



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, AND YOUTH

DISORDERED EATING

Did you know?

ALMOST 10% OF THE POPULATION IS THOUGHT TO BE LIVING WITH AN EATING DISORDER

What is Disordered Eating?

Disordered eating describes a set of behaviours, thoughts, and emotions around food and body image. While disordered eating doesn't fit the standard definitions of eating disorders, like anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating, it isn't typical of healthy eating habits either.

Forms of Disordered Eating may include:

- **Fasting** (not eating for long periods)
- **Restrictive dieting** (severely limiting how much you eat)
- **Purging** (through vomiting or abusing laxatives)
- **Binging** (using food to cope with stressful emotions and life events)
- **Over-exercising**
- **Misusing supplements**
- **Using performance-enhancing drugs**
- **"Yo-Yo" dieting** (repeated cycles of extreme dieting, followed by weight gain)

Young people may have symptoms of disordered eating only once in a while. Sometimes these symptoms are triggered by stressful life events, and they may use disordered eating to cope with strong feelings.

If these behaviours continue for long periods of time, they may start to interfere with everyday life. Disordered eating can also lead to the development of an eating disorder like anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder.

For more info:
embodybc.com
heretohelp.ca

Embody | A provincial program of Family Services of the North Shore
Kindness for every body

In partnership with
heretohelp
Mental health and substance use information you can trust

DISORDERED EATING



People of all genders are affected by disordered eating. Youth are often influenced and overwhelmed by social pressures and media messaging that dictate the “right” way to look. This influence is even more confusing for transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming youth.

It's important to consider the “big picture” of a young person's life and emotional health when they shows signs of disordered eating.

Young people typically receive messages from society that being “fat” is bad and unacceptable. Being “thin” is perfect and “in control”. When these messages go on unchallenged by parents, teachers, and healthcare providers, they can lead children and teens to develop an unhealthy body image. Disordered eating becomes a way to maintain an unrealistic standard.

Someone who is living with depression or anxiety, or recovering from trauma can also be at risk of disordered eating. It's important to consider the “big picture” of a young person's life and emotional health when they shows signs of disordered eating.

What can I do?

- 1 Find a compassionate, consistent parenting style that lets you set firm boundaries and realistic consequences.** It's important to create a home environment that encourages freedom to be who you are and avoids anxiety about potential problems and perfectionistic behaviour — this can lead to disordered eating.
- 2 Model the way you expect your children to act.** Eat a variety of foods you enjoy. Exercise for fun, not just to burn calories. Show them how doing things that make you feel good, like listening to music or seeing friends, can help them cope with stressful feelings.
- 3 Maintain a family atmosphere where open, honest communication is valued, and children are allowed to express their own opinions.** Difficulty processing “negative” emotions like sadness and anger can lead to self-denying food as a way to “keep control.”
- 4 Be someone your child can trust with sharing their feelings and experiences.** Show them that you value them as they are, regardless of how they look and dress, what kind of marks they get, or how good an athlete they are.
- 5 Show your children a balanced approach to eating and food.** Sit down for regular family meals. Don't use food to bribe, reward, or punish children.
- 6 Teach your children how to think critically.** Give them room to disagree and challenge conventional wisdom. This helps them resist the lure of media messages and peer pressure. Model how to think, not what to think.
- 7 Let your children know you value inner beauty over outer beauty.** Don't make comments about people's looks, weight, body shape, or size.
- 8 Seek professional guidance.** If your child is showing signs of disordered eating, it's important to get help before disordered eating becomes an eating disorder. Talk to a counsellor and be sure your child has regular visits to the doctor and dentist.

For more info:
embodybc.com
heretohelp.ca

Embody (formerly Jessie's Legacy) equips BC parents and professionals with trusted resources to support young people before they develop an eating disorder. Embody is a provincial program of Family Services of the North Shore, and one of the seven BC Partners for Mental Health and Substance Use Information.