

6. Although the treatment of eating disorders requires professional help, family members can play an important part in the process.

You must also be prepared to be actively involved in your child's treatment and recovery.

The first thing that you should do if you suspect your child has issues with food and weight is to face the problem in a loving and non-judgmental way. Eating problems do not go away by themselves.

Seek help as soon as possible – the more entrenched the illness becomes the harder it is to overcome.

Make sure you get the right sort of help. Talk to a professional who has specific experience of eating disorders. As well as emotional support, you will need help to develop practical strategies to support you in:

- Monitoring your child's health and nutrition with the help of your GP
- Offering simple and nutritious meals which the family prepare and eat together
- Seeking whole family treatment to help support your child and to resolve underlying emotional issues

Sometimes residential care is unavoidable to protect your child's long-term health. This maybe another step towards your child's overall recovery process. Parents still have an important role to play during this stage of recovery.

It can be a long and difficult road – but remember, your child is likely to get better, quicker, with your support and involvement.

7. Acknowledge what is happening presently but don't forget to focus on the future.

Success comes on the day on which your child can eat normally, dress without anxiety and take part in daily life without stress. It's the day when joy returns to them.

Foundations UK is here to help you... and can offer personal consultations, phone consultations, and online help.

Please call Chloe on 0845 241 0962.

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A Parents' Guide to Eating Disorders

As a parent, it is very distressing to realise that your child may have an eating disorder.

But try to remember that there are many things you can do to help your child recover and regain control of their life.

1. What is an eating disorder?
2. The source of eating disorders
3. Signs and symptoms
4. How does it feel to have an eating disorder?
5. How eating disorders affect the whole family
6. Helping your child
7. Looking ahead



1. An eating disorder may seem to be about food and weight control, but experts say that instead it is a device people use to cope with depression and anxiety and to avoid other problems in their lives. They worry about whether other people find them attractive, their academic achievement and relationships.

Eating disorders are often associated with adolescence, but sometimes much younger children are affected. We often hear from parents of older children and even from people with grown-up children. Many people associate eating disorders with very restrictive eating. However, there are many kinds of eating disorders and binge eating and eating in secret can be just as troubling.

2. For parents, having a child with an eating disorder is an emotionally challenging experience. It can feel as if your child has been taken away from you. People often say, "The child I knew has disappeared".

It is likely that a person who relates to food unhealthily and/or is frightened about their

appearance and weight will often feel out of control and fearful about other things in their life.

Eating disorders have a wide variety of sources. These include:

- Peer pressure
- A lack of a sense of purpose
- A lack of maturity
- As a response to trauma
- To escape from bad feelings
- A feeling of 'emptiness' inside – even though on the outside the person seems well-balanced and successful
- As a result of taking in messages about size and shape
- Bullying – by the media, by other children etc, about desirable weights
- Feelings of inadequacy and low self esteem
- Knowing others with an eating disorder (either friends or through websites)

3. You are likely to be the first to spot that something is wrong with your child although it may be hard to pin down the cause.

Signs that your child may have an eating disorder include:

Signs that your child may have an eating disorder include:

- Restricting certain foods
- They lose or gain a lot of weight
- Talking about themselves as fat even though they are thin
- Counting calories in an obsessive way
- They admire thin celebrities and peers and compare themselves negatively to skinny role models
- They lack energy
- Family meals and social events are avoided
- Disappearing into the bathroom after eating
- Visiting the 'pro-ana' or 'pro-mia' websites that promote anorexia and bulimia
- Taking food from cupboards and eating it in secret.
- Staying up very late and not sleeping much during the night
- Exercising to excess

4. Eating disorders are painful and upsetting but for the person involved, coming to terms with the cause of the problem and confronting

their emotional issues can be even more difficult. This is one reason why eating disorders can become a way of life for many people and getting them to seek treatment can be challenging.

A young person with an eating disorder needs a safe therapeutic environment to explore underlying psychological and behavioral issues. This is where skilled and experienced professionals can make a real difference. They are there to help the young person with managing overwhelming feelings and developing a sense of self-esteem. With their help the link can be made between self-belief, emotional health and behavioral change.

5. The presence of a child with an eating disorder will deeply affect the entire family and parents are faced with many challenges.

Family therapy can help parents at many stages in the recovery process. Even before your child is willing to accept help it can be important to seek professional help which guides you to develop consistent strategies and present a united front while exploring ways to support every member of the family.

