

Helpful Strategies for Friends, Partners, Roommates, and Relatives of People with Eating Disorders

Friends and family members are good sources of hope & support for those struggling with an eating disorder. Here are some tips and strategies on how to help:

- Learn about eating disorders – the more you know the more you'll understand be able to share treatment options with them.
- Set aside a time to talk & use “I” statements vs. “You” statements
 - Examples:
 - AVOID “You” statements – “You’re too thin” or “You need help”
 - BEWARE of “You” disguised as “I” statements – “I think you’re out of control” or “I think you’re just trying to get attention”
 - USE “I” statements – “I’m concerned that your health is in danger” or “I’m afraid I will lose you and I’m scared for you”
- Don’t blame yourself - remember that there’s no single cause of eating disorders which means there’s no simple solution or cure.
- Be patient - recovery takes time and usually involves lapses & setbacks.
- Accept that you may feel helpless - people often see eating disorders as a solvable but it’s often a way for that person to cope with stress
- Talk directly & express genuine concern – remember to say what you see and stick to specific behaviours you’ve seen that concern you.
- Express continued support – say that you care and want to help them.
- Avoid conflicts – if they refuse to acknowledge that there’s a problem, restate your feelings and be a supportive listener.
- Encourage professional help – ask your friend to explore these concerns with a counselor, doctor, nutritionist, or other health professional and offer to go with them to their first visit if you feel comfortable.
- Set limits for yourself –remember you won’t be able to provide much emotional support if you’re physically and mentally exhausted.
- Talk to someone - if someone is in acute medical danger you need to tell someone whether it be a teacher, doctor, counselor, nutritionist, or any other trusted adult.