

# Dialectical Behaviour Therapy and Treatment

Thursday, March 2, 2023

## How Can I Support My Friend with An Eating Disorder?



In your lifetime, it's likely that you will know and love people who are battling eating disorders. [Research](#) estimates that 9% of the U.S. population, or 28.8 million Americans, will have an eating disorder in their lifetime. Thus, many of you have come here searching for answers, wondering, "How can I support my friend with an eating disorder?", "What are the warning signs to look out for?" and "If you suspect that a friend has an eating disorder, what should you do?"

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## What Are The First Things You Should Know About Eating Disorders?

**Eating disorders** – including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder – are complicated and serious conditions that involve severe disturbances in people's eating behaviors, as well as a preoccupation with food and body image. These behaviors are often fueled by negative thoughts or painful emotions. Restricting food can be used to feel in control and overeating can temporarily soothe sadness, anger, or loneliness.

Over time, people with an eating disorder lose the ability to see themselves objectively and obsessions over food and weight overcome everything else in their lives. The nature of these illnesses makes them one of the deadliest mental illnesses, second only to opioid overdose.

## Warning Signs Of An Eating Disorder

It can be challenging to differentiate between an eating disorder, general self-consciousness, weight concerns, and dieting. In addition, those with eating disorders may go to great lengths to hide their behaviors. As time progresses, however, the warning signs can become easier to spot:

### Restricting Food

- Obsessions with counting calories, reading food labels or weighing portions
- Taking diet pills or other drugs (stimulants, amphetamines) to promote weight loss
- Avoiding meals or situations involving food
- Restrictive food rituals, including excessive chewing or [refusal to eat certain foods](#)

### Bingeing

- Hoarding and hiding of food, especially “junk food” and sweets
- The disappearance of large amounts of food in short periods of time
- Empty food packages and wrappers, potentially also hidden
- Secrecy and isolation

### Purging

- Leaving right after a meal or frequent bathroom trips
- Running sink or shower after eating to hide sounds of purging
- Using excessive amounts of breath mints or mouthwash
- Taking laxatives or diuretics unnecessarily
- Discolored teeth

### Body Dysmorphia

- Extreme preoccupation with body or weight (constant weigh-ins, spending time in the mirror inspecting and criticizing their body)
- Dramatic changes in weight (weight loss, weight gain, or constant fluctuations in weight)
- Fear of gaining weight
- Attempts to hide weight under clothes or by avoiding social events

If you notice any of these warning signs, it may be time to speak up. It can be difficult to combat fears that you might be wrong, might say the wrong thing, or potentially upset the other person. While these worries are valid, it is important to remember that this person may need help that they are afraid to ask for. Without treatment, eating disorders only get worse.

## How To Talk To Your Friend About Their Eating Disorder



You've noticed some warning signs of an eating disorder, and you are preparing for a tough conversation. Consider how you will initiate the conversation and how you can make your friend feel as safe and supported as possible.

## Pick A Good Time

Find a time when you can speak to your friend in private and free from distractions or interruptions. Make sure that you are both feeling emotionally calm and regulated.

## Share Why You Are Concerned

Without lecturing or criticizing, share what you have noticed and why you are worried. You do not need to immediately offer solutions – just express that you love them and want to help.

## Be Prepared For Defensiveness Or Denial

This conversation may initially feel threatening to someone with an eating disorder. Individuals with eating disorders can be especially secretive due to the guilt or shame they feel – so you may be met with defensiveness or denial. Try your best to remain calm, focused, and respectful.

## Be Patient And Supportive

Even if the person shuts you down, don't be discouraged. It may take some time before they are fully willing to accept that they need help. Opening these lines of communication means that when they are ready to talk, they know they will be met without judgment. Make sure they know that you see them, believe in them, and are ready to help when they are ready to accept it. Recovering from an eating disorder takes a great deal of strength, resilience, and re-learning.

### Take Care Of Yourself

Supporting other people requires us to first support ourselves. Pay attention to the thoughts and feelings that come up as you help your friend navigate through their eating disorder. Make sure that you maintain a healthy and balanced approach to what you eat and how you view your body. Stay close to people who make you feel safe and comfortable in your own skin. If you notice disordered eating in your own life, do not hesitate to reach out. Not one of us is alone.



At Thira Health, we know that eating disorders do not discriminate and every road to recovery is unique. Let us help you (or your friend) find your path to a happier, healthier life. Visit [www.thirahealth.com](http://www.thirahealth.com) or call us at 425.448.8808.

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