



**Glenn Livingston, Ph.D.
and Carolyn
Emotional Eating Self-Esteem**

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Dr. Glenn: Hey, this is the very good Dr. Glenn Livingston with Never Binge Again and I'm here with a nice woman named Carolyn who's agreed to let me record this session so you can benefit from it as well. Carolyn, how are you?

Carolyn: I'm great. I'm good.

Dr. Glenn: Terrific! My niece always says that she's great. Ever since she was two years old, she always told me she was great.

Carolyn: That's sweet.

Dr. Glenn: Yeah, she's sweet. You responded to a request on the Facebook forum, NeverBingeAgainForum.com and you wanted to talk about a particular issue. Which one was that?

Carolyn: I believe I responded to the one about self-esteem or lack thereof.

Dr. Glenn: You felt that your binging was related to self-esteem?

Carolyn: I do. I think so.



Dr. Glenn: Could you tell me a little more?

Carolyn: Sure. I guess I have always struggled with that issue. I guess I've always tried to analyze it and tried to figure out where it came from. I think for me, it was the way I grew up and the household dynamic I grew up in. My father was kind of a cold person and he also was -- I guess I would call him a pretty high functioning alcoholic. He was kind of a sad person. He could do his job nine to five basically, but he was never really violent. He was just not there. He did not come to my high school graduation. I don't think he was mean-spirited. I think he suffered from possibly depression. I don't know, but I think because of that.

And then I think my mother was a very domineering person and actually at 82, she still is even though I'm 60. She could still throw my little world in a tailspin when she visits me or just some of the various things on how we interact and that kind of thing. So I think some of it maybe stems from that, but I also recently had a 60th birthday and I feel shocked that I'm still not over that.

I've had a pretty good life and lots of blessings and I have a lovely husband, great grandchildren, a grandbaby, so I have everything to be thankful for, but I still seem to struggle with this. I think for years, I thought I had it cured or fixed or licked. It came rolling back in, in the empty nest, the phase of life I guess about five years ago, but I think the self-esteem thing has always been lying there like a snake in a basket at the bottom just waiting for you to stick your hand in, and -- I don't know.

Dr. Glenn: What was it about the empty nest that brought the issue back?



Carolyn:

I guess for me in my particular set of circumstances in my life was being a mom. I had never thought I wanted to be a mom as a young woman I guess because of my experiences in my family, not that I had a horrible childhood. I had a pretty good one, all things considered, but I was told I was going to be this career woman. I loved college, wanted to do really well, was a high achiever, perfectionist kind of a person and somehow that never quite worked out. I had decent jobs but never anything that was that compelling, but being a mom for me was the one thing in my life I really loved, enjoyed, and truly gave me purpose.

My kids are five years apart. They're 23 and 28 now. My daughter recently graduated from college, but basically out of the house about five years for her, and she and I were always very close. She lives a long distance away. Also at the time, and still right now, I haven't worked full-time in a while. My husband has a high pressure, long-hour job and we haven't made the decision as a family for me not to work full-time in the last few years I guess, so I've part-time did it and full-time a bit here and there, but I never really found my stride as a career person. I volunteered a lot with the kids.

So I think when Sarah went off to college and was happy thankfully and stayed for five years, became a nurse, my husband was still like, "I really think it's great if you don't work because that way, we can pick up and go." We had a second home that we were working on and renovating, so it gave me no reason to get up in the morning except to take the dog for a walk and then after that, I'm like, "Okay. Now, what do I do?" Five years, six years have gone on, I'm still trying to figure that out.



I think the lack of purpose is giving me too much time on my hands. I guess it's just not having enough to do. There's always stuff you can do, but it's busywork like vacuuming or the laundry or whatever. In my married life, we moved about every five to six years, so keeping friends and family ties has always been a struggle. Now, we have a new dynamic in our life where I'm living in a different state renovating a family home.

So I think I was hot on that one when I first got here and really enjoyed it, but now that all the glory has died down, I'm left with what to do with my day and I think that's part of giving me a lack of purpose again. I don't know. It just gets really goofy like you start questioning your whole life like, "Why did I do this? I should've done that. God, I'm a screw-up. Wow, I'm 60 now and I haven't done anything with my life." I don't know. All those things start to swirl around. And then I have some sleep issues, so I guess you just start to really wonder what the heck you should be doing with the rest of your life.

Dr. Glenn: When was your birthday?

Carolyn: September 10th, and actually, my husband bought my daughter and I a ticket to Rome. We took a trip there kind of like a whirlwind week in Rome. My husband is not that physically active and I am, so he's like, "I think you'll really enjoy the time with Sarah." She was just starting her new job the day after she got back. Yeah, I guess maybe having a birthday too, but I think that's -- I don't know. It was wonderful. We had a fabulous time.

My daughter tells me, "Mom, I think if you have an issue and you don't deal with it, it's going to keep coming up" and I think in a lot of ways, she's right.



Dr. Glenn: You know, Carolyn, it sounds like you're a very insightful person. You've given this a lot of thought. You understand where some of the self-esteem struggles are coming from. I'm wondering, what's your understanding about the relationship between those struggles and the binge-eating, the overeating?

Carolyn: Well, I guess I had come to the conclusion that for me, the binge-eating is often tied with the usual stuff like being tired, being let down, being sad, being alone, the nighttime stuff, but for me, it usually goes from a time when I've neglected myself.

I think that goes right back, harkens back to the lack of self-esteem. I think on some level, I feel like I don't deserve it, so I'm totally giving up my time like if I volunteer, I will just exhaust myself. And if I do something with my kids, I do everything like 150% for others, but when it comes to me -- like if I serve a meal, I happily go out of my way to make it really nice for other people, but for me, it's just like lettuce out of the box. I don't know.

Dr. Glenn: Why don't you deserve it?

Carolyn: It's a hard question. I guess intellectually, I feel like I do, but I think on a gut level, I just have a hard time feeling that. I guess I'm always cheap with myself and my daughter is always like, "Oh, come on, Mom. You can spend on yourself." I'll happily buy it for others but when it comes to me, it's like clear all the way. I don't know.

Dr. Glenn: So your understanding of the connection is that because you don't feel good about yourself and you feel like you don't deserve to care for yourself that you wind up neglecting yourself so you're not preparing



meals or taking the time to take a break or get the self-care that you need. And there comes a time in the day when you say, "Oh, screw it. I'm just going to binge" because you've neglected yourself.

Carolyn: I think that's often a part of it or a big part of it. It just sounds goofy because -- what you said that you think I'm insightful, I think possibly I spend too much time on that. I recently listened to a lecture by a person named Dr. Doug Lisle, who's part of the McDougall Plan and it was called the Cram Conditioning or something. It sounds like a weird name, but I guess it's new information because -- I don't know if you're familiar with *The Pleasure Trap*, the huge book that he co-wrote.

Dr. Glenn: Yes, a very good book.

Carolyn: I think that's incredible. I guess I'm feeling like that's the truth. When I recently listening to this lecture, it was a little more complicated, but what I got out of it was once you've overeaten, you have that too full feeling, that having that too full feeling is kind of a trigger also. I guess it's just like your brain saying, "Well, I've gotten this far, so basically I'm all in at this point." You make a decision at that point to binge.

Dr. Glenn: What do you want to do about all this?

Carolyn: I want to overcome it. I want to live the rest of my life free from it, but I also want to find a way to have a happy, fulfilling life. I'm not a moron to think that life is always perfect and you can be happy every day, but I'm generally a pretty optimistic person. I'm just having a hard time with this one and I feel like a weak person for not being able to smart my way out of it.



Dr. Glenn: Your pig has you on a trap. Do you know what that trap is? Do you want me to tell you what that trap is?

Carolyn: I guess I could try to guess, but I'm not sure. I guess I'm blind to the trap at this point.

Dr. Glenn: Your pig says that you don't feel good enough about yourself to take care of yourself and if you don't take care of yourself enough then you're definitely going to binge because you're going to be deprived by the end of the day, and your pig says that you don't deserve to take care of yourself. Until you feel good enough about yourself and until you feel like you deserve it, you're just not going to do it. That's the trap.

Carolyn: Okay. I can see that.

Dr. Glenn: Do you know how to get out of that trap?

Carolyn: No. I don't know. I guess I don't know.

Dr. Glenn: The way out of that trap, Carolyn, is to say, "It doesn't matter whether I deserve it or not. It doesn't matter if I feel good about myself or not. I'm in charge. You're not. You're the pig. I'm the person. I get to dictate what happens here. Why do I have to feel like I deserve it? Why do I have to feel good about myself? I just need to do the right thing." That's the answer.

Carolyn: Okay.



Dr. Glenn: If you give the pig that answer and you stay with that, over time you will start to feel like you deserve it. You will start to feel like you feel better about yourself.

Carolyn: Like it's not really an earned thing. As a human, you deserve to have control of what you put in your mouth and when you say 'yes' and when you say 'no'. Is that what you mean, kind of?

Dr. Glenn: Yeah. There's a concept in religion -- I'm not a religious person, so I might be bastardizing this a little bit, but there's a concept of grace that so what if I don't deserve it? So what if I didn't live up to it before? I'm a human being. I've got the right intentions and I'm going to take care of myself because I'm in charge and I can, and religion is because that's what God expects of me.

Carolyn: Right.

Dr. Glenn: God doesn't care so much if I feel like I deserve it or don't deserve it. It just wants me to do the right thing.

Carolyn: Okay. I was raised Episcopal and I feel like I'm supposed to believe it, but the older I get -- I find a lot of comfort in some aspects of it, but a lot of it feels like baloney. I think that there's a certain amount of -- I wouldn't really call it spirituality, but maybe that would be the closest word. I think there's something and I'm not sure what the something is.

Dr. Glenn: I'm as agnostic as they come. I don't really believe in an afterlife. My mom talks to angels and stuff and I ask her why they can't give her lottery numbers.

Carolyn: Yes.



Dr. Glenn: I'm a trained scientist. I'm as agnostic as they come, but there's an experience that religious people have where they get over this psychological trap where they say it doesn't matter if I deserve it. In fact, in many ways it's more special because I didn't deserve it and I'm going to accept it because God wants me to accept it.

Another way to say that is by the virtue of being a human being, you're in charge. Your neurological wiring is superior to the pig, so if you say that you don't have to deserve it and you don't have to feel good about yourself, you just have to do it, then the pig is going to have to suffer. The pig is not going to get to keep bothering you with that.

That seems to me like the primary squeal that you're dealing with. I feel for you very much with all of the struggles that you have. I understand why you're struggling with your self-esteem and I don't think you have to. I think you've probably done a lot of very important things with your life that you're not giving yourself credit for, but I understand given how ambitious you were when you were growing up and what you did in college, I understand why you feel like that. I've got compassion for it. I'm just really zeroing in on how the pig is keeping you trapped. I want to free you of that trap because I think it'll make a world of difference to you.

Carolyn: Oh gosh, yeah, it really would. A lot of days, I'm fine, but then every now and again -- I think also, I do struggle with some sleep issues and I think that that kind of really contributes. It's like a catalyst for it too because when you're not well-rested, you just can't think straight and then you tend to want to eat a bunch of stuff that's not good anyway. I pretty much follow the starch solution. That's how I eat.



I'm a whole food, plant-based, no oil for the most part. I do drink a little bit, which is probably not good, but I try to limit it to just a couple of times a week, a drink or two. Usually, even with the family history of alcoholism, I can usually cope with that and I'm trying to be careful about that.

Dr. Glenn: Are you talking about the McDougall Plan?

Carolyn: Yeah, I'm totally bought in on that. I totally feel like that for me is the way to go and I feel most comfortable. I feel the best that way, but the sleep issue caused me to blow things.

Dr. Glenn: Carolyn, you do know. What would you need to do to sleep better? What's the smallest step you could take towards sleeping better without the possibility of failure?

Carolyn: Getting to bed by 10:30 and reading a book and turning off all screens and that kind of stuff like at probably nine -- actually, probably after five, no more phone or computer, and then after maybe nine or ten, no more TV. I think that would help a lot. Cutting back on the alcohol substantially would help a lot.

Dr. Glenn: What does that mean, 'substantially'?

Carolyn: Well, rather than having a glass of wine every night, which I really love and it really helps me -- I feel like I have crazy brains. There's nothing more that I look forward to in the evening than just sitting down and watching a little bit of PBS or something goofy like that and having a glass of wine. That to me is heaven, but I feel like I can't, so I'm having herbal tea or something.



I'm trying to convert the wine drinking to just social occasions and maybe once a week or twice a week and limit it to one glass of wine or one beer or something.

Dr. Glenn: Be very, very specific. What do you want to do?

Carolyn: Well, really I would like to cut the drinking out except for maybe once a week and/or at social occasions, and at that point, allow myself to have one or maybe two glasses of beer, wine, or possibly the hard stuff, but no more than two bar none. No more [inaudible 00:14:08] test, cracking a couple of bottles of -- which is my idea of a fun time, but it's not a healthy thing.

Dr. Glenn: Okay, so you would do that. You would turn all your electronics off at 10:30. Get off the computer at 5:30. Is that what you said?

Carolyn: Yeah. I think five actually, no more looking at my phone and Facebook and that kind of junk.

Dr. Glenn: This is regardless of whether you felt like you deserve to sleep, right?

Carolyn: Yes, absolutely, because I think that would be a very positive thing for my mental health and for my getting things done in life and just feeling better about myself, feeling a small sense of accomplishment on just something silly because I have still some goals and dreams and I'm not accomplishing them because -- I guess I'm using the excuse of not getting my sleep, but it's all stuff I have control of.

Dr. Glenn: Great. Why does your pig say that you can't do this now?



Carolyn:

I think I can do that now. I don't think my pig really has an opinion about that. I think I just have been lazy and just not doing it. I'm currently living alone with my dog. I'm living in New York State. My husband is in Colorado and I have some friends and family in the area here, but I have long stretches of days where the only person I see is if I go to the store or if I take a walk with the dog. I don't know, you kind of lose your marbles a little bit when you're by yourself a lot, and so I find myself goofing around on Facebook too much.

I really enjoy painting and last year, I went to France with a group of ladies that I met through Facebook. It was a painting group and it was a flower painting trip with a bunch of random women from all over the country and a couple from a different country. That was the most fun thing I've probably ever done in my life. I was feeling so inspired after that to continue and I have all kinds of supplies.

My husband has sent me two more easels. I wake up every day thinking I'm not going to further my day away. I'm going to get up. I'm going to journal. I'm going to meditate. I'm going to do a little bit of yoga. I'm going to go for a walk. Before I know it, I'm listening to MPR and getting angry about politics and basically furthering the day away and then going to bed thinking I didn't accomplish anything, never got my paints out.

Dr. Glenn: What's the smallest thing you could do first thing in the morning that might put you on the path to doing some of those constructive things?

Carolyn: Not turn on my laptop. I would make some coffee and then get my paints out and start to paint immediately before I'm even totally awake and just start doing it in the flow, play some nice music and zoning out



on that and just get involved with that and stop wasting time on stressful things like the latest Trump nonsense or whatever.

Dr. Glenn: Good! Are you going to do that?

Carolyn: I am actually. I was saying that -- I was half laughing to myself because of my dumb comment about the politics, but it made me feel really happy thinking like I could do that tomorrow. I could do that tomorrow. There's no reason why I can't do that.

Dr. Glenn: That's terrific, Carolyn. Can I ask you one more question before we start to wind down? And then you can ask me any questions you want to.

Carolyn: Of course.

Dr. Glenn: Is there anybody in your life from your upbringing or your recent past that really inspired you, who you felt led a really meaningful life and you wanted to be like?

Carolyn: I can't think of anybody. My husband is very accomplished in his career. My mother has overcome a lot of things, but do you mean like someone that I know in my life that would be like a true role model of someone I would like to emulate kind of a thing?

Dr. Glenn: Who is the most positive influence in your life, the single most positive person?

Carolyn: Well, in an odd way my mother because in some ways I blame her a lot for my eating disorder, bulimia stuff, but I think I could always count on her. If I ever said, "Mom, I want to go become a Russian tap dancer,"



whatever crazy idea, she would always be like, "I think you should do it and I'll try to give you the money to do it" like when I was a kid, she was always very encouraging of all kinds of crazy dreams. If you said, "This is what I feel like I want to do," she would be like, "I think you should do it."

Dr. Glenn: That's great. There's a research on that. Not everybody follows through on it, but it seems like people are more likely to achieve unusual things when their parents did what your mother did. The common sense thing would be you would want to say to your kid, "Well, that's great, dear, but what's your Plan B?" but it turns out the people that accomplish really great things, the mothers just say, "Oh, that's phenomenal. You can do that. Absolutely."

Carolyn: That's cute. That's amazing. I love that. I love that. Well, we try to do that with our kids. We try to be very positive and encouraging and supportive of all their different things, although we did try to steer them to what we thought was the right direction. We also try to be supportive of their different interests no matter what they were like skateboarding or whatever happens to be at the moment while secretly thinking, "Oh no! He's going to break a neck, an arm," but then we'd be like, "Oh, that's great! We'll help you get that ski board."

Dr. Glenn: Yeah. What are the action steps you're going to take after this session? What's going to change?

Carolyn: Often I resolve that I'm going to do all these good things. Sometimes the morning rolls around and I fall right into my old habits, but I think I might unplug my laptop and put it away. And then I think I might get my -- well, I will get my art supplies out. I don't really have a little studio



set up now because of this chaos I have in my house, but I think I'll get all my stuff out tonight before I go to bed.

I think this sounds goofy, but I'm kind of a list maker. I think I'll make a list of the things I need to do tomorrow because I like the satisfaction of accomplishing things, so I think I'll write down the things I want to do, the things that make me feel good like spend at least an hour painting even if it's just playing, making a mess, and then spend at least half an hour taking the dog for a walk in the morning before it gets too warm.

I don't so much like to plan my food for the day because I feel like that gets a little bit -- I generally have a plan, but I don't like to portion control and keep track of every little mouthful.

Dr. Glenn: What are you going to say when the pig says that you don't deserve this?

Carolyn: Well, I think I'm going to say that it doesn't matter if I deserve it or not. It's what brings me joy in life and it's what I want to do, joy and satisfaction -- joy in the doing in the moment and satisfaction at the end of the day that I did something that brings me joy.

Dr. Glenn: Carolyn, you're in charge, right?

Carolyn: Yes.

Dr. Glenn: Let the pig cry about that.

Carolyn: Okay.

Dr. Glenn: What questions or concerns do you have?



Carolyn: I guess my question is -- and this sounds really dumb -- is when you're talking about bingeing, are you talking about just overeating or are you also talking about bulimia-type bingeing like bingeing and throwing up or are you talking about strictly overeating past the point of full? What is your description of a binge, I guess.

Dr. Glenn: What's behind the question?

Carolyn: Well, I'm bulimic. I have a history of that but like I said for me, a binge is bulimia, kind of. It's been a while since I've read your book honestly. I read it in one sitting. I don't really know whether or not this is geared for people who are bulimic or whether or not it's just geared for people who chronically binge.

Dr. Glenn: Okay. Let me say a couple of things. First of all, legally I'm not allowed to gear it towards any eating disorder whatsoever, so it's supposed to just be information, blah, blah, blah. So I have to say that it's for education only and that kind of thing, but I can tell you how people use it.

Let's start with the definition of a binge. I define a binge as a bite outside of your food plan because I think people need to be able to see the boundaries of the bull's eye. Now, in the traditional eating disorders community, I take a lot of heat for that because they'll say if people think that they had a stick of chewing gum and now they're on a binge that all bets are off. I see that as pig squeal in and of itself because I think if you find yourself having had a stick of chewing gum and that was off your plan then you just get back on the plan. I don't think you're supposed to go have more.



Just like if you're shooting an arrow with a bull's eye and you missed, you're not supposed to shoot the rest of them at the audience. You're supposed to just get up and aim again. My definition of a binge is really, really, really clear as a bite off your food plan. Some people like to distinguish between a mistake and a binge because they feel like a binge is a total loss of control and a mistake is just missing the bull's eye. That's okay if you want to do that. My only concern is that you really see the bull's eye very clearly. Now, the other thing is if you don't binge then you won't purge, right?

Carolyn: Right.

Dr. Glenn: There's nothing to purge if you don't binge, so if you can figure out how to never binge again then you can figure out how to never purge again also. At least 99% of the bulimics that I've talked to told me that that's the case.

Carolyn: Absolutely.

Dr. Glenn: Yeah. I didn't treat a lot of bulimics in my clinical days when I was running a practice because I didn't feel like I had my own eating disorder under control and I never specialized -- I never went for the specialized training or anything like that and working with bulimics and anorexics and I never had bulimia myself. I was an exercised bulimic, so I'd eat 10,000 calories and I'd spend the next day exercising to get it off, but I couldn't throw up.

Carolyn: Right.

Dr. Glenn: And you can't really get 10,000 calories off in a day, by the way.



Carolyn: Right. It doesn't matter how much you try.

Dr. Glenn: Yeah, it doesn't matter how much you try. You really can't. So what I recommend as an extra precaution for bulimics and anorexics is that they have components in their food plan which requires them to eat regular meals. Bulimics and anorexics are prone to restricting and you don't really overcome binge-eating in my experience by restricting. By restricting your calories and nutrition, you can restrict particular foods, but not your calories and nutrition. You really have to have very sufficient, very regular fueling of the body so you don't trigger that evolutionary mechanism.

Carolyn: Right. That's why the starch solution really works for me because I was the kind of goober that was in the mode of I have to find the perfect eating plan, so I've tried the Weight Watchers to Suzanne Somers to whatever.

I've never been fat, but I've been heavier than I wanted to be because it's all part of that stupid false body image or whatever, but after trying so many different things, I feel like for me, because you can eat a fair amount of volume because you're eating a lot of veggies and because you're not supposed to portion control and all that and from all the stuff I've read about it, I guess I'm fully bought in on the whole McDougall Plan. It really rings true for me, so I feel like for whatever reason, it rings all the bells for me in a good way.

Dr. Glenn: Good! Do you have any other questions or concerns?

Carolyn: I guess not really. I guess I think I just need to think about our phone call and absorb it all. Actually, it was really helpful for me to talk to you.



I'm feeling a little bit better like I feel like the load is off of me now. I'm feeling very positive about things in general.

Dr. Glenn: Good. Carolyn, I'll summarize it for you. Stop bingeing whether you deserve it or not. Take care of yourself whether you deserve it or not. Get better sleep whether you deserve it or not. Everything else will get better.

Carolyn: That's awesome. I love a good summary.

Dr. Glenn: Okay. It was very nice to talk to you.

Carolyn: It was nice to talk to you too.

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