

Sharing with EEEase

How to Talk About Eating Concerns Using the Three Es of Expression

When you begin to notice that disordered eating habits are affecting your life, your happiness, and your ability to concentrate, it is important that you talk to somebody about what you're going through.

What is Disordered Eating?

Disordered eating is when a person's attitudes about food, weight, and body size lead to very rigid eating and exercise habits that jeopardize one's health, happiness, and safety. Disordered eating may begin as a way to lose a few pounds or get in shape, but these behaviors can quickly get out of control, become obsessions, and may even turn into an eating disorder.

When you begin to notice that disordered eating habits are affecting your life, your happiness, and your ability to concentrate, it is important that you talk to somebody about what you're going through. Although you might not be struggling with an eating disorder, sometimes it is necessary to recognize disordered eating tendencies and address them before they escalate into a life-threatening problem.

If you are able to recognize disordered eating attitudes and behaviors in yourself, you have already taken the first step toward a happy, healthy, balanced way of life. The second step – telling a trusted friend, family member, or professional counselor/nutritionist - is equally important.

You should not attempt to address your disordered eating alone.

You will benefit from the support of others and the comfort of discussing the feelings you're experiencing.

Because many individuals who are dealing with disordered eating have found it difficult to tell somebody what they are going through and what behaviors they've adopted, we have created this guideline of things to say in order to make the initial conversation a bit easier. Remember that this is not a script and that everyone's situation is different. If you have additional questions or concerns, call the National Eating Disorders Information Centre (NEDIC) toll-free Information and Referral helpline at 1 800 633 4320

What are the Three E's of Expression?

1. **Establish a Safe Environment**

Once you have decided to tell somebody about the habits you have adopted, identify someone that you trust and feel comfortable talking to. Next, set aside a specific time with that person so you can discuss your situation. To make things most comfortable for you, try to find a private, comfortable place away from other people and distractions. This will help you talk openly about your concerns and feelings. Both before and during this conversation, it is normal for you to experience a range of feelings including fear, shame, anger, embarrassment, or nervousness. To keep up the courage to talk about what you're going through, remember that you are doing the right thing. It is important to talk about this and ask for help!

You should be proud of yourself for taking the first steps toward a healthy, well-balanced lifestyle!

2. **Explain the Situation**

Using specific details, explain the thoughts and feelings that you are having and the behaviors you have developed. Starting from the beginning, talk about how you began the disordered eating habits and why you feel pressured to continue them (It is a good idea to prepare yourself ahead of time and write these things down or practice saying them aloud). Although you may not be able to fully explain the reasons for your eating and exercise rituals, attempting to do so may help you recognize some of the connections you make between eating, exercise, and self-esteem.

It is important to keep in mind that the person you have confided in may not completely understand exactly how you are feeling or the reasons for your behavior. They may demonstrate shock, denial, fear or even anger. Be patient and remain calm. Remember that they may not automatically know the best way to respond and support you, but you can help them learn how. Educate them with the facts and explain what you need from them during your recovery process.

3. **Educate with the facts**

Give the person you confide in some information regarding the prevalence of eating disorders and tips for how to best support somebody who is struggling with food, weight or body image issues. Share facts with them that include the physical and emotional

effects of eating disorders, along with the steps involved in recovery. Give them some handouts from the National Eating Disorders Association (available at www.NationalEatingDisorders.org) and the toll-free information and referral helpline number (1-800-931-2237). Be sure to let this person know how they can help and what you need, and keep them informed as your needs change throughout your recovery process. Remind them that recovery is a gradual process, there may even be some setbacks, and you will require patience and understanding along the way.

Who should I tell?

In addition to a trusted friend or family member, it is advisable to seek help from a professional counselor and/or nutritionist. **Getting help from a professional who understands and specializes in eating, weight, and body image issues is essential during recovery from an eating disorder.** Confiding in a counselor or nutritionist can feel less threatening and more objective because they are familiar with situations like your own.

The National Eating Disorders Information Centre (NEDIC) provides lists of treatment providers in every province in Canada. These are people that specialize in the treatment of eating disorders and offer support services, medical advice, and nutritional therapy. 1-866-NEDIC-20 (1-866-63342-20) or 416-340-4156 in Toronto

What should I say?

Be as specific as possible when explaining what you are going through. It may be helpful to develop a script based on the following questions. Include whatever answers you are comfortable revealing and remember that the more you include, the better the person you're speaking with will understand and be able to help.

- When did you begin having different thoughts regarding food, weight, or exercise? What were the thoughts?
- When did the different behaviors start? What was the behavior? How were you feeling at the time? Did you hope to accomplish something specific (i.e., lose weight, maintain weight, gain control of something, get somebody's attention, see what it was like) in doing this behavior?

- Have you noticed any physical health effects? (may include fatigue, loss of hair, digestive problems, loss of menstrual cycle, heart palpitations, etc.) Have you noticed any emotional effects?
- How are you currently feeling physically? Emotionally? Do you feel ready to stop the disordered eating behaviors?
- How can the people in your life best support you? Do you want them to monitor your behavior? Do you want them to ask you how you are doing with your recovery or would you rather tell them about it when you're ready?
- What changes are you willing to make in your life to establish a healthy lifestyle?

What are the Facts?

It is important to realize that you are not alone in your struggle. Studies have shown that **5-10 million** girls and women, and **1 million** boys and men, are struggling with eating disorders including anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder, and related conditions. The National Eating Disorders Information Centre has created several brochures and handouts about body image, the dangers of dieting, and how to help a friend who is struggling with disordered eating tendencies. Along with this, they have information regarding eating disorders, their precursors, their prevalence, ways to combat them, and their prevention and treatment. This information is available through the toll-free Information and Referral Line at 1-800-633-4320. You may find it helpful to review these resources and provide them for your loved ones.

Good Luck!

As you begin to address your eating concerns, keep in mind that you are a special and unique individual! Regardless of the numbers on the scale, the size, shape, and curve of your body, you have qualities about you that nobody else has. As you begin to let go of the dieting mindset, you will notice how wonderful it can be to enjoy life without being consumed with thoughts of food and weight.

Rest assured that you could return to a mindset where your happiness and self-image are not based on your reflection in the mirror or your weight on the scale

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