Alpha Chi Omega
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NEDA
National Eating Disorders Association

Disordered Eating Resource

This resource offers guidance on the early signs that someone may be developing an eating disorder, practical ways to show support when a friend is struggling and clear direction on when it's time to reach out for professional help.

WHAT IS DISORDERED EATING?

Disordered eating covers a spectrum of irregular habits and attitudes toward food, body shape and weight that may cause distress or harm. These patterns may be situational or short-term and fluctuate depending on stress, schedule and emotions. These behaviors do not meet the clinical frequency, duration or severity required for an eating disorder diagnosis. These routines can include dieting, skipping meals, fasting, restricting food groups, binge eating or using methods like laxatives or excessive exercise in attempts to manage weight.

WHAT IS AN EATING DISORDER?

Eating disorders are diagnosable mental and physical illnesses characterized by persistent disturbances in eating behaviors, significant psychological distress and impairment in daily routines. To qualify as having an eating disorder, a person must meet the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR) criteria for conditions such as anorexia nervosa (AN), bulimia nervosa (BN), binge eating disorder (BED), avoidant restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID) and other specified feeding and eating disorders (OSFED). Eating disorders are long-term and recurring behaviors that require professional treatment.

WARNING SIGNS OF DISORDERED EATING BEHAVIOR

Early detection and timely treatment improve chances of recovery. Recognizing warning signs can help you identify when you or someone else may need support or professional care. Observable behaviors that may indicate disordered eating or an eating disorder include:

EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

- Preoccupation with dieting, weight or body size/shape
- Avoiding meals or making excuses to skip eating
- Feeling out of control or ashamed when eating
- Withdrawing from social activities
- Frequent body checking or noticeable mood swings
- Fear of choking or vomiting when eating
- Only eating certain textures of food

PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Noticeable weight fluctuation (up or down)
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Menstrual irregularities
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling cold all the time
- Cuts and calluses across top of finger joints
- Dental problems
- Poor wound healing
- Muscle weakness

STARTING A SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATION ABOUT EATING BEHAVIORS

Use these National Eating Disorders Association tips and phrases to help start a conversation about disordered eating behaviors. They can guide you in expressing concern and offering support to someone who may be experiencing problematic eating patterns:

1. **Learn the facts first.** Educate yourself about eating disorders to better understand signs, myths and behaviors to help you approach the conversation with accurate information.
2. **Plan what you want to say.** Think through or rehearse your talking points to reduce anxiety and communicate clearly and compassionately. Consider asking open-ended questions and statements in your conversation such as: *"How have you been feeling about things like food, stress or body image?", "Would you feel comfortable sharing how you've been feeling around eating lately?" or "I'm here to listen if you want to talk about anything that's been on your mind including your relationship with food."*
3. **Identify a comfortable space to talk.** Find a setting without distractions where the person won't feel exposed or rushed.
4. **Use "I" statements and focus on specific behaviors.** Share observations you have seen or behaviors you witnessed instead of making accusations. Start by saying: *"I've noticed changes lately" or "I want to check in on how you're feeling" and transitioning into "I'm not here to label anything" or "I just want to understand and support you."*
5. **Encourage seeking help.** Emphasize that support is available and that reaching out to a professional is an important next step. This may sound like: *"You don't have to go figure this out alone" or "I want to support you in whatever direction feels best for you."*

REMEMBER: *When discussing eating behaviors, the words we choose matter. Avoid language that suggests an eating disorder diagnosis. Only licensed medical or mental health professionals are qualified to make an assessment.*

SCAN THE QR CODE TO TAKE A MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING

IF YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR OR A LOVED ONE'S EATING BEHAVIORS, HELP IS AVAILABLE. A CONFIDENTIAL MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING CAN GIVE YOU INSIGHT INTO WHAT YOU'RE FEELING AND HELP YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING. GET PERSONALIZED RESULTS AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: NATIONAL EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION (NEDA)