so. Mindfulness around noticing when diet thoughts are coming up, judgment is coming up, , noticing our automatic responses to food requests or to our child's eating style. And if we can be more mindful and kind of exercise that mindfulness muscle, we'll be able to pause a little bit, reframe settle into what matters most in these situations, and then decide how we want to respond to whatever is going on versus what many of us are doing, which is [00:55:00] automatically reacting from a place of diet mentality.

And that's a really big thing to do. And it's going to take some time for someone to even just get comfortable with the idea of how often diet mentality shows up.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. Yeah. And I noticed, you know, my husband that like, he's just never had issues in any of these domains in his life, you know, partly because of the way he was raised. And, and I think also being male, it's become more of a problem for men recently. , but you know, for him growing up.

it was an issue, but I still hear those kinds of things coming out of his mouth without, like you said, with all the best intentions, but just you, you cannot, you can just sort of hear the brainwashing, like no matter your history, you can't escape this social culture that, that we all live in.

And that, and I think it takes a lot of practice to really be, deliberate, you know, to be intentional and, and a piece of mindfulness [00:56:00] really promotes that. Yeah. What about.

**Amee Severson:** I think it's when it comes to values, it is about you get to choose what your values are as a parent. Like I think that is probably one of the things that we hold the most strong throughout this entire book. And I, I, this is something I hold with my clients every time they show up is I can give you the facts.

I can give you information. I can tell you the science, I guess. And also you get to choose what not only you do with that, but what you have to do in your own life. And so when it comes to like the diet culture, thoughts that are in there, the way that we relate to them and the, even how much we want to engage with intuitive eating or with diet culture, or with wellness culture, any of that, we get to choose as individuals what that is and what that looks like for us and for our family, like Sumner said earlier, there is no one way to do this.

There is no. This is the script and this is the perfect meal family, whatever it's, what is this? And how does it work with your life [00:57:00] and how do you want it to be? And I think it can be a whole long journey. You know, it might, you might want it to look this way for a while, and then you might change your mind and decide what you want it to be different, or you might be more radical with it later on.

And those are all perfectly fine things. , because it's your values. It's your life. You get to

**Jill Stoddard:** It's your choice. Yeah, right? .

**Sumner Brooks:** We offer a lot of reflective kind of questions and, , journal prompts and things like that. For parents at the end of many of the chapters to help them work through the difference between what diet culture has taught you to believe are your values versus what really matters to you and how you want to be raising your kids with food.

And so I think there's a lot of opportunity to, for people to get clear on their values.

**Jill Stoddard:** I agree. I mean, I, I, that was my [00:58:00] experience in reading and I have so many other questions for you. , I'm thinking of that, like maybe I should have you guys back because one of the things I wanted to talk

about is obstacles. Like all the habits that you must get from parents who have spent decades in diet culture, and maybe we can reach out to some of our listeners who have heard this episode and have their own questions.

And maybe we could just come back for like a full Q and a with parents, but what I wouldn't that be cool? We,

I

**Sumner Brooks:** would be really

**Jill Stoddard:** with one other guest and it worked really well. So maybe we'll we'll do that. And what I thought we could do as art sort of last and final question is I got the impression from reading.

That a really important first step to raising intuitive eaters is to be practicing this ourselves because of the modeling and everything else. So what would you say are some initial concrete steps our listeners could take to get started? I mean, really whether they're a parent or not. I mean, if you're a non-parent who wants to practice intuitive eating, or if you're a parent who wants to raise intuitive eaters, what might [00:59:00] be some, in addition to reading the book, what might be some concrete steps people could take today to get started on this journey?

**Amea Severson:** I think some of the first, most important steps we can take, because I'm also a very firm believer in, we say this in the book, and I know Sumner agrees with me that especially when it comes to parenting in this way, we can kind of fake it till we make it. You do not have to be a perfect, intuitive eater in order to help your kids be intuitive eaters.

Beyond this journey at the same time. And one of the first things we can start to do is that mindfulness of the language we're using both in the world and like coming out of our mouths, but also the way we talk to ourselves and starting to be mindful of the way this diet culture influence is making decisions for us and, and bringing fear out of us and concern and the way we're commenting on not just our bodies or a child's bodies, but everyone else's as well.

And the mindfulness of [01:00:00] it, of the, of the diet culture soup, that's kind of all around us, I think is probably one of the most important first steps.

**Jill Stoddard:** love it. What about you Sumner?

**Sumner Brooks:** Yeah, I think, I think right back to act. Right. So noticing, , the, feelings and the thoughts that come up that are maybe could be kind of peaked by anything that happens around you, something you eat, something, you see something you see in your child, something your child eats and starting to.

Connect the dots with how the feelings you have about food and body then lead you to, , want to do some kind of behavior or reaction because of those feelings and thoughts and that it runs so deep. You know, as soon as we start to notice all of this and do this work, we realize, oh, wow, this has been happening a [01:01:00] long time.

And this is really deep. So self-compassion is something that we, you know, bring up over and over again, because it's so critical here, but the little having compassion for even the very littlest of things, right. Um, and I'd like people to know that they're not alone.

**Jill Stoddard:** Yeah. That's great. Well, I think I was doing really well for quite a long time and not exerting negative parental control. And I think I've back slid a little bit in the last year or two. So that's what I'm going to commit to after our conversation today is to really try to, , let go, like to, to, you know, as you're saying, be mindful, like notice my own anxiety when I see my.

Mowing four bags of chips and, you know, try to try to make some, some shifts there. So this has been so incredibly helpful. Thank you so much for being here.

**Sumner Brooks:** Great. Thank you so much for having [01:02:00] us.

**Amea Severson:** Thanks for having us. It was great talking to you.

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