

Preparing for social events and using coping strategies

For people with eating disorders, their friends, families and carers

Social events such as family celebrations and meeting up with friends can be a stressful experience for people with eating disorders. These gatherings often focus on food and people eat together. We have put together a resource to help people with eating disorders and their loved ones to enjoy social events. This is an adaptation of an original resource with reduced text and a simpler design.

It can be useful for friends and family to think about how eating is experienced by the person with the eating disorder. Try to understand that eating is difficult for them. People with eating disorders might find it useful to talk to friends and family about their experience.

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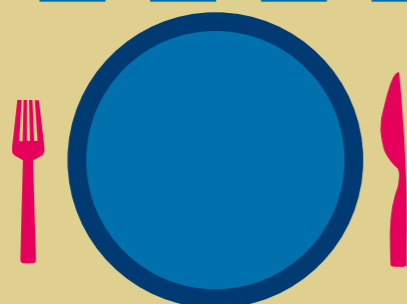
Common problems for people with eating disorders:

- People watching them while they eat.
- People commenting about how much they should eat.
- Being encouraged to eat food they are scared to eat.
- People being unsure of what to say to the sufferer.
- People commenting on weight, body shape or diets.
- Being rushed during a meal.



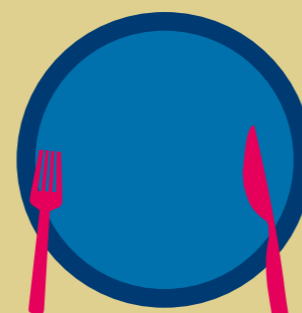
Seeing the positives in social events:

- Social gatherings can be difficult, but they can also be a great opportunity to spend quality time together.
- With some prior communication and planning, they can run smoothly for both the sufferer and others present.
- Religious and cultural festivities, birthday parties and other events are great times to show you care and to feel cared for.
- Social events allow us to escape from the stresses of everyday life and spend time with the people we care about.



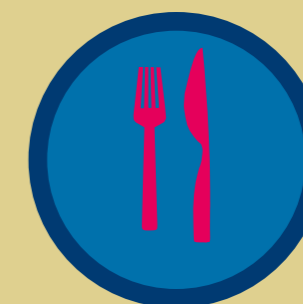
Before the meal

- People who know about the eating disorder should avoid commenting about the food the person with the eating disorder chooses to eat.
- Family and friends should educate themselves about eating disorders.
- The contents and serving size of a meal should be discussed in advance.
- Serving meals away from the table might help the person with the eating disorder avoid worrying about portion size.
- For buffets and self-service, the person with the eating disorder might want to approach the table with someone and copy their portion size.



During the meal

- It can be helpful to put on the radio or start a conversation that does not focus on the eating disorder.
- Understand that the person will find the eating disorder difficult to manage and they might find it hard to concentrate.
- Give them space – do not sit too close to them or watch them eating.
- If there are family traditions involving food, assure the sufferer they do not need to participate if it is difficult for them.
- Offer support and ask if the person with the eating disorders needs someone to talk to or wants to go somewhere private.



After the meal

- Some people find it difficult to accept praise when they finish eating. The eating disorder can make them feel ashamed and guilty.
- Other people with eating disorders are pleased to receive praise.
- Praise is more likely to be accepted if the challenge the person with the eating disorder has faced is acknowledged.
- Many people find it helpful to have an activity planned for after the meal. Activities such as board games and films are good choices.
- It is also good to encourage conversation that does not focus on food.