

CONNECTION

EATING DISORDER RECOVERY HAPPENS THROUGH CONNECTION



COVID-19 Impact on Eating Disorder Treatment for the Emerging Adult

New challenges for the emerging adult 18 to 25-year-old demographic have developed since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Higher education has seen a significant increase in student withdrawals. Some statistics indicate as many as 1/3 of college students have considered leaving the classroom. Employers have experienced increased resignation from young adults compared to other age groups. And mental health struggles, including eating disorders, have skyrocketed.

Mental health professionals were called to rethink their approach to providing services for this fragile population. Many partial hospitalization and intensive outpatient programs moved services to virtual platforms, which posed various obstacles in facilitating behavioral change. In 2022, most eating disorder treatment facilities are back to in-person programming. However, there are continued new challenges to treatment progress, specifically for the emerging adult.

Isolation resulting from COVID-19 has exacerbated the behavioral impact of technology in this group. Today, even prior to a patient's admission, we observe increased anxiety surrounding speaking on the phone and a preference for texting. We also observe that emerging adults express an increased desire to attend treatment programs virtually, despite having difficulty consistently attending virtual outpatient therapy, school, or work and the availability of in-person programming.

Once admitted, many emerging adults have experienced heightened levels of distress as result of returning to a social environment. They are choosing to exit treatment following short stays because of the discomfort of being part of a community. These behavioral changes appear to be related to the pandemic's social distancing and stay at home orders. Early adulthood is a developmentally critical period for individuals to hone their critical thinking skills, form relationships based on shared values and belief systems, learn to engage in complex conversations, modify risk taking behaviors and make decisions based on future consequences.

Because of two years of limited social interaction, this group is missing these developmental milestones. Difficulty functioning in social settings ultimately impacts attendance in eating disorder treatment. Engaging in conversations, which is part of the treatment process, is very difficult for many emerging adults. Patients report feeling exhausted, being anxious in the in-person environment, and experiencing discomfort in new or varying settings outside of the home or familiar environment. This makes sense as these individuals have spent the last two years in their own routine, in their own environment, connecting with others through a screen, and typically creating their own schedule.

Connect with Dessimber Daniels at (210) 253-9763 for a telephone screening, insurance benefits review and to schedule a comprehensive, in-person assessment.

www.EsperanzaEDC.com

ESPERANZA = HOPE



Esperanza's Response to these Challenges

At Esperanza Eating Disorders Center, we always emphasize the importance of focus on the needs of the individual. Navigating the impacts of COVID-19 and continuing to meet our patients where they are has required creativity and flexibility from our treatment team, especially in the treatment of emerging adults.

Treatment strategies that are helping emerging adults stay engaged in treatment include:

- Unique, specific treatment plans
- Flexible, individualized treatment schedules
- Increased frequency of patient check ins
- Increased frequency of patient monitoring
- Increased focus on identifying and implementing exposure therapies



Connection credits:
**ALI DEEM, LPC,
NCC
DIRECTOR OF
ADULT PROGRAMS**

Ali is engaged with each adult patient from assessment to discharge planning. She leads the Adult Program multidisciplinary treatment team and coordinates adult group programming.

If you would like to schedule a tour of Esperanza's new facility or schedule eating disorder training for your organization, contact Beth Confer at bethc@esperanzaedc.com or at 210.749.1030 for arrangements