Helping Someone with an Eating Disorder: Advice for Families, Friends and Treatment Professionals

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PARTNERS IN ACT

• In providing support for others, uncomfortable and unwanted feelings may arise that get in the way of your support

• Goal today is to provide tools as you create a recovery focused environment for your loved one
FAMILIES DO NOT CAUSE EATING DISORDERS!

And, you can create a Recovery Focused Environment at home!

• Dramatic Powerful Change is Possible!
• Do what works
• Be true to your values
• Be part of the solution!
The Family Puzzle
Family and Friends are the Front Line of Defense
We Can’t Fix It

Stress Reduction Kit

Bang
Head
Here

Directions:
1. Place kit on FIRM surface.
2. Follow directions in circle of kit.
3. Repeat step 2 as necessary, or until unconscious.
4. If unconscious, cease stress reduction activity.
What is wrong with trying to fix it?

Eating Disorder → Efforts to Fix

Efforts to Fix → Control

Control → Power struggle

Power struggle → isolation

isolation → Eating Disorder
Power Struggles
Connection

I see me through your eyes.
Family Life in Context
Be Present

Mind Full, or Mindful?
Why Be Present?

• Increases awareness
• Acceptance of our current reality
• Research shows being present decreases stress, improves memory, makes you smarter, improves health, and makes your life better!
What’s on Your Mind?
Being Present/Mindfulness

What does mindfulness mean to you?

awareness, engagement, noticing, observing
Being Present/Mindfulness

• Consciously bringing your attention to the present moment with openness, interest, curiosity
• Engaging and focusing with genuine interest and openness

ACTivity: 5 things you see, hear, feel
When We’re not Present
Ways to Practice

• Practice staying – learn to stay
• Fully focus on a hobby or chore
• Drive to work with no radio
• In line, pay attention to how it feels to stand still or shift your body
• Notice the wind, air, rain, birdcalls, rustling noises
Mind as Puppy
Mind as Kitten
Open Up

The mind is like a parachute. It doesn't work unless it's open.
Acceptance

You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn how to surf.
- Jon Kabat-Zinn -
Acceptance

Making room for unpleasant feelings and sensations instead of trying to suppress them or push them away

ACTivity: Four-Step Experiment
Layers of Acceptance

• Recovery takes time
• The person with the disease must move through a process of accepting that they have a disease
• Support people also move through a process of acceptance
Avoidance

• Ways in which we try to get rid of, avoid, or escape unpleasant feelings.
• We use strategies to attempt to control how we feel.

Two categories of Control Strategies:

*Fight strategies*: attempts to dominate or fight your unwanted thoughts and feelings

*Flight strategies*: involves running away or hiding from unwelcome thoughts and feelings
How to Help

• Ask open questions about feelings
• Listen, Empathize, and Validate
• Offer support
• Give a hug
• Just be there
Acceptance Skills

- Make room for more than one thought and emotion at a time
- Let go of “should”
- Accept your emotions
- Take a non-judgmental stance
Skills to deal with negative thoughts:

• “I am noticing I am having the thought that...”
• Naming the story
• Putting the thought to funny voice or music
• Ask yourself, “Is this thought helpful?” (Regardless of if it’s true or not)
I'm so stressed out over being stressed out that I can't even remember why I'm stressed out.... and it's stressing me out!
Remember...

- Aim of opening up is NOT to feel better, nor to get rid of unwanted thoughts
- Aim of opening up IS to relate to thoughts and feelings differently
Do What Matters

• Values
• Committed Action
Values
Values

• “Why” or “process” in life that provides inspiration, purpose and meaning
• Identity separate from the illness
• Empowering
Values or Rules?

- Values: Important, meaningful, open
- Rules: Rigid, “should”, confining
Boundaries

Do you have healthy boundaries?

The confidence to politely let the people around you know that they need to respect the rules.

FB/Sye of Relief
Values

Values are like glue that binds the tiniest action to biggest long term goal

A little step may be the beginning of a great journey

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Committed Action

• Doing the uncomfortable
• Taking action in line with values
• Doing so regardless of how many times you get off track
Committed Action

Willingness to accept whatever discomfort your mind provides you AND commit to your values and the behavior changes they imply.
Communication Skills

• The focus of communication is on you as an expert of Yourself.
• Your job in communicating is to take responsibility for your own emotions by communicating honestly and openly about what you feel.
• Walking on Eggshells ↔ I-Statements
I-Statements

Carefrontation model

• Look person in eye, state their name.
• Say “This is about me and my feelings. When I (see, hear, observe) you ____ , I feel ____ .
• Optional: this reminds me of a time when ____ (not about person you are talking to).

Example: “WHEN I see food wrappers in your room, I FEEL nervous you may be binging.”
Communication Skills

“Curious Listening”

• People often become defensive or shut down when questioned.

• **Validating does not mean agreement:**

• “I don’t agree with you but I can tell that this is very painful for you”
Active Listening
Roles in Communication

• The speaker and the listener role are two different roles.

• As the listener, listen. Focus on the speaker and not on your come backs, explanations, or concerns. This is not the time to plan what you are going to say next, you aren’t tuned in if you are planning a zinger or your response.

• Listening doesn’t mean you agree! You are providing a place to be heard.
Active Listening

The Active Listening Skill Set

- Pay Attention
- Share
- Summarize
- Clarify
- Reflect
- Hold Judgment
SUPPORT

- Listen or Problem solve?
- Open Up
- Validate Feelings
- Find solutions together
- Connect
Partners in Recovery

• Family and friends can provide valuable support for the person in recovery
• Action speaks louder than words
• Support through example
• Do your own work – Backburner issues:
• List 3 backburner issues you would be dealing with if the eating disorder wasn’t a problem
Do what you say and say what you mean!

WELL DONE IS BETTER THAN WELL SAID

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
Questions:

1. Is your communication open and validating?
2. Does your relationship support each person’s values?
3. Are you willing to accept your loved one as they are and do what works to support their recovery?
Resources

• The Happiness Trap – Russ Harris
• ACT With Love – Russ Harris
• Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life – Steven C. Hayes
• Man’s Search for Meaning– Victor Frankl
It’s a journey!

Success is a journey not a destination. The doing is usually more important than the outcome.
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