Family and Friends: Part of the Treatment Team for Eating Disorders

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emilyprogramfoundation.org
What is the role of a family member or friend in recovery from an eating disorder?

• Dr. Cynthia Bulik, a world renowned and respected expert, has this to say: “There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that there is a parenting style that causes or leads to eating disorders. Families are our best allies in treating these illnesses and should not be blamed.”

We know that families, loving friendships, support, guidance, and compassion are healing and an essential tool for recovery.
What happened in my family?
Anna Selina Westin
November 27, 1978 – February 17, 2000
How did I move from despair to HOPE?

• We had to move forward, not blame ourselves, transform the horror into something positive. HOPE. Anna Westin Foundation (now The Emily Program Foundation) and the Anna Westin House.
• Address the multiple factors that contribute to eating disorders including the media, the fashion industry, the myths and misunderstandings that are prevalent.
• Speak often, with passion, to all who will listen.
• Create access to care and HOPE for the future.
• We needed to take Action: to get INVOLVED and be Anna’s voice for change – ADVOCACY
• Death ends a life, not a relationship.
What has changed in the past 13 years?

• Overall greater understanding and awareness of eating disorders.
• More research which has led to better prevention and treatment.
• Changes in laws.
• Less shame for having a mental health problem.
• More help for friends and family.
• More acceptance of the role of family and friends in recovery.
Eating Disorders are not an Adolescent Phase!

- Serious, life threatening illnesses that are influenced by:
  - Biology/heredity
  - Personality traits
  - Culture and society

The best treatment for and eating disorder is prevention.
Eating Disorders Happen for Many Reasons

• Eating disorders are not a choice; they are not a lifestyle. Eating disorders are not behavior problems but behavior has to change to recover from an eating disorder.

• The person can’t ‘just stop doing it’. They need help.

• Eating disorders can be a way to cope, communicate, and solve problems to help an individual feel whole, secure, safe, and in control.

• Once we can work on other ways to cope and what the person needs, we can help them to make changes.

• A lot of the ideas that people with eating disorders have are strongly supported by societal/environmental norms and are hard to figure how to deal with.

• Parents/friends do NOT cause eating disorders.

• Family and friends can help the person they love recover.
With so many things that can lead to an eating disorder, asking “Why?” has limited value.

When working to recover or support someone in recovery, the more useful question is HOW………..
Tips to help you identify if your child is developing an eating disorder:

- Eat with your child as often as you can.
- Watch for changes in your child’s eating habits.
- Listen to how your child talks about food.
- Watch for a change in mood and attitude.
- If your child eats large amounts of food constantly but does not realize how much he is eating, or isn’t enjoying it, especially during times of stress could indicate obsessive eating.
Treatment

• Treatment can look a lot of ways:
  – Residential, or 24 hour care
  – Use of multi-disciplinary team including therapist, a dietitian, and a doctor
  – attending a group for an hour or for most of the day
• Treatment is dependent on what the person needs
• Family involvement in the treatment process is especially important
• Insurance – know your policy.
Recovery

• Recovery from an eating disorder is possible; people do get better.
  – Recovery is different for everyone

• People can be in treatment for awhile; it takes time.

• Even if someone “looks” better it doesn't mean they really are. You can’t judge recovery based on looks.

• Family involvement in recovery is especially important
How to help a family member or friend:

• Read, learn, try to understand.
• Understand your “role”.
• Support and guidance.
• A helping hand.
We believe that involvement of family and friends is crucial to recovery

Remember:

- Recovery is possible and it is a long, hard road.
- Eating disorders harm physical, emotional, social and emotional development.
- You are important and your support will help.
Why get involved?

- We know that loving families, friendships, support, guidance, and compassion are healing.
How does someone change?

• It’s a process. It takes time. It can seem painfully slow. It can be frustrating. Your patience will be tested. It can feel like a fight!
Know Someone Struggling?

• GET HELP FROM OTHERS WHO HAVE MORE EXPERIENCE.

• TALK TO THE PERSON
  – What are the things you are concerned about?
    • What are you seeing or experiencing that is making you worry?
    • What are others saying?
  – Communicate concerns either by yourself or with someone else
    • “I notice that you hardly ever eat lunch with us anymore.”
    • “I hear you talk about food and dieting a lot and this worries me.”
  – Ask for feedback
    • “Can you tell me more about these things?”
    • “What do you think about the things I’ve mentioned?”
  – Have information on resources available
    • “We could find someone appropriate to talk to about this.”
  – Check back/ask them how they are doing
What can you do?

Communicate:
• Empathy & Compassion
• Speak from your experience
• Keep trying to communicate
• Express affection and appreciation
• Avoid following the eating disorder’s “rules” of blaming, demanding, and attempting to control
• Avoid arguing or getting into power struggles
• Avoid commenting on weight or appearance: instead of saying “you look great” try saying “it’s great to see you” or “your eyes are sparkling today!”
• Keep trying to understand and validate the person: “I know this is painful for you.” “You seem sad today.”
• Ask for support and take good care of yourself.
Recovery defined:

A peaceful relationship with food, eating, body and self.

Food, eating and body are enjoyable elements of living, loving, and community.
How can I tell the difference between “normal eating” and “abnormal eating”?
People with eating disorders come in all shapes and sizes.

You cannot tell if someone has an eating disorder by looking at them. It is important to know that weight must be considered in context.

There are 3 billion women who don’t look like supermodels and only 8 who do!
Healthy Looks Different for Everyone
Health at Any Size: why are we losing the “war on obesity”

• Body fat can be beneficial
• Fat in the arteries and fat on the body are different and not necessarily related
• Men/women classified as “overweight” who exercise regularly and are physically fit have lower all-cause death rates than thin men/women who do not exercise
• Weight loss does not necessarily improve health or lengthen life
• “Thinner is better” myth – body weight is fairly unrelated to health status and death
Prevention: Things we can all do

Resist the urge to diet. DIETS DON’T WORK IN THE LONG RUN and are a risk factor for eating disorders.
Prevention: Things we can all do

- **Think about your body in terms of how it functions:**
  - “I hate the way my legs look” to “My legs help me to run fast”

- **Stand up to comments about weight and appearance**
  - “Look at her, she is so skinny” to “You may think that but does that really matter?”
  - Change the conversation. “You look great” to “you are great”!

- **Develop strong coping skills not related to eating or exercise**
  - Talk about your feelings with people you trust
  - Develop a “self-care toolkit” for times when you have strong emotions (e.g., journaling, relaxing activities)
You Can Make a Difference in the Community

• The media has a big influence on what we believe.
• Media has an impact on the whole community and uses this power to advertise unrealistic images of body shapes.
• Spend your money on brands that have advertising that makes you feel good.
• Talk to your friends and family about feeling, not looks. Avoid judging based on looks.
• Love yourself for all the things you are.
Where We Are Trying to Go

Wouldn’t it be great if we all were able to..................

• Eat and be active in tune with the body’s needs
• Eat when hungry and stop when satisfied
• Eat a variety of foods without a fear of fat
• Focus on health
• Appreciate the body
• Think critically about media
• Employ many coping skills
Remember:

- We don’t need to change our bodies, we need to change our minds!
I STAND
FOR A HATE-FREE FUTURE
FOR EVERY BODY.
Stop weight bigotry.

Health At Every Size®

CHARLOTTE BILTEKOFF | PHOTO: SARA SEINBERG

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I STAND FOR HAVING A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE FOR LITTLE GIRLS WHO LOOK LIKE ME.

Stop weight bigotry. Health At Every Size®

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I ROLL

FOR SOLIDARITY AT EVERY SIZE,
BECAUSE WE NEED EACH OTHER.

Stop weight bigotry. Health At Every Size®
“May all your love, joy and pain, all your fears and desires lead you to your own promises. May your dreaming never end and your voice never die.”
Anna Westin, January 2000

Thank you for participating. Your involvement will help your loved one recover.
Resources

www.aedweb.org
www.eatingdisorderscoalition.org
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
www.tcme.org
www.mollykellogg.com
www.about-face.org
www.something-fishy.org