

## RELATIONSHIPS

# IT'S NOT WHAT YOU EAT, IT'S WHY YOU EAT IT

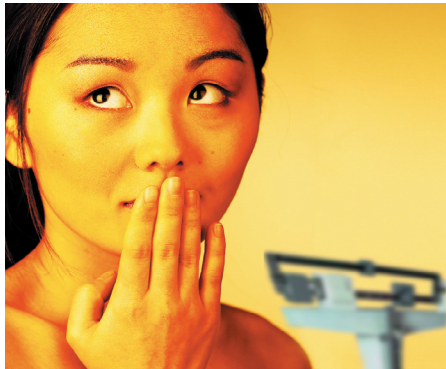
Relationship coach **Vicky van Praag** explores why it's not the calories in food that count, it's why we want to eat them

**D**o you ever find yourself putting something in your mouth when you really don't want to? You're not remotely hungry, but you fancy that piece of chocolate cake or that extra helping, and so in it goes. Then you feel weak and pathetic, without will power or control. And every time you slip up, you tell yourself that if only you had more discipline, if only you weren't so flawed, you could be thin.

**"Eating too much isn't about will power, and we shouldn't hate ourselves for thinking that we don't have it."**

Most people think that being thin is about self-control, and they are judgmental of bigger people who clearly don't have it. Most overweight people believe that reaching for that extra slice of cake is about will power. They know they don't want to eat it, but they seem unable to stop themselves. So they vow to cut down on sweets, eat the right foods, and join a gym. But before long, they find themselves reaching into the fridge again. Inevitably, trapped inside this cycle of determination and failure, self-loathing eventually sets in.

But eating too much isn't about will power, and we shouldn't hate ourselves for thinking that we don't have it. Naturally



thin people don't have more self-discipline than fat people, and they don't resist food; they simply don't want any more than their body wants. Naturally thin people eat when they're hungry and don't care how many calories their food contains. Their bodies can be trusted to burn off what they eat. More calories just means fewer hunger signals later on. Food doesn't mean anything more to them.

When we're carrying extra pounds, it can mean we aren't simply eating for physical reasons, but for emotional ones, too. If you don't think this is the case, look at your life. You will find the triggers: boredom, sadness, anger. A job you don't like, a relationship that is making you unhappy – you may be using food to avoid any or all of this. Some people use alcohol, some cigarettes, and others food. People with full, happy lives don't worry about food, and don't need distractions.

Going on a diet will not solve the problem. Diets only make you obsess about food more, not less. And diets can't work, since they only address the effect of overeating and not the cause. The real work in the battle to lose weight is internal, not external – and that is where you must begin.

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## BEING HAPPY

## WHAT DO WE TELL THE CHILDREN?



Talking to our kids about the London bombings is a good time to examine our own values, says counsellor **Ian Woodroffe**

**W**hen children ask about the London bombings, what on earth can we say?

How do you explain to a child that some people choose to pack their rucksack not with a lovely pink lunch box (probably packed by a loving mother), but with a box that is filled with the sole intent to murder as many as possible?

How do you explain that level of evil to children?

Maybe that is the only answer – that some people make evil decisions. The more complex issue is that such people think theirs is the right decision, which beggars belief. Maybe we have to engage in conversations with children that let them know we hope to create a safe world where we can travel without fear, and that means we must try to live in tolerance and peace with each other.

We have to help children (and adults) to understand that because some peaches in the box are rotten, not all peaches are rotten. While our world is made unsafe by such bombings, and we may become over-anxious about travel, our world of tolerance and understanding can be made unsafe too – and therein lies the evil of racism.

The problem with such events is that they can leave us feeling helpless. Maybe we have to challenge that helplessness by checking that we really do wish to stand up for tolerance, justice, and a peaceful world. Maybe we have to ask, "What have I done this week to enhance those qualities in the world around me?"

A hug for a child and a smile for an adult is one place to begin.

Long after this event has been superseded by some other news, there will be hundreds of people who may never sleep properly again, including those caught up in the evil event and those involved in rescuing them. I hope they have speedy access to all the help they will need.

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