

SEND Bulletin NO. 12

Eating Disorders



Eating disorders are usually triggered by a combination of factors in a person's life. These may include:

- bereavement
- low self-esteem
- poor family relationships
- being bullied or abused
- illness or disability
- lack of confidence
- problems at school, college or work
- social pressures
- depression.

Eating disorders are most likely to affect young women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, though anyone can develop one, regardless of age, sex or culture. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are the most well-known.

Anorexia nervosa means 'loss of appetite for nervous reasons'. Sufferers restrict the amount of food they eat, often as a way of coping with life rather than with the intention of starving themselves. They have a distorted view of their body image and weight. As the illness

progresses the sufferer becomes unable to make rational decisions about food and, if untreated, can die from the effects of the illness.

Bulimia nervosa means 'the nervous hunger of an ox'. As with anorexia, this eating disorder is usually the sign of an emotional need. Sufferers binge-eat large amounts of food, then make themselves vomit or take laxatives to get rid of it. They also have a distorted view of their body and weight. Bulimia is most likely to develop from the late teens.

Key characteristics

Young people with eating disorders may have a mixture of symptoms. No two sufferers will be the same.

A person with anorexia may:

- show poor weight gain or extreme weight loss
- have a fear of gaining weight
- have dry or discoloured skin
- feel cold and have poor circulation
- experience stomach pains and have constipation
- appear restless, have mood swings and show changes in personality
- display an obsessive interest in the way that they eat their food
- deny that they have a problem with eating.

A person with bulimia may:

- have uncontrollable urges to eat large amounts of food, then fast periodically
- often appear tired and lethargic
- take excessive exercise
- suffer with bad breath, sore throats and other problems caused by vomiting
- show erratic weight changes
- have difficulties with socialising
- visit the toilet frequently, particularly after meals

- have some hair loss
- have an obsessive interest in food
- have mood swings
- use laxatives regularly.

Support strategies

You may need to:

- find out if the student has been seen by their GP and is receiving help
- provide a mentor (a trusted adult) with whom they can discuss their anxieties
- focus on how a person feels rather than how they look or what they eat
- focus on the person's achievements rather than their difficulties
- provide activities that encourage the building of self-esteem
- liaise with outside agencies who may be counselling the student and their family.

Support agencies

- Anorexia and Bulimia Care: www.anorexiabulimiacare.co.uk
- UK Eating Disorder Charity: <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>
- Eating Problems: www.mind.org.uk

If you have any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin, please e-mail them to me:

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Many thanks

Anne