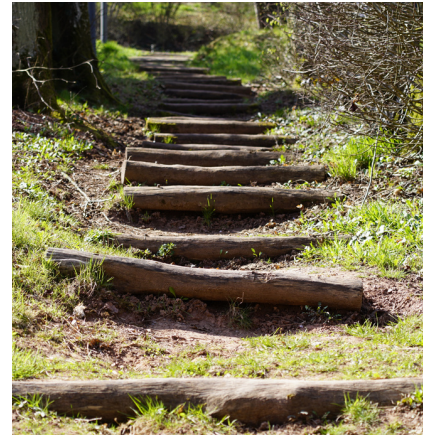


# Concerned That a Loved One May Have an Eating Disorder?

## Initiating the Conversation About Eating Disorders with Care

Watching my loved one struggle with not eating, losing weight, purging, and overexercising every day was one of the scariest times in my life. I felt helpless and hopeless, and every time I brought it up, it turned into a big fight with my loved one. At times, I wanted to give up and just accept my loved one's fate just as they are.

The hardest part was that initially no one believed me, especially the doctors and therapists. I was told it was "exercise anxiety; he has an athletic heart, and he's just a picky eater." "Diet Culture" in America was also not helping. Not only were others doubting me, but I was also doubting myself. Did I have the ability to convince my loved one to accept getting help?



### The following is a list of things I wish I would have done 10 years ago:

- Listen to my intuition and do something sooner rather than later. Research shows that the sooner the eating disorder is addressed, the better the chance of reaching full recovery.
- Educate myself on eating disorders and the impact they have on emotional and physical health. Educating myself would have helped me approach my loved one with compassion instead of fear.
- Choose the right time and place to have a non-confrontational, compassionate conversation with your loved one. It is best to approach the conversation with curiosity instead of judgment and frustration. Avoid statements such as, "You aren't eating enough, you are hurting your body, you need help now!" Instead, use statements such as, "I have noticed that you have been struggling recently. We don't have to talk about it now, but just know that I care about you, and I am here when you need me."
- Avoid arguments and trying to convince them to accept help. Instead of focusing on their denial or defensiveness, focus on validating their emotions. Use statements such as, "I know this is not easy to talk about, and when you are ready, I will be here for you."
- Offer small steps, such as let's start with seeing your PCP to make sure your vitals are stable and nothing else is going on. Focusing on the medical can be less threatening than focusing on the possible eating disorder diagnosis. Before taking this step, it is crucial that you ensure that your medical team is well-versed in eating disorders and that they will be aligned with the overarching plan that food is medicine.
- Walk the talk! To support your loved one through this journey, it is crucial that we also take care of ourselves. Our loved ones are watching us, and if we offer support but do not take care of ourselves, we will likely not be able to stay the course, and our loved one may not trust our intentions.
- Remind your loved one that seeking help is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of strength.
- Tell yourself and your loved one that they did not choose the illness or cause the illness. Eating disorders are a "combination of biological and psychological factors that set off an individual's predisposed genetic vulnerability" (NEDA).
- Remember, no one chooses an eating disorder, but they can choose recovery.
- Don't give up! Eating Disorders are one of the few diseases that can reach full recovery. Stay patient, compassionate, and never stop trying to help your loved one. It is critical to realize that there is no silver bullet to achieving recovery. This is not a sprint--it is literally a marathon--and there will be days of great progress and days of great defeats.

***Remember, recovery will be achieved when you and your loved one are able to separate the individual from the illness and team up to defeat it. You can do it!***

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