

Eating Disorders – Helping Your Loved One

An eating disorder has taken hold of a loved one and you want to help, but you don't know how. It seems that despite your best intentions, your comments and concerns haven't been well received. While each eating disorder sufferer is unique, consider the following suggestions as you reach out to help the person who means so much to you.

1. Educate yourself about eating disorders. You can find loads of information on eating disorders in this day and age. Yet once you've educated yourself, accept that there may still be certain food related behaviors your loved one engages in that you won't understand. There may be days that he/she doesn't even understand.
2. Do your best to focus on feelings, not just food. It's understandable that you want to see this person eating well balanced meals in appropriate portions and not purging in any fashion, but eating disorder recovery reaches beyond surface food related behaviors. Your support in changing these behaviors may be vital, but understand that it's one part of the recovery process. If you can also listen and be understanding of your loved one's emotional needs, you can do even more to help.
3. Realize that your loved one needs professional help. This does not indicate failure on your part. Eating disorders are complicated and individuals generally benefit the most from a treatment team of some kind that addresses their physical as well as their mental, emotional and spiritual needs.
4. Ask your loved one how you can help. Listen carefully to what he/she has to say. However, don't be surprised if your friend or family member isn't sure what to say even though it meant a great deal to him/her that you asked. In addition, understand that what your loved one needs from you may change throughout the recovery process. Keeping the lines of communication open will be key for both of you.
5. Communicate to your loved one that you love, accept, appreciate and value him/her. Commit to standing by your loved one through this difficult recovery process no matter how long it takes. Understand that recovery can sometimes take years, but celebrate any step forward with your loved one. Some of those steps will probably seem very small to you, but to him/her, the same steps may feel like giant leaps. Each step closer to breaking free of an eating disorder is worth celebrating.

These are just a few things you can do to support your loved one through the recovery process. Most of all, do your best to listen, be patient and show compassion. Your loved one will appreciate it more than you know.

By Laurie Glass
© 2007