

You Think Someone Has An Eating Disorder...What Should You Do?

Speak Up!

The symptoms of an eating disorder are physically and emotionally destructive and can be life-threatening. The behaviors may also signal severe underlying depression, anxiety, and/or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Heed the Signs

Anorexic behavior includes extreme weight loss, obsessive dieting, hyperactivity, and distorted body perception (e.g., a thin person thinks they are fat). Clues of Bulimia Nervosa are subtle: your friend/loved one may eat a great deal of food, and then go directly to the bathroom. They may misuse laxatives or speak about a "magic method" of eating a lot and not gaining weight. A person with binge eating disorders will consume an abnormally large amount of food and feel guilty or shameful.

Be Gentle But Persistent

Tell your friend/loved one that you are concerned about them. Listen sympathetically. Don't expect a person with an eating disorder to admit there is a problem right away. Give it time.

Don't Discuss Eating Habits

The starving or bingeing is NOT the problem; it is the smokescreen over the larger problem. Do not tell someone with an eating disorder to "just go ahead and eat," or "just stop eating so much." Do not recommend that he or she join a weight loss program.

Focus on Their Apparent Unhappiness

Unhappiness may motivate a person with an eating disorder to seek help. Point out how tired and irritable they have been lately and emphasize it does not have to be that way.

Be Supportive

This is the most important thing you can do. Show your friend/loved one you believe in them – it will make a difference in their recovery.

Seek Help

Don't deal with it alone. If you are not making any headway or your friend/loved one is becoming self-destructive, confide in a trusted family member or a medical or mental health professional. Tell your friend/loved one why: "I have to involve other people because I care about you and want you to be helped."

Source: Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc. (ANRED) www.anred.com

Please note: ANRED information is not a substitute for medical psychological evaluation and treatment. For help with the physical and emotional problems associated with eating disorders, talk to your physician and a mental health professional.
