



# FOR PARENTS



## *For Parents*

Eating disorders not only affect the individual suffering, but those around them as well – specifically parents. Parents want so much to help their beloved child, but often times anything they may say will be met with anger, frustration, denial, or just plain avoidance.

### **DO NOT DENY A PROBLEM EXISTS!**

So often, a parent cannot believe that their child is capable of hurting himself/herself by means of an eating disorder. Since eating disorders are so secretive, manipulative, and/or occur among perfectionists, it is very difficult to see that a problem exists. Here are some of the most common warning signs associated with Anorexia, Bulimia, and Binge Eating Disorder. If your child displays any/all of the following signs and symptoms, seek help immediately. The earlier the intervention, the more likely the recovery.

- Distorted Body Image (Body Dysmorphic Disorder)
- Binging and Purging
- Secretive Eating– Missing Food
- Intense, dramatic mood swings
- Feelings of guilt after eating
- Visits to the bathroom after meals
- Tooth decay
- Disgust and shame after overeating
- Complaints of being cold
- A high need for control
- Absences of three consecutive menstrual cycles in post-menarcheal females
- Avoids eating in public, in front of others
- Swollen glands in neck & puffiness in cheeks
- Excessive and compulsive exercise regimes
- Hides food in anticipation of a binge
- Constant sore throat
- Feels like he/she has no control over food
- Hair loss, paleness, and dizziness
- Wearing loose or multiple layers of clothing
- Broken blood vessels in eyes
- Abuse of laxatives, diet pills, ipecac, and/or diuretics
- Very poor self-esteem

## *Helpful Hints*

1. Never engage in power struggle over food. **YOU WILL NOT WIN!**
2. Keep the lines of communication open with your child.
3. If your therapist/counselor suggests family and/or couples counseling, **DO IT.**
4. Keep in mind your own behaviors and attitudes towards food, weight, and coping skills.
5. Educate yourself about eating disorders.

Just because your child develops an eating disorder, it **DOES NOT** mean you have failed as a parent. Try not to blame yourself and realize that there are many causes that contribute to the development of an eating disorder. Remember to focus on helping your child get better and be proactive. There is help available.

## **Tips on how to prevent an eating disorder in your child**

- \* Teach your child/children that there is more to a person than the physique. It is what's on the inside that truly counts.
- \* Avoid negative statements and teasing about weight, body shape and size.
- \* Teach your child/children that there are no "good" or "bad" foods. All foods are great in moderation.
- \* Encourage physical activities for fun and join them. (I.e. bike ride, nature walk, etc.)
- \* Model and encourage healthy eating in front of your child/children (not dieting). If they constantly hear you complain about your weight or needing to be on a diet, they will learn similar behaviors.
- \* Do not use food as a reward or a positive reinforcement.
- \* Educate yourself about recognizing the warning signs of an eating disorder.
- \* Compliment your child/children on their talents, accomplishments, intelligence, and values.
- \* Do not force your child/children to eat or not eat. Do not engage in power struggles.
- \* Never hold your child/children back from activities because of the type of clothes needed (I.e. bathing suit).
- \* Teach your child/children to listen to hunger. Encourage eating when hungry and stopping when full.
- \* Always make sure that there is open line of communication available between you and your child/children.
- \* Teach your child/children to love themselves for who they are and as they are...

## **Suggested Reading**

*Anorexia Nervosa: A Survival Guide for Families, Friends, and Sufferers.*

By: Janet Treasure

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*Bulimia: A Guide for Family and Friends.*

By: Roberta Trattner Sherman, Ph.D. and Ron Thompson, Ph.D.

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*The Anorexia Diaries A Mother and Daughter's Triumph over Teenage Eating Disorders*

By: Linda M. Rio and Tara M. Rio

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*Your Dieting Daughter: Is She Dying for Attention?*

By: Carolyn Costin, M.A., M.Ed., MFCC

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*Surviving an Eating Disorder: Perspectives and Strategies for Family & Friends.*

By: Michelle Siegel, Ph.D., Judith Brisman, Ph.D., and Margot Weinschel, Ph.D.

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*Father Hunger: Fathers Daughters & Food.*

By: Margo Maine, Ph.D

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*When Your Child Has an Eating Disorder: A Step-by-Step Workbook for Parents and Other Caregivers.*

By: Abigail H. Natenshon

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*Help Your Teenager Beat an Eating Disorder*

By: James Lock, MD, Ph.D. & Daniel Le Grange, Ph.D.

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*Preventing Childhood Eating Problems.*

By: Jane R. Hirschmann, CSW and Lela Zaphiropolous, CSW

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**The Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness**  
**P.O. Box 13155**  
**North Palm Beach, FL 33408**  
**(866) 662-1235 \* (561) 841-0900 \* FAX (561) 841-0972**  
**[www.eatingdisorderinfo.org](http://www.eatingdisorderinfo.org)**