

KATE'S STORY (part one)

Kate is 35, lives alone, has a good circle of friends who like to meet for book club, dinner or drinks after work. She takes her career as a financial planner seriously - she works hard to help her clients experience security and achieve their financial goals and often wins awards for being the branch's top performer.

But Kate has a problem. She has been single for about five years and while she routinely reminds herself that there is nothing wrong with being single, her hope is that one day she will be in a long term relationship. Her previous romantic relationship lasted about 3 years - things seemed promising at the beginning and the two of them sometimes talked about getting married. But over time she realized that her emotional needs were not going to be met, and deciding it would be better to be single than sorry, she eventually ended the relationship.

Still, five years on, at 35, things were not going as she had hoped.

She goes on the occasional date but so far no relationship has worked out. She finds the whole dating experience very discouraging and sometimes wonders if she should stop trying so hard and learn to be content being on her own. Over the years, her friends have tried to encourage her to 'not give up' and her mom has suggested that she work on her self-esteem, or use her gym membership so she would look better and feel better about herself. Although they are trying to help her, Kate sometimes feels worse after talking to her friends or her mom. In fact, as time goes on, she wants to talk less and less about herself and just keep her pain inside.

Kate works long hours, more overtime than anyone else in the office - she likes staying busy, as it helps her not think about her emotions. For Kate, her emotional pain takes many forms. She can't seem to get rid of lonely, sad, confused and frustrated feelings; she notices that she often feels tired, tense, lethargic, and generally uneasy. Her neck and shoulders are often stiff and her stomach feels upset. She often wants to stay home when her friends invite her out. Seeing them have fun, or seeing other couples together, is sometimes just too much for her. But when alone at home, she normally resorts to scrolling through facebook, binge watching Netflix, surfing the web looking for a new job or a nice vacation spot... But most frustratingly for her, she finds comfort in food.

She feels like she is in a trap: the more she experiences the distress of her loneliness, the more she works, or isolates herself, or soothes herself through food. And the more she works, the more stressed she gets. The more she isolates herself, the more lonely and upset she feels. And the more she eats, the more weight she gains, which makes her feel even worse about herself. When she decided to seek counselling, it was clear to her something had to change.

1. *Describe Kate's internal emotional experiences in terms of her thoughts, feelings, sensations and urges.*
2. *What avoidance strategies does she use?*
3. *What are the short term benefits of these strategies?*
4. *What is avoidance costing her in the long term?*