

EATING DISORDERS

Counseling Guide

FACTS ABOUT EATING DISORDERS

Eating disorders are not just a choice of lifestyle or diet; in fact, they can be fatal diseases. People who struggle with disordered eating or eating disorders usually experience long-term mental distress. It is very likely for eating disorders to develop into a variety of mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, or OCD along with a combination of physical symptoms. Those who suffer from an eating disorder can have an elevated high risk for suicide.

ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THESE CONVERSATIONS?

Conversation with self

Part of me: I am so tired/bored. I want to get something for myself.

Part of me: I will just have some ice cream.

---10 minutes later---

Part of me: What have I done? I finished the whole gallon of ice cream! I hate myself! I am gaining weight...I should skip a meal tomorrow / go work out for one more hour.

(Or you will hear yourself saying... "Whatever, since I've already eaten so much, I will eat some more and purge later.")

Conversations with others

Friends/families: I notice that you are not eating/You should eat more.

Me: No, I think I am good. (In fact, I feel I am not thin enough. Just look at my thighs. They are HUGE!)

Dual-standard toward self and others

To others: I know everyone has their struggles, and I wouldn't judge a person by their outer appearance. I can see their value inside.

To self: I am not satisfied with my size and shape. If I don't "look good," then I am not good enough. I should be better at self-control.

MYTHS ABOUT EATING DISORDERS

Check all the statements that sounds familiar to you below:

- I do not “look like” I have an eating disorder.
- I am at a normal weight. I shouldn’t have a problem with an eating disorder.
- I eat a lot. I’m not like skinny anorexics.
- I do purge whenever I eat too much, but I don’t think it is an issue.
- I told my friends/family my struggles about foods and self-image. They told me: “You think too much. You look great.”
- I don’t do the binge-purge thing. I just skip meals when I feel I am fat.
- I have to work out/exercise, or I will feel guilty after I eat the food that “I shouldn’t eat.”

Eating issues or eating disorders are silent killers. People can live with them without noticing how they play an important role in shaping their view of their body, mind and brain. They not only slowly impair the way that they value themselves, they skew their perception of how other people view them. Eating disorders contribute to blood problems, digestive issues, brain chemical imbalances, oral hygiene issues, and heart dysfunction. They also create a stronghold for self-doubt, self-comparison, self-shaming, or even self-loathing. One of the common myths about people who are suffering from eating disorders is that people are immediately aware of their appearance and make judgments about them, such as thoughts that they are over-weight or under-weight. However, before they reach this extreme point, people with normal weight could have suffered from dieting, emotional eating, fasting, over-exercising or purging for years without being discovered.

People who grew up with a mother having excessive concerns about her own body image tend to model that behavior. Seeing the example of keeping a restrictive diet and a rigid exercise routine is most likely to cause sensitivities about diet and body image. They will also tend to be harsh and critical about themselves.

COMMON SELF-TALK



There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

Proverbs 14:12



Check all the statements that apply to you:

- I don't think I have any problems even though people address their concerns with me.
- I feel / think that I am fat sometimes.
- I feel hopeless / helpless sometimes.
- I feel no one really understands me.
- I feel ashamed of myself.
- I feel guilty about the things that I have done.
- I avoid letting people really know me.
- I feel great when I keep myself in good shape / keep a "healthy" diet.
- I obsessively think about food.
- I do not like my body shape.
- I should have done a better job in keeping myself look good.
- I am not good enough.
- No one really cares about me / No one will truly love me.
- I eat when I am anxious, bored, or stressed.
- I compare my body figure to others who I think are thin.
- It is hard for me to ask for help.
- It is easier to give grace to others than to myself.
- I should not eat _____ / do _____, but I can't help myself.
- I have to do _____, and do it well.

We all struggle with self-identity and self-image. If the questions listed above sound familiar to you and these thoughts become much more intense, it may be time to go deeper to examine the behavioral or thought patterns. Otherwise, it could become even more difficult to be free of these behaviors and thoughts.

DISORDERED EATING (EATING ISSUES) VS. EATING DISORDERS

The most common eating disorder diagnoses listed in the *Diagnostic Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* are Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge Eating Disorder, Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder, Pica and other unspecified feeding or eating disorder, etc. Before an individual develops an eating disorder, he or she has likely been struggling with eating issues that are similar to the symptoms of eating disorders. These symptoms include:

- Dieting
- Calorie counting
- Restricting amount/type of food intake
- Compensatory behaviors and/or purging
- Over exercising
- Body shaming
- Skipping meals regularly/Fasting
- Mental distress regarding body figure/image/weight
- Weight watching

People who have eating issues do not necessarily fit into any of the eating disorder diagnostic criteria. For example, the term Orthorexia is used to describe people who are overtly obsessed about healthy food and excessive exercise. Choosing the right food to eat, staying healthy, and exercising occupy the person's majority of spare time. There could be a diversity of types of symptoms related to eating issues. The main common feature of any kind of eating issue is that these obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors are fixated on food. The obsessions about food spiral down with the following symptoms such as excessive thoughts, feeling anxious/stressed, urge to have control in life, perfectionism, avoiding conflict, struggling in a relationship, seeking affirmation from parents, peers, or significant others, not knowing how to manage emotions, constant loneliness, self-isolation, low self-esteem, people-pleasing behaviors and thus a sense of confusion and feeling of **being out of control**.

Some common etiological factors of having eating issues or an eating disorder includes genetic factors, familial, social influences, traumatic experiences (ex. being bullied), personality, and difficulty in coping with stress or feelings. Personality plays a critical role for the onset of disordered eating behaviors such as passive-aggressiveness, low-confidence, low self-esteem, perfectionism, people-pleasing, inflexibility, and rigidity.

Society projects a certain type of body image throughout social media, and it affects the way people of all ages view themselves. Pre-teens, teens and/or young adults tend to seek approval or find self-identity through social and environmental support. This results in an increased risk of weight-watching, dieting, and/or over-exercising.

RED FLAGS FOR EATING DISORDERS

Self-awareness is an important first step that leads to healing or recovery. If you believe you may have an eating disorder, you will need to **recognize** the symptoms below.

Check all the statements that apply to you:

- I feel tense/anxious when eating too much.
- I do not enjoy food as I did before.
- Whenever I eat too much, I must do something else to cope with it (purging, fasting or over exercising)
- I do not like to eat in front of others.
- I eat a lot in a short period of time and then I refuse to eat afterwards.
- I have thinning hair/hair loss.
- I have irregular menstrual cycles.
- I get sick more frequently than before.
- I weigh myself more than 3 times a week.
- I experience mood swings/feel depressed/anxious.

If you checked more than two questions, you may want to use the SCOFF questions listed on the next page to further examine your condition.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE SYMPTOMS OF EATING ISSUES/DISORDERS?

If you notice that you have more than two symptoms list in the previous page, you may want to use the following SCOFF questions to check on yourself:

- Do you make yourself **Sick** when uncomfortably full?
- Do you worry you have lost **Control** over how much you eat?
- Have you lost more than **One** stone (14 lbs) in a 3-month period?
- Do you believe yourself to be **Fat** when others say you are too thin?
- Would you say that **Food** dominates your life?

If you answer YES in more than two questions, you may have acknowledged that you need some help. The next step you can take is to consult with your physicians, dieticians, or counselors for professional help.

*If you are enrolled as a current DBU student, you can receive counseling services from **DBU Counseling Center** at no cost.*

*The DBU Counseling Center is located in the 1st floor of the Collins Learning Center. You can call **214.333.5288** or sign up online at **counselingcenter.dbu.edu***

IDENTIFY YOUR BELIEF PATTERN

Pick one situation from the past week when you experienced mental disturbance. Use the journal below to help you identify your belief pattern.

In this moment, I feel _____

I think that I _____

I want to...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

If I could do these things listed above, that will make me feel/think...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

But if I did these things, then I would feel/think that I...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

And that means I...

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Therefore I must do the following things to make myself a better person.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Pause a second here. Review the answers that you just filled out above. What does this thinking pattern mean to you? You can also see an example in the next page.

EXAMPLE

Saturday night after finals:

Joanna was alone by herself in her room. She felt the urge to purge after eating. She used the worksheet to write down her thoughts below:

In this moment, I feel lonely, sad, angry and bored

I think that I am fat and ugly

I want to...

1. Yell
2. Cry
3. Purge

If I could do these things listed above, that will make me feel / think...

1. Feel better, get the feelings out of my chest
2. Feel less stressed
3. Keep me in the right shape

But if I did these things, then I would feel / think that I...

1. I locked myself in the room yelling and screaming? People will think that I am crazy
2. Out of control when I could not help but to cry
3. Just trying to gain some control of my body

And that means I...

1. Am a mess
2. Am awful
3. Can control my body

And that means...

1. No one would like me
2. I am not worthy to be loved
3. I am not good enough

Therefore I have to...

1. Be better at academics/sports/job performance
2. Keep in good shape
3. Keep everything to myself. Don't tell anyone about my personal stuff or they will not like me anymore

Pause a second here. What does this thinking pattern mean to you?

Something doesn't look right. I don't want to live like this

NAME YOUR EATING DISORDER

If you are tired of obsessive thoughts of eating healthy, staying slim, self-doubt, or self-criticism, and you choose to do something about it, you'll find better results if you work with a therapist or a professional health practitioner. Talk to your counselor or your primary care physician about your concerns before you start the following steps.

Fighting with eating disorders/eating issues is a long process. Much of the time, self-doubt and comparison lead to more confusion about value and identity. A small tip here is to give the eating disorder a name to call it out when necessary. When your eating disorder comes to manipulate your thoughts, you can learn to recognize its voice.

It could be male or female name based on your preference. Circle any names from these names below:

Ed, Edward, Anne, An, Bob,
Or you want to call it as _____ *

REWRITE YOUR STORY

In this moment, I feel _____

I think _____ * wants me to do...

What I truly feel/think/ want/ long for is...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I hear _____ * telling me that I am...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I know I have freedom to choose and the power to do things that are good for me.

_____, you want me to do things that I don't want to. I know I agree with you sometimes, but this time I choose not to follow your rules. I am not going to....

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Circle the things that will work the best for you in this moment.)

Reach out to _____ * to watch a movie/ have a cup of coffee/ go to library/ share my struggles/ just hang out go out for a walk.

Work out/ walk in nature/ go swimming/ listen to music/ draw/ sing/ meditate/ do my devotions/ write journal/ play with children/ play with dog/ watch inspiring movie/ read books

_____, I choose not to do these unhealthy things to make me distract from you.

(Check all that apply)

- Drinking
- Drugs
- Rewarding self with too much or too little food
- Watching excessive amounts of TV
- People-pleasing

Recognizing how eating disorders lie to you, calling out its name to stop negative thinking, and rewriting your story to empower yourself are essential pathways to becoming comfortable in being who you are. You may feel lost walking down the path to healing and recovery. It is time to focus on your inner qualities and inner characteristics instead of your performance or outer appearance.

“Listen to me, you descendants of Jacob,
all the remnant of the people of Israel,
you whom I have upheld since your birth,
and have carried since you were born.
Even to your old age and gray hairs
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.
I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Isaiah 46:3-4

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

Psalms 139:13-14

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Proverbs 31:30

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart.

Jeremiah 1:5

Write down the negative self-talk that you often hear from yourself or from your eating disorder. In the column to the right, write down the positive sphere of your temperament, personal traits, characteristics, abilities, or gifts. Find the evidence to support your thoughts.

Negative Self-Talk	Self-Affirmation	Positive Evidences
I am fat and ugly	I am wonderfully made by God	Psalm 139:13-14
I always feel I am not good enough.	I will never be able to measure up to any of the standards, but I am a hard-working person.	I do my job faithfully even without anyone in the office today.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF SOMEONE I CARE ABOUT HAS SYMPTOMS OF EATING ISSUES/DISORDERS?

It is hard to see someone you care about constantly struggle with self-destructive thoughts, insecurities, under-eating, over-eating, or not being able to feel content in their life. Sometimes you may feel helpless in terms of helping them to “feel better.” Here are some tips on how to continue being compassionate while keeping healthy boundaries.

DO's

- Do address your concerns about his/her behavior and ask them questions. The most important thing is to LISTEN.
- Do express your appreciation of his/her characteristics instead of outer appearance/outfit.
- Do realize that he/she does not intentionally do this to harm themselves or others.
- Do find resources/support group/referrals for the individual.
- Do understand that it takes time to recover.
- Do allow the individual to have space to grow when you give support instead of trying to solve the problem.

DON'TS

- Do not ask their weight or check the amount of food they've eaten. You can simply ask: “Have you had anything to eat today?”
- Do not give up. Your support matters!
- Do not ignore the symptoms and hope they will alleviate someday; do talk about it.
- Do not make any comment (neither positive nor negative) about their outer appearance/weight.
- Do not try to “fix” the person or control his/her lifestyle. It would make it worse. (Including setting rules or using food as reward/punishment.)
- Do not expect to change the person. All you can do is to accompany them and walk with them until they get back on their feet.

WORKS CITED

Adapted from the work of Schaefer, J., & Rutledge, T. (2014). *Life without Ed.*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Name of your eating disorder

The name of someone you can trust, such as: a classmate, roommate, family member, co-worker, church friends, or mentor.

Adapted from Eating Recovery Center website. <http://www.eatingrecoverycenter.com>