

Supporting Young People with Eating Disorders

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Objectives:

To consider :

- Our understanding of Eating Disorders
- The individual and their experiences, needs and challenges
- Your school learning environment – creating a space of safety

And beyond ...



What is an Eating Disorder?

- Eating Disorders involve a disturbance of eating habits or weight control behaviour, which results in impairment to physical health , or which affects a persons' psychological and social functioning. **(MHFA England)**
- Eating Disorders occur in people seeking validation and seeing their self-worth largely in terms of their body shape, weight and ability to control these.



There are 3 main types of ED ...

- Anorexia Nervosa
- Bulimia Nervosa
- Binge Eating Disorder





What is Anorexia Nervosa?

- Strive to keep low weight by restricting energy intake
- Distorted thoughts about body image and fear of gaining weight
- Use of dieting/ purging/ laxatives / exercise
- Low self - esteem/ poor coping skills / low self-confidence
- Secretive disorder



- **Physical** – Loss of weight; periods stop or are irregular (amenorrhea); growth of downy (soft and fine) hair all over your body (called Lanugo); hair loss; low blood pressure; fainting; stomach pains and poor sleep.
- **Behavioural** – Pursuit of thinness; secretive about food; give excuses not to eat; strict dieting; calorie counting; excessive exercising; missing meals; avoid eating with others; social withdrawal; use of laxatives/vomiting.
- **Thoughts** – Pre-occupied with being fat; poor image of self; distorted perception of weight; poor concentration; hiding weight loss; denial of problem; having ‘perfectionist’ tendencies.



What is Bulimia Nervosa?

- Can be associated with evaluation of body shape/weight
- Recurrent episodes of binge eating and vomiting (purging) at least once a week over a 3 month period for diagnosis.
- Use of diuretics/ laxatives
- Lack of control over eating during episode



What you might notice?

- **Physical** – regular changes in weight; vomiting; fatigue; feeling bloated; constipation; stomach pain; sore throat; gastric problems; swelling hands and feet; kidney problems; periods irregular or stopped.
- **Behavioural** –Binging, purging, over -exercising, using laxatives or diuretics, fasting, secretive behaviour – especially after eating, mood swings,
- **Thoughts** – Pre-occupation with food; poor image of self; poor concentration; guilt/ shame; loss of control over eating; denial of problem; depression; poor emotional regulation



What is Binge Eating Disorder?

- Binge eaters experience loss of control/ overeat / eat rapidly
- Eating vast amounts when not hungry – linked to emotions/ guilt/ disgust
- Marked distress regarding binges
- Binges must occur once per week for a period of 3 months to be diagnosable



What signs and symptoms might we see in school?

- Lack of concentration – mind elsewhere ; consumed by thoughts.
 - Increased movement ... fetching equipment; lack of organisation
 - Leg shaking
 - Keeping jumpers on
 - Standing by radiator
 - Not 'sitting' on a seat
 - Anticipatory and compensatory anxiety
 - Increased tiredness
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- If we see these behaviours , explicit, transparent and open conversations might be needed, by a trusted adult.



What might help?

- A designated safe space and trusted adult
- Active Listening - show that we have listened and be able to demonstrate outcomes and change.
- Structure and support management of behaviours – allow movement but agree it first. (restricting movement will increase anxiety)
- Look at timetables – identify trigger points – before a break time / snack time/ before and after a lunch time.
- Communication with all staff, not just teaching staff
- At a glance – young person to write with support – what you will see when I am ok and what you will see if I'm struggling.
- Recognise but challenge unwanted behaviours
- Be available to seek / receive advice
- Use what you already know ... support can take a while and for 'disordered eating' use similar strategies.
- Be aware of language ... you're looking well is often misinterpreted as you're looking fat!
- Be ready to make mistakes!



- Externalise the eating disorder and separate it from the individual – this allows for supported management of behaviours, thoughts and feeling;
- ‘That’s not you ... that’s the eating disorder’
- Remember this is a serious, complex illness and there can have significant long term health implications but

Recovery is possible with early intervention and support. It’s a team effort and everyone needs to work together.





- **Some Key Facts:**

- Although ED's tend to be more common in certain age groups , it is not uncommon for people of any age to be affected.
- EDs are estimated to affect between 600,000 and 725,000 people in the UK. NICE guidelines suggest that this figure might be even higher and up to 1.6 million may be affected.
- Almost 10,000 children and young people started treatment between April and December with record demand for services – an increase of a quarter compared to the same period last year and up by almost two thirds since before the pandemic. **NHS England**
- As many as one woman in 20 will have eating habits which give cause for concern; most will be aged 14 to 25 years old. **MIND**
- Girls and women are 10 times more likely than boys and men to suffer from Anorexia or Bulimia. **The Royal College of Psychiatrists**
- An investigation into the problem of eating disorders revealed that at least 1 percent of women are affected by eating disorders. **The Independent on Sunday**



From Beat - ED Charity and support group

- In a survey of 600 young people with eating disorders, Beat found:
- Only 1 percent of children felt they could talk to their parents about their eating-related concerns.
- 9 percent of children felt they might be able to talk to someone at school.
- 17 percent of children felt they might be able to talk to a doctor or nurse.
- 92 percent of children felt they couldn't tell anyone.
- Beat currently believes the number of people receiving treatment for anorexia or bulimia to be near to 90,000, while many more people have eating disorders undiagnosed, in particular those with bulimia nervosa.
- A person with an eating disorder can recover within five years providing they receive appropriate treatment, but in some cases, the illness will persist throughout life.



- **Thank you for listening!**
- **Any Questions?**

