

Eating Disorders

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Eating Disorders

The Benefits of healthy eating are widely recognised and promoted in schools and in the media. Therefore we are more preoccupied with diet and lifestyle than we have ever been. Eating disorders are seen in girls and boys.

Definitions

- **Anorexia Nervosa:** Worried all the time about being fat (even if they are skinny) and eat very little. They lose a lot of weight and in girls their periods stop.
- **Bulimia Nervosa:** Worried a lot about their weight. They alternate between eating nothing, and then having binges when they gorge themselves. They vomit or take laxatives to control their weight.

Definitions

- **Binge Eating (Compulsive Overeating):**
Periods of uncontrolled, impulsive or continuous eating beyond the point of feeling comfortably full. There is no purging, but there may be sporadic fasts or repetitive diets.
- **Other eating disorders** can include some combination of the previous disorders, they are still physically dangerous and emotionally draining.

Signs of Eating Disorders

- Weight loss or unusual weight changes.
- Missing meals.
- Eating little and avoiding 'fattening' foods.
- Avoiding eating in public/secret eating.
- Large amounts of food disappearing from cupboards.

Signs of Eating Disorders

- Believing they are fat when underweight.
- Exercising excessively.
- Pre-occupied with food.
- Cooking for other people.
- Going to toilet or bathroom immediately after meals.
- Using laxatives or vomiting to control weight.

Signs of Eating Disorders

In school it may be very difficult to monitor these signs. However staff might spot other signs

Signs of Eating Disorders

- Tiredness which affects normal activity
- Wearing excessive/baggy clothing
- Sensitivity to cold
- Appearance of fine downy hair on face and body
- Anxiety, depression, obsessive behaviour or perfectionism
- Poor concentration.
- Missing school.

Signs of Eating Disorders

- Not completing work
- Slow brain functioning and/or slow physical functioning.
- Lack of confidence, withdrawal from friends
- Signs of vomiting – discoloured teeth and lesions/calluses on knuckles.
- Dependency or over involvement with parents.
- Poor skin condition – spotty/dry.

What can help?

- Focus on self-esteem and healthy attitudes.
- Celebrate diversity and value individuals for who they are rather than what they can do.
- Offer a wide range of activities so everyone can enjoy and succeed.
- Being aware of overly competitive environments in classrooms.

What can help?

- Being aware of overly high parental expectations.
- Listen to pupils concerns about peers and provide support to the concerned individual. As they may experience rejection from their friend or may be worried about their well-being.

What to do?

- Contact parents and encourage them to seek **specialist** help. e.g GP, CAMHS. Working with the family is an important part of treatment.
- If you have concerns about a child/young person ask them if they are worried about themselves.
- Listen non-judgementally to the young person, if they want to talk. Remind them you cannot 'keep secrets'.
- Share your concerns with another member of staff e.g SENCO, SHA, Head Teacher.

What to do?

- Where you have concerns always contact parents to discuss, unless doing so would compromise the safety of the child/young person. In such cases this would be a safeguarding issue.

What to do?

- Eating disorders can be life threatening. Although older children may not want your help you **must** make it clear that you **must** inform another adult because you are worried about them. Over time, they are harder to treat, and the effects become more serious.

What to do?

- Where possible involve the young person in making decisions about how to do this. This will help them to feel they are maintaining some control of their circumstances.

Further Information

- The Eating Disorders Association:
www.edauk.com
- Young Minds: www.youngminds.org.uk
- Royal College of Psychiatrists (Mental Health and Growing UP series)
www.rcpsych.ac.uk