

An Education on Eating Disorders

Unfortunately, body image issues are prevalent among traditional-aged college students. The transition into college life brings new anxieties, feelings, and emotions, along with a newfound sense of control over how one treats his/her body. Students who don't know how to handle the stress of college sometimes turn to eating disorders as a way of regaining control and blocking out what is going on in their lives.

How to Help

At the heart of any eating disorder is a lack of emotional coping skills for dealing with stress, anxiety, or trauma. The persons' relationship with food becomes their mechanism for coping and a way to manage or alter mood states.

If you suspect that your student has an eating disorder:

- Learn as much as you can about eating disorders.
- Remember that disordered eating patterns do not necessarily mean that an eating disorder is present.
- Develop a support network in which you can talk openly about your feelings and frustrations – and where you can develop a plan of action to help your student.
- Directly express concern, tell him/her you care, and offer to help. Share details about behaviors you have noticed.
- Try to be objective and calm in discussing the behaviors that concern you. Avoid offering simple solutions – if it were that easy, there would not be a problem.
- Suggest that you and your student seek professional help from a physician and/or therapist.
- Avoid making comments about his/her appearance. Concern about weight loss may be interpreted as a compliment; comments about weight gain may be felt as criticism.

- It won't help to become involved in a power struggle. You can't force the person to eat. Offer continued support and refrain from judgment.
- Try to maintain as normal and healthy a lifestyle as possible.
- Do not blame yourself.



An Eating Disorder Primer

Knowing the signs and symptoms of the most common eating disorders and how to talk about body image issues can help you proactively address any potential concerns you notice.

Anorexia Nervosa Signs & Symptoms

Anorexia Nervosa has four primary symptoms:

- Resistance to maintaining a body weight that is at or above normal for age and height
- Intense fear of gaining weight and anxiety over being "fat," even if underweight
- Disturbance in how weight or body shape is experienced, overemphasis on weight or shape on self-evaluation, or denial of the seriousness of low body weight
- Amenorrhea (loss of menstrual period)
- Warning signs of anorexia include: comments about being fat in spite of weight loss, refusal to eat certain foods or categories of food combined with food-related rituals, denial of hunger and excuse-making around situations involving food, and excessive and rigid exercise routines.

Bulimia Nervosa Signs & Symptoms

Bulimia Nervosa has three primary symptoms:

- Frequent intake of abnormally large quantities of food, coupled with a sense of loss of control over eating

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- Use of compensatory “purging” behaviors after binges, such as self-induced vomiting, laxative or diuretic abuse, fasting, and/or compulsive exercise
- Extreme concern with body weight and shape
- Warning signs of bulimia include: evidence of binges including the rapid disappearance of large amounts of food or the existence of many empty food packages; evidence of purging such as trips to the bathroom after meals, signs and/or smells of vomiting, presence of empty laxative or diuretics packages; a rigid exercise routine even if sick or injured; the creation of complex schedules or rituals to make time for binge-and-purge sessions, and withdrawing from friends and activities.

- Physically, an individual with bulimia may present with swelling of the cheeks or jaw, stained teeth, and calluses on hands or knuckles from vomiting.

Binge Eating Disorder (or Compulsive Overeating)

Binge Eating Disorder has four primary symptoms:

- Recurrent binge eating similar to bulimia without the compensatory measures to rid oneself of the food
- Extreme discomfort from consuming large quantities of food
- Avoidance of social activities that draw attention to one’s body or involve food or eat only small amounts around others
- A history of cyclical dieting, depression, and weight gain