

Top Tips to Help You Support Your Child

Alertness

Be alert to the early stages of an eating disorder – changes in your child’s eating over a few weeks or weight loss which is not caused by a physical illness.

Communication

Talk to your child early and openly. If they don’t want to talk to you, get a trusted friend or teacher to talk with them. Here are some things you might talk about:

- What is on their mind?
- How can you support them to fight this?
- Do they want distraction or rather discuss how to cope with their distress about eating to help them at meal times?

Make sure that your communication with your child is not just about eating and that your relationship has some quality time outside of their eating disorder.

Try to encourage your child to see the eating disorder as a separate person or thing. You could perhaps give it a name. So you could say for example: ‘That is the anorexia talking.’ ‘That is ‘name’ talking.’ This can really help.

Managing emotions

Try not to feel personally attacked. Try not to get angry or despairing with your child. It’s not their fault. Remain calm with them – it works much better!

Remember, you are all fighting this illness.

When your child is calm, ask them how they want you to manage arguments.

Remember, occasionally, an eating disorder is a sign of a child who has or is being sexually abused.

Seeking help

Seek help from your GP early. Don’t bury your head in the sand.

Mealtime programme

If you are convinced that your child has an eating disorder, talk with your partner and start a mealtime programme:

- No negotiation during the meal
- Plan meals and don't be diverted by your child
- Distraction, not congratulations – the eating disorder takes congratulations as a sign of defeat and it is out to win!
- Avoid diet foods
- Avoid your child making immediate visits to the toilet after meals or retreating to her room
- Your child stays out of the kitchen and food shops

Acceptance

Accepting your child does not mean that you are accepting their eating disordered behaviour.

Siblings

Try not to let siblings get involved with supervising meals for their ill sister or brother.