

Supporting A Friend/Loved One Struggling with An Eating Disorder Do's & Don'ts

Recommended Do's

- Educate yourself on [eating disorders](#)
- Learn the differences between facts and myths about weight, nutrition, and exercise
- Find an appropriate time and place to talk to the individual in private
- Express your concerns using "I" statements (e.g. "I've noticed you haven't been eating lunch with us for a while." or "I'm worried about how much you've been exercising")
 - Listen openly and reflectively
 - Be patient and nonjudgmental
 - Have compassion when the person shares painful issues about underlying problems
 - Ask what you can do to help
 - Let them know you are there to support them
- Encourage the individual to get professional help
 - Acknowledge that seeking help can feel really scary
 - Offer to go along if they need support
 - Be ready for pushback - denial is not uncommon. Don't give up, let them know you care and you'll be there for them
- Get help from a trusted adult
 - Reach out to an adult you trust (e.g. a family member, school counselor, coach) even if the person is in denial. You're doing the right thing in a really difficult situation and both you and your friend deserve support.
- Take care of your own mental, physical, and emotional health
- Remember: recovery takes time and food may always be a difficult issue. Most importantly, the recovery work is up to the individual affected, not you.
- Validate the person's feelings, struggles, and accomplishments and express your support
- Reinforce any wins/successes in the recovery process, as small as it might be (e.g. keeping appointments, taking medication as prescribed, etc.)

Recommended Don'ts

- Don't be scared
- Don't attempt to solve/fix their problems or offer more help than you are qualified to give
- Don't comment on calories/food intake, weight, appearance, etc.
- Don't demand weight changes or insist the person eat every type of food at the table
- Don't promise to keep it a secret
- Don't create guilt or place blame on the person, self, or others
- Don't put timetables on recovery
- Don't expect recovery to be linear or perfect
- Don't use scare tactics or threaten the person to get them into treatment, but do call 911 if you believe the person's condition is life-threatening