Tips for Helping Students With Eating Disorders

COMMON WARNING SIGNS

RESTRICTING FOOD
• Avoiding meals or social situations involving food (e.g., s/he says had a big meal earlier, isn't hungry, or has an upset stomach)
• Eating tiny portions or specific low-calorie foods, and banning entire categories of food such as carbs and dietary fat
• Obsessively counting calories, reading food labels, and weighing portions
• Food rituals such as eating foods in certain orders, rearranging food on a plate, excessive cutting or chewing
• Diet pills, prescription stimulants like Adderall or Ritalin, or even illegal drugs such as amphetamines (speed, crystal, etc.)
• Weight fluctuations
• Obsession/fear of weight gain
• Wearing baggy clothes or multiple layers in an attempt to hide weight

BINGEING
• Unexplained disappearance of large amounts of food in short periods of time
• Lots of empty food packages and wrappers, often hidden at the bottom of the trash
• Hoarding and hiding stashes of high-calorie foods such as junk food and sweets
• Secrecy and isolation; may eat normally around others, only to binge late at night or in a private spot where they won’t be discovered or disturbed

PURGING
• Disappearing right after a meal or making frequent trips to the bathroom
• Showering, bathing, or running water after eating to hide the sound of purging
• Using excessive amounts of mouthwash, breath mints, or perfume to disguise the smell of vomiting
• Taking laxatives, diuretics, or enemas
• Periods of fasting or compulsive, intense exercising, especially after eating
• Frequent complaints of sore throat, upset stomach, diarrhea, or constipation
• Discolored teeth
SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERVENING

• **Speak in private and express your concerns.** Don’t offer solutions.

• **Avoid lecturing or criticizing.** Instead, refer to *specific situations and behaviors* you’ve noticed, and why they worry you.

• **Avoid confrontations or over-simplifying**, e.g., “All you have to do is accept yourself.” Eating disorders are complex problems. If it were that easy, s/he would not be suffering.

• **Respond to denial and resistance in a calm, focused, and respectful manner.** Remember that this conversation likely feels very threatening. Don’t take it personally.

• **Be patient and supportive.** Don’t give up if the person shuts you down at first. The important thing is opening up the lines of communication.

• **Encourage seeking support** from the Counseling Center and/or offer to bring them to the Counseling Center.

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**An eating disorder is a serious illness and can be fatal.**

It is **NOT** a lifestyle choice or an unhealthy dietary habit.

It is a way someone has chosen to handle stress and difficult emotions.

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**Resources**

**Manhattanville Student Health and Counseling**
914.323.7277

**National Eating Disorders Association**
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
800.931.2237