

*Intro music: Bags are packed, are you ready to go?...This time tomorrow we'll be on the road...riding with you into sunnier days...I wouldn't want it any other way.*

Julie: It's time to name the neglect from typical food advice. Welcome to the Find Your Food Voice podcast, hosted by me, Julie Duffy Dillon. I'm a registered dietitian with 20 years of experience partnering with folks just like you on their food peace journey. What have we learned? Well, cookie cutter approaches exclude too many people, and you don't need to be fixed. It's not you. It's not me. It's all of us. Only together we can start a movement and fix diet culture. And we will. Let's begin with now.

*Transition music: I want to see how the world turns round...Let's go adventure in the deep blue sea...home is with you wherever that may be...home is with you wherever that may be.*

Julie: Hi and welcome to episode 282 of the Find Your Food Voice podcast. I am Julie Duffy Dillon, registered dietitian and partner on your food peace journey. So this food peace journey could be a lot easier if we were eating and experiencing food in our bodies without having to worry about all the other crap that random strangers or people, maybe really important to us in our life, bring with their own relationship with food in their body. It makes it so darn complicated, and I hear how frustrated you get. I get really frustrated too. And it can be just really hard to have to navigate relationships and parent or take care of people when you are having to experience maybe something that activates your eating disorder recovery. When someone talks about dieting, or when someone talks about bodies or food as a parent about another child, and it really clicks into place like, oh well, thanks for showing me your anti fat bias. What do you do about these things? These are really huge and also common experiences as we are just navigating all of life, and again, also on our food peace journey. So I feel really grateful Jessie Spence, a counselor, a supervisor, and also a certified personal trainer that lives near me in North Carolina, they said that they would submit a letter, and it's on this exact topic. I'm so excited for, for them to join me to have a conversation about this letter, their own personal experience with hearing diet talk, and also then like, sharing the vulnerable side of how that then affects their relationship with their body and food and as a parent and all these other things. I'm really excited for you to hear this letter and my conversation with Jessie Spence, but a quick word first from our sponsor.

Julie (ad breal): This episode of the Find Your Food Voice podcast is brought to you by my PCOS Roadmap. If you're living with PCOS and can relate to the challenge of diet discussions, talks about body, and not being able to get away from the constant push to make yourself smaller while living with PCOS, well, I have made a resource for you. It's my first three steps along your food peace journey while living with PCOS. It's called my PCOS Roadmap. And you can get to that and many other anti diet tools at [julieduffydillon.com/voice](http://julieduffydillon.com/voice). So get the PCOS Roadmap and my, all my other anti diet tools, free downloads at [julieduffydillon.com/voice](http://julieduffydillon.com/voice).

Julie: Alright, let's hear from Jessie, and excited for you to hear this episode all about pop tarts. [Laughs]

Jessie: Dear food, First and foremost, I love you. I love body liberation. Sometimes I even love my fat body. I'm a parent, a therapist, and a fat human who fawns at the prospect of a bright and

shiny future where we don't all struggle with diet culture and the lies that it tells about you, food. It's been at least five years. I've read the books, I've had the eating disorder training, I've been in therapy. However, I still don't know how to respond when I hear a fellow parents say that their six year old has never been allowed to have a pop tart. I can observe my thoughts. Well, damn, my kid loves pop tarts. Do they think sugar is bad? Is this kid going to end up with an eating disorder? Have they even tried the s'mores ones? Do they know how good they are? Do they think I'm a bad mom because I let my kid eat pop tarts? What if they think pop tarts are the reason I'm fat? Is this kid allowed to have toaster strudel? Are pop tarts too low class for them? You can see that a pop tart gets very complicated very quickly. I mostly don't respond when I'm coming from my best self. I can see that this parent is in many ways normal. They're swimming in diet culture because we all are. I know firsthand that doctors can scrutinize the bodies of both kids and adults and that parents can face intense judgment for food choices they make for their families. Other times, the need for body liberation and an end to diet culture just feels so urgent, and it's harder to be compassionate and calm. Like, just let your kid have a fucking pop tart, lady. Sincerely, Jessie.

*Transition music: Take the good and the ups and downs...I want to see how the world turns around. Home is with you wherever that may be.*

Julie: Hey Jessie, welcome to Find Your Food Voice. I'm so glad you're here.

Jessie: Yes! Thanks for having me.

Julie: Oh, it's my pleasure. I know we've talked about doing this for a long time. So, I'm so glad we got our shit together. And you brought the pop tarts.

Jessie: Yes. Yeah.

Julie: That's so important. And before we push record, we were talking about like, this could be a four part series, and one part could be just like, what are the top five pop tarts? And yet that may be quite polarizing? Um, so the S'mores, is that your favorite pop tart?

Jessie: I would say s'mores is, it's high up there.

Julie: Yeah, that's mine.

Jessie: The brown sugar is also, whatever that one is. Brown sugar cinnamon. Um, cherry is really good too.

Julie: Oh, I don't like a cherry.

Jessie: No? We can't be friends. That's polarizing.

Julie: [Laughs] Yes. But you know, the thing that's the most polarizing for me in pop tarts is like, the ones that don't have any like icing frosting, whatever that is, that, that what's the point? I just

feel like that's just not going to be satisfying at all. But really, let's get to the meat of this. Um, so what about, what was it like for you like, writing this letter, first of all?

Jessie: Um, I think it felt like a relief because I had, I could finally put down on paper what it was that like, that experience that I've had, not just with the pop tart incident but I think any parent, anyone really in diet culture will hear these things and we're like, what is that? What do I do with that? How do I, you know, should I say something, do I not say something? And for me, it just kind of like swirls and like, becomes this amorphous thing. So I felt some relief like, putting it down on paper, like [inaudible]. This is the thing that I experience.

Julie: Well it seemed through the letter too, you kind of came to a place of like, oh, um, like in the beginning of all these questions, questions. The swirl, and then kind of a space of okay, let me pause for a second and take, take a step back, and recognizing this person is like swimming in the same ship we're all swimming in, you know, it seems like compassionate Jessie was like, oh, I have a place for this right here.

Jessie: Yeah. That's not always accessible though. Like I can't always-

Julie: No, I would imagine that's not immediate.

Jessie: Yeah. It's hard.

Julie: Well and you know, it's something that you mentioned in the letters. You're a therapist, and you've done lots of training, and I appreciate not everyone has access to that type of self awareness and like, skill set um, to be able to make all those steps. So yeah, if you're someone listening who's like, I'm in the swirl, like that's as far as this goes for me, is the swirl, it doesn't make you bad.

Jessie: [inaudible] of time in the swirl, if not more and, yeah, that's very normal.

Julie: For sure. [Laughs] For sure. Well, when I read this though, there was a lot I could relate- I mean I have a different lived experience um, living in a small sized body and I have, I, when I, when you were reading through it, I'm like, there's so many times, especially as a parent um, interacting with my kids and my kid's friends and, and kind of like, I want some more friends, can I be friends with this parent? You know, like kind of checking out in that way. So part of it is like selfishly for me. But then also I want to just put my kid in a cave so they do not get exposed to this anti fat bias that comes from diet culture and learning rigid eating disorder behavior and stuff like that. That was something that I was experiencing and like, I could totally relate to this letter from that angle.

Jessie: Yeah, and being a therapist too, adds another layer because I get to see, you know, and hear some of the traumas and some of the weight stigma and people's experiences as kids, because most adults in therapy that I'm meeting with have some, you know, they can go way back with when they first experienced some of these things. So as parents, we do kind of want to like just put the kid like, in a cave and like protect them and have prerequisites for, you know, other parents and households they're going to be exposed to.

Julie: Exactly. Well, so then as a therapist, like this kind of conversation is um, are you saying that it kind of can be something that you can relate to clients saying, “hey, this is something that was a really important, like triggering point for me to start experimenting with dieting is overhearing a neighbor talk about “the devil's in the pop tarts or something”, you know, like is that, is that you're saying like you can see how that could be so powerful. Just that one moment.

Jessie: Yeah.

Julie: Yeah, that's a lot. That's like a big burden, you know, for every moment, because there's going to be conversations where this happens all the time. Um, what, when, when you mentioned too like, having that spot of, oh my gosh, does this parent's kid have an eating disorder, or does this parent have an eating disorder? Are they going to teach my kid- and I don't think you said this in there, but this is where my brain goes: and are they gonna teach my kids how they have an eating disorder because of this rigidity? Yeah. Tell me about that. Like do you kind of have that kind of experience when in these conversations too?

Jessie: I think it's, it's like this gut feeling. This like, uh oh feeling of like, oh, like, like danger. Um, I don't think necessarily that it's going to spread like it's contagious. But, but like, um, I don't know. There's, there's just something icky there.

Julie: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah. It's a, it's a moment of, oh, there could be some learned behavior that, that's what I think about. And maybe-

Jessie: And I think too it's like, now that I'm talking about it like the uh oh feeling and the, and the anxiety. I think it's like a worry, right? It's like a worry or fear for like, oh, is this like, the starting of something that's really going to be pathological? And in like 20 years this kid who's not allowed to have a pop tart is going to be sitting in some therapist's office talking about how they weren't allowed to have pop tarts.

Julie: Yeah. Yeah. We could read the, the like dictation of the note from the therapist about the pop tart narrative. Yeah.

Jessie: And I was there. [Laughs]

Julie: And I was there!

Jessie: I witnessed it.

Julie: Like “wait, do I know you?? [Laughs] You also talk about some other things that were really interesting too that I, especially as some of us start digging into um, like food behaviors, you know, as a listener, you may be someone who has been recovering from an eating disorder for a number of years. And as you like, study diet culture, kind of connect things to like, class, elitism. Um, and you bring up that stuff in this letter too, tell me about that.

Jessie: The toaster strudel. [Laughs]

Julie: Yes.

Jessie: Yeah. Which I can't help but laugh. Kind of laugh at that part. I'm not quite sure why. But I do think that exists where, you know, I've talked to other people about this. And in preferences there, you know what you hear from people sometimes is like, well this convenience food isn't okay. But this thing is. And there's like, you know, like it feels like there's like, "poor people" food and "what's acceptable in our house." And that does happen.

Julie: Mhm. Oh yeah, For sure. Yeah. What are some other foods that you put in there? The toaster strudels-

Jessie: In the, in the like, the "bad convenience food"? Lunchables. For sure. Kind of keeping it with the kid, kid food.

Julie: Yes. That is so interesting too. I wonder how um, it's, just it's making me really think about like the parent, like us as parents and what our kids are eating as a reflection of ourselves, and um, and how we're parenting based on the food that they have. And um, that's just another burden. Just another heavy piece of shit to carry. I'm fully loaded with lots of cuss words, listener, right now. I apologize, but you know, it's just, it's just really, it's a lot in these interactions and um, you know, swimming against stream and existing in a body that the world tells you is that's not acceptable, and choosing to do this, like that's just so much for you to be doing all the time, and you know, in that the later part of your letter you talk about like, I usually don't respond. Um, how do you feel about that part? Like, do you struggle with like, how to respond?

Jessie: Sometimes I feel okay about it and other times I don't, I think sometimes I'm not sure kind of where that um, where we can like gently push on the edges of those boundaries and help people change, or help people see things in a little bit of a different way, but I'm also just so aware of like, like you said, like all these parenting choices, and you know, like um, goldfish crackers versus Annie's goldfish crackers, bunnies or whatever it is, you know, like are lunchables okay, white bread versus wheat bread, you know, like there's like, I don't want to add one more thing to that kind of shit pile that parents already have to deal with. And I think that's, when I don't respond, I think that's part of where I'm coming from is like, there's some things complicated there, and I don't want to add to it.

Julie: Like why add more shoulds?

Jessie: Yeah.

Julie: Like not responding is an okay response too. Yeah, yeah. Um, I was telling you before we pushed record, like I have a new friend who would just started to talk about dieting um, and it was kind of an interaction where it wasn't just the two of us talking, it was like a group of people plus some kids around. And so, when I read your letter, I thought of that, because I was like, this is something in real time, because I'm like, I thought this person I was gonna click with, and does this make it a deal breaker? What am I gonna do with this? When am I gonna say something?

And I just like, part of me is like, I'm clocked out right now. But then that, that's like, that's the privilege of my experience is being able to clock out. But also, I want her to ask my opinion so bad, and I'll be like-

Jessie: [Inaudible] ask my opinion on the WeightWatchers.

Julie: [Laughs] I, that was the diet too. I do have shirts that help the interaction. Like I have one that says no diet chat um, that I wear sometimes and, and you know, and also I will say this toom like some people, because the word diet is just so like unacceptable right now. Like I, I think it's the code word that so many people are like, oh, it's not a diet. Um, I don't think people have connected that. So um, at the layer of, of friendship that I'm talking about with this person, they already know what I do, but I don't think they realize what it's really about because like, diet culture is just so much part of the air we breathe and it's totally unchecked. And yeah, is there, is there anything that you do for yourself in these situations? Like I know you said you mostly don't respond, but is there anything like self care or response back or anything that you do to kind of help replenish the drain from that?

Jessie: I think, you know, being a therapist, I'm fairly good at this point, like 10 years into being a therapist, of like I can kind of like take a deep breath and like, feel my center and just be like, this isn't about me, this is this person, you know, sadly going through some stuff, and this is how it's coming out.

Julie: I, I um, can imagine some listeners being like, it just feels personal too, like, um

Jessie: [Inaudible] because I think especially if you're in a larger body and you hear some of this talk, I mean, that was one of my things that, you know, one of the thoughts that popped up was like, oh do they think I'm fat because I allow pop tarts in my house, which maybe some people do think that. But yeah, that's [inaudible].

Julie: Yeah. Yeah. So um, taking a step back and having compassion for yourself, but also compassion for this person when you have access to it, maybe, I can imagine it's not always there.

Jessie: Yeah. And when it's not there, it's just like I just divert, like alright well, whatever.

Julie: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And even like not responding in itself is like, a really beautiful boundary too. And um, I think that type of boundary, whenever people talk about boundaries I know, I know they always seem to talk about like, verbalizing like, hey this is my line, you crossed it, stop it. But there's also this like, I'm just not going to respond to it, like that in itself is its own beautiful.

Jessie: [Inaudible]

Julie: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. I'm not going to engage in that, and that may be more accessible. And I can recall similar conversations with people too who may have surface level, or maybe even deeper or engaged in this conversation just because they wanted to like, fit in with the group. I

don't know if it's something that you've experienced or just had other people share. Um, I also want to reach out to that person and be like, it's okay, like that's a part of this whole process too because it has too many layers anyway.

Jessie: [Inaudible] hasn't, you know, had that response, especially in a group setting, you know? Is it Mean Girls where it they're all like hating on their bodies. Like, I hate this part of me and I hate this. And then they kind of like get to the one character and she's like, what? And they're like, it's your turn, it's your turn to participate in the chatter about...

Julie: What did she say? I can't remember.

Jessie: I don't remember.

Julie: Lindsay Lohan.

Jessie: Okay.

Julie: Isn't it Lindsay Lohan who plays the character who's like, had been homeschooled so had never really experienced these kind of dynamics before. Yeah, and was like, uh I don't know what to say. That's funny that we can't remember. I've seen it enough. But um, anyway, well, before we wrap up, any other kind of things that we need to include before we hang up for now?

Jessie: The only, the only other thing that popped up for me writing this was just thinking about how scrutinized our bodies are. Like, I, I thought of, you know, when I was pregnant and like hearing all this talk about like, what are you eating? And oh, this baby's measuring big, oh, you're measuring big, and then like, okay, the baby is born and then it's like, okay, well, wow, this baby is suddenly like, oh, now she's too small, and like, no, you're too- and it's just like, I had this point where I was like, I'm just not going to give a shit, because it doesn't matter. But like, I had to get to a breaking point for that. And that definitely came up with me in thinking about this person and the diet culture stuff and being a parent in particular. It's just that the weight of those forces, it's a lot.

Julie: Yeah. What did the breaking point feel like?

Jessie: Freedom.

Julie: Mmhmm. Did it feel like, I mean, freedom to me feels like a super positive thing. Did it always feel that good?

Jessie: I think there was anger too. Like I was like, there's no winning. Like there is no winning this. This is not about like the actual objective content or like, what my kids eating or not eating or weighing or not. You know, it was like, it's not about that. And it, and it's like yeah, it doesn't, it didn't matter anymore. It was like a real fuck it kind of moment too of like, I'm done trying.

Julie: Yeah. Yes. You know, there's a lot of people who listen to the show who are in that spot, and that's an unfamiliar spot of like, oh I'm angry. Ooo I don't, I don't have experience with this

anger, or I'm not allowed to feel this anger, it feels really uncomfortable. So hearing you say like, when you're able to access that and sit with it a little bit longer, it does become the fuck it that becomes the freedom. It's like, that's what really, because you're right, we could keep playing this game about like, what we're gonna feed our kids and our body size to be exactly whatever, but it's like constantly chasing it, but never really having this destination that's promised and it's really cool to learn that like, yeah the destination actually doesn't exist, and it's really harming people, so yeah, jump off the train, grab your pop tarts, let's ride. [Laughs] Oh goodness. Well it was so good to talk to you.

Jessie: Yeah! Thanks for having me on.

Julie: I'm glad that we finally had a chance to talk and um, I don't know, like the way to, I'm thinking about ending this, like is there anything that you wish this person who had the pop tart interaction with you...like not necessarily like you would respond differently, but there is there something that you wish this person had a knowing about that would make things-

Jessie: I think if I could like-

Julie: -maybe a perspective shift.

Jessie: -take something from my brain and kind of put it into theirs, it would be like, it's just not that important. It's a pop tart.

Julie: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Um, Sumner Brooks and Ameer Sevenson just released a book called, I think it's like, *Raising An Intuitive Eater*, and they talk a lot about like, sometimes we just value certain things over others and um, the pop tart thing, I'm like, you know, the thing that I just really value is my relationship with my kids and not get into this like super nitty gritty kind of analysis of nutrients that they're eating. Like I just, that doesn't seem to be, have the payoff that I want.

Jessie: Yeah, you know, there's a lot. I know we could go on forever. But there's also control wrapped up in that too. Like I want to be controlling what my kid eats that much?

Julie: Yeah. What's the outcome with that? Um, yeah, lots of therapy dollars later in the future, which I highly encourage anyway. [Laughs] But just more struggle. Yeah. More struggle with relationship with food. So, oh, well, I appreciate you so much. Thank you for coming on the podcast. And if someone wants to know more about your work, is there a way for someone to connect with you?

Jessie: Um, I'm taking a social media break at the moment, but um.

Julie: Good for you.

Jessie: Google exists. You can find me [inaudible] You can put in like Jessie Spence therapist, North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina. And you'll find me. I have a website. Um, I'm

doing um, clinical supervision and consults for um, you know, anyone who wants to learn more about weight stigma, highly sensitive people, gender.

Julie: Mmhmm, awesome. Well, Google Jessie, find out where Jessie is that way. And I'll put, is it okay if I put your website in my show notes here?

Jessie: Yeah, yeah of course.

Julie: I will do that. Alright, well, thank you so much, and have a great rest of your day, Jessie.

Jessie: Thanks!

Julie: Bye!

Julie: So there you have it. I hope you enjoyed my conversation with Jessie Spence on this episode of the Find Your Food Voice podcast. Be sure to check out Jesse's website in the shownotes, they are an amazing mental health counselor, supervisor, and personal trainer. And I know they are going to have some insight into your own food peace journey. And before we get to food's letter back, because food has written back, Jessie, I want to say thank you so much for listening. And if you enjoyed this episode, I would love it if you left a rating, a review, you subscribed or shared the episode. Doing any of those small small things really helps more people find the show. And I am going to just say, I appreciate you so much in advance. Thank you for all your support over the years. And doing those acts of kindness really does make a big difference.

Julie (ad): This episode of the Find Your Food Voice podcast was brought to you by my PCOS Roadmap. You can get to it at [julieduffydillon.com/voice](http://julieduffydillon.com/voice). Alright, enough of all that, we are going to get to food's letter, but until next time. Take care.

Julie (as food): Dear Jessie: We appreciate how heavy food conversations can be. The swirl of fear, loss of control, anticipation, doom, fear of judgment, loss of access. What did we miss? It all holds up space in our collective unconscious. Some are aware of it. Some ignore it, and some are completely checked out and all in. Even though it sounds funny, pop tarts are a powerful tool to fuel, and at the same time used as a mocking mechanism for oppression. How did pop tarts get so powerful? Besides their deliciousness, nostalgia, and convenience, how did they become a way to leverage power, communicate class? Let people no one is better? Connecting with all of this is heavy. Holding that awareness, and if you can, access for compassion, for the person leveraging the pop tart or any diet culture tool, can soften that swirl, calm its energy, lessen its pull, and keep you grounded in your truth and hope for true fat liberation. Where do pop tarts land in fat liberation? They are meaningless and mean everything at the same time. Hold that complexity with compassion for you in the moment to keep you connected to freedom. Love, food.

Julie: Thank you for listening. I am Julie Duffy Dillon, and this is the Find your Food Voice podcast. Ready to join the anti diet movement and take the food voice pledge? Go to [julieduffydillon.com](http://julieduffydillon.com) and sign your name to the growing list of people saying no to diets and yes

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