



ANIMAL ANALOGIES & CARING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH EATING DISORDERS

Which of these animals represents your 'emotional style'?

Supporting a young person with an eating disorder can be challenging. Friends, family and carers might be anxious about the best approach when communicating with the young person and may adopt unhelpful behavioural styles even with the best of intentions. The Maudsley Hospital in London developed these animal analogies to help us think about how we communicate. These can be a great tool to refer back to and can really help when you're in the carer role for a young person or adult. The Maudsley's 'Toolkit for Carers' tells us "Carers are the solution, not the problem!" SWEDA has put together this easy reference guide to help us remember how to be more like dolphins and St Bernards.

OSTRICH



An ostrich runs fast and buries its head in the sand - the perfect example of avoidance! It can be tempting to hide from the problem, but unfortunately, this won't make it go away.

- The problem with being an ostrich is that it can:
- make the young person feel unseen, unloved or uncared for, triggering worse symptoms.
 - sap the self-esteem of the young person managing the ED.
 - create an atmosphere where things are not discussed and communication is difficult.

KANGAROO

- The kangaroo is a protective parent, keeping its baby safe in its pouch, avoiding any upset or stress. The problem comes when the kangaroo won't let its offspring venture out alone and is always ready to take over when the young person faces a challenge.
- The issue with this approach is that:
 - the young person may not learn resilience or how to solve their own problems.
 - change doesn't feel natural to the young person and they may want to remain cocooned.
 - they may feel they have a lack of control over their own lives and come to rely on their ED in order to cope.



RHINO



The rhino is a carer, fuelled by stress, frustration and exhaustion. They may charge into confrontation, using force and logic to try to make the young person change their behaviour.

- The problem with the rhino's style is that:
- it is unlikely to enable permanent change, with the young person only obeying in the moment to placate the person shouting.
 - it erodes the young person's personal confidence as they are continually confronted and undermined; they may lose trust as a result.
 - it is emotionally draining for everyone and the young person may 'rebel' through their ED behaviours.

JELLYFISH

- The jellyfish can be over-emotional, perhaps anxious or easily upset and may fear the worst possible outcome.
- This style can be unhelpful because:
 - it is hard to see a clear path in a sea of emotion; it can lead to tears, anger and stress for everyone and raise anxiety levels all round.
 - much like the jellyfish, the person can deliver stings of overt and uncontrolled anxiety and anger.
 - it can make the young person feel bad that they are hurting those close to them, so they may avoid opening up.



DOLPHIN

- The dolphin offers gentle guidance without being too intrusive or overbearing. It is intelligent and wise and offers multiple forms of support. A dolphin approach is good because:
- it provides hands-off support whilst gradually nudging the young person to safety.
 - the dolphin can choose to swim in front as a guide, alongside in encouragement or behind to show trust and belief in its companion's abilities.
 - the dolphin knows when someone needs rescuing and when they need to find their own way.



ST BERNARD

- The St Bernard is a loyal companion, always willing to help when someone is in need. They offer compassion, warmth and consistency, helping those who are lost or in trouble. This style is a great choice because:
- someone with an ED needs friends, family and carers they can depend on.
 - the St Bernard is calm and collected in all situations and circumstances.
 - it encourages trust and a safe environment for honest communication.