

TWU Counseling Center

Tips for How to Interact With Someone With an Eating Disorder

What to do if you think someone has an eating disorder:

1. Tell your friend that you are concerned and that you care about his/her well-being.
2. Encourage him/her to talk to a counselor or therapist. Remember you are his/her friend, not psychologist. You cannot solve the problem for them.
3. Try to get him/her to talk about their feelings. This will prevent the feelings from being “bottled up”.
4. Get support and educate yourself. It is important to have a support network as well as education in the area of eating disorders.
5. Be POSITIVE, people do recover from eating disorders.

What not to do when interacting with someone with an eating disorder:

1. Don't focus on weight, food or exercise when talking with your friend. This may be their focus, but it does not have to be yours. Remember, these are only symptoms of the problem—not THE problem.
2. Don't lay guilt trips, for example, “Why are you doing this to your family and to me?” He/she feels badly enough as it is. Also, he/she is not responsible for your emotions, only you are.
3. Don't treat them as though they have a handicap. It will help if you treat him/her as normal as possible. Remember, they are **more** than someone with an eating disorder. The more you help him/her find a different identity, the easier it will be to let go of the “eating disorder” identity.
4. Don't be afraid to discuss conflicts or problems. These areas need to be brought out into the open, not hidden.
5. Don't blame yourself. Friends, family members and spouses do not cause an eating disorder. They can help in the recovery process however.
6. Do not focus on weight gained or lost. Focus more on his/her mental state than their physical state. If you say, “You look thin” you are focusing on appearance and “feeding” into the behavior. Don't say, “You look healthy” as he/she may interpret it as thinking that he/she looks fat.
7. Don't focus on achievements—grades, sporting events, and promotions. Instead, talk about his/her inner qualities and strengths. Also talk about your own failures and mistakes. If she/he sees you as less than perfect, they won't feel so strongly about their own imperfections. Again, model, model, model---be good to yourself and they will see that it is possible.

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