

REMEMBER

- People with disordered eating use their behaviours around food to deal with uncomfortable or painful emotions. Restricting food can be used to feel in control. Overeating temporarily soothes sadness, anger, or loneliness. Purging is often used to combat feelings of helplessness and self-loathing.
- As illogical as it may seem to you, the young person is having a deep need being met through their behaviour. Because it feels like it works, stopping feels like a loss.
- Conversations around disordered eating can feel very threatening. Don't take it personally if the person becomes angry or defensive. If this happens, try to remain calm, focused, and respectful. Make it clear that you'll be there in whatever way they need, whenever they're ready.
- Inviting someone into places where of belonging and are significance/ contribution - right in the middle of the messiness - illustrates that God has a place for them in his heart no matter what.

RECOGNIZE

- Keep an eye out for teens whose focus and conversation keep going back to their body, appearance and weight. You might see them doing excessive amounts of exercise or obsessing about food, calories or nutrition.
- Disordered eating is an outward manifestation of inner pain. It is an attempt to find some control in a world that feels full of anxiety, uncertainty and powerlessness.
- Behaviours may include any extreme weight control behaviour such as dieting, bingeing & purging, skipping meals, hiding food, under-eating, over-eating, or excessively exercising.
- Disordered eating can lead to heart problems, kidney damage, reproductive issues, memory loss, and death.

RESPOND

Recovering from disordered eating is a long and difficult path. Those who have walked this road say that it involves making major changes in patterns of eating and activities around food, walking away from weight control methods, viewing their bodies differently, and learning how to embrace and express their emotions in healthy ways. This does not happen overnight and definitely doesn't happen because someone in their world forces these changes on them. So how do we step in?

- **Be gentle but direct** in discussing your concerns: Tell them what you've seen and that you suspect they have some deep feelings stuck inside. Let them know their feelings matter and you want to help them find help for their hurts.
- **Find a team:** It will take a wider community of professionals to assist the teen through healing and coming to health—including a doctor who understands disordered eating (not all do), a counsellor, and supportive friends. Work with their parents to help create the team.
- **Don't over simplify:** Disordered eating is not the same as other addictive behaviours and it's not a simple change of behaviour that is needed. Remember that this is about more than food and it's not your job to make them eat.

- **Don't be judgemental:** Don't tell a teen that disordered eating is 'sick' or 'unnecessary' or 'self-destructive'.
- **Don't get caught up in the behaviours:** Keep the focus on the reality of their inner pain.
- **Don't give your 'advice'** on better eating or exercise habits. Your job is support, not diagnosis or treatment.

RESOURCES

www.lookingglassbc.com/hand-in-hand/ - The only non-profit in Canada offering residential treatment for eating disorders as well as face to face online counselling.

Keltyeatingdisorders.ca - A great overview to help understand the complexity of the issue.

www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/stories-of-hope - A whole lot of real-people; encouragement for the journey.

