

SUPPORTING YOUR FRIEND WHEN THEY ARE ATTENDING UNIVERSITY WITH AN EATING DISORDER



LOOKING OUT FOR A FRIEND IF YOU THINK THEY HAVE AN EATING DISORDER

You may notice several of the following indicators that your friend is struggling with food problems:

- » Do they choose not to eat with you?
- » Do they seem not to eat?
- » Do they buy lots of food and it all disappears quickly?
- » Do they become anxious and agitated around meal times?
- » Do they spend a lot of time alone?
- » Do they seem to push you away?
- » Do you feel like whatever you do is wrong?
- » Do they weigh themselves lots?
- » Do they have fixed patterns and routines?
- » Do they seem obsessed with their body?
- » Do they spend hours on training for fitness?
- » Do they study for hours and is nothing ever good enough?
- » Do you feel like you do not know them anymore?
- » Do they rush to the toilet after eating?
- » Do they seem very cold and tired?
- » Do they have difficulty sleeping?
- » Have they lost weight?
- » Are they always on a 'diet'?



These are all possible indicators of an eating disorder.

SUPPORTING A FRIEND WHO HAS AN EATING DISORDER

It can be very difficult and exhausting for both you and your friend when one of you has an eating disorder. It is important to look after yourself. Being at University is hard, you are away from home and studying in a new environment.

A house mate's eating disorder can have a huge impact on your lifestyle. It is important that you are able to feel comfortable and at home in your accommodation. It is important that you can put in clear boundaries about what is ok for you. You need to continue to cook and eat at home or go out as you would normally do and not feel guilty or uncomfortable. This may be hard, especially knowing your friend is having a tough time. If you don't put in clear limits you may find that you get angry and resent your friend and that will make it difficult for both of you as the eating disorder will encroach on both of your lives.

Remember your friend's eating difficulties are not yours, you are not there to fix them. No one can make someone better from an eating disorder, but you can support your friend on their journey, listen and support them to get the help they need.

WHY WON'T THEY JUST EAT?

It is important to know that eating disorders are not just about food. They are a psychological condition that affects the whole person. What you see is their way of coping by using food and their bodies.

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THEY LOOK BETTER SO WHY AREN'T THEY?

Someone may have put on weight and this can often leave the person in a more difficult place. They are trying to manage their difficult feelings and to study and try life without reverting back to their old food ways. In a place of finding their life solutions your friend may need and be able to accept more support.

Remember having an eating disorder is not like having a small cut that heals outside and is gone. The outside person may seem healed but the inside person may still be hurting. The pain may be invisible to us on the outside.

SO WHAT CAN I DO?

- » Encourage your friend to seek help, but remember a person with an eating disorder has to want to get better themselves.
- » Offer to go with them to see the medical centre, the university counsellor, their tutor.
- » If you are able to be there when it's ok for you that will be a great help.
- » Listen to them and try not to give advice or criticise – this can be tough when you don't agree with what they say about themselves and what they eat. Just making sure they know you're there for them is what's important.
- » If you can sit and watch the TV together, without having to talk or ask questions around food or eating, that too can help.
- » Try and focus on the things your friend likes doing, not on food.
- » Keep trying to include them – they may not want to go out or join in with activities, but keep trying to talk to them and ask them along, just like before. Even if they don't join in, they will still like to be asked. It will make them feel valued.

WHAT SUPPORT CAN I GET FOR MYSELF?

Remember in life it is often the people we trust the most who we hurt the most. This does not make it ok to be hurt though – you have the right to say NO. Trying to help someone can be frustrating and hard work. Recovery can be a long process, you need to look after your own needs during this time. It is important that you are able to talk to someone about your feelings.

You can also choose to:

- » Visit websites which offer help www.swedauk.org or www.b-eat.co.uk.
- » Join a local Support group – have a look at what **SWEDA** can offer.
- » Read up on information on how to help someone with an eating disorder.



The SWEDA Coachhouse in Shepton Mallet ready to welcome clients

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