

## **EATING DISORDERS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS IN IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING STUDENTS**

**Become familiar with warning signs.** Seek consultation from your school psychologist or counselor when students exhibit these symptoms. Recognize, however, that any one of these is not a telltale sign that a student has an eating disorder.

- Frequent excuses to skip lunches or having unusually poor eating habits.
- Compulsion to constantly talk about his/her diet and weight.
- Engaging in fad dieting or long-term dieting.
- Oversensitivity to criticism.
- Sudden behavior changes, including mood swings, signs of depression, compulsive behaviors, and excessively controlled behaviors.
- Changes in physical appearance, including weight loss, poor hair texture, brittle nails, blotchy or yellow skin, yellow teeth due to vomiting, amenorrhea, and seems overly sensitive to the cold, perhaps always wearing layered clothes.

**Understand and look out for other contributors to the development of an eating disorder.** These include: adolescent attention to a modeling group (e.g., “popular kids”) that displays perceive cohort norms, peer encouragement to diet, joint dieting among individuals or groups, peer teasing, feelings of ostracism by peers or negative peer relations, intense attention to media norms, lack of positive peer relations, growing up with abuse or an alcoholic family, the experience of a traumatic event causing extreme emotional pain, development of a mood disorder, and lack of encouragement from peers, teachers, or parents.

**Be aware of co-existing psychological disorders.** These include: obsessive-compulsive disorder, self-inflicted violence (cutting, biting, head-banging), substance abuse, undiagnosed ADHD, depression, post traumatic stress disorder, multiple personality disorder, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, and panic/anxiety disorders.

**Use teaching strategies to instill self-confidence and positive self-image.** (see recommendations on self-esteem)

**Help students develop coping skills.** These include: stress management techniques, decision-making skills, communication skills, and conflict resolution strategies.

**Assist with program development.** Consider serving as the advisor for peer assistance groups and anxiety and tension reduction groups.

**Most importantly, be supportive.** Teachers should understand that this is an internal psychological disorder that manifests itself externally. The best thing they can do is immediately inform the school counselor or psychologist. This will drastically increase the likelihood of proper intervention.

**Additional Resources:**

- Handbook of eating disorders and obesity.* (2004). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Heller, T. (2003). *Eating disorders: a handbook for teens, families, and teachers.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.
- Ogden, J. (2003). *The psychology of eating: from healthy to disordered behavior.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Phelps, L., Augustyniak, K., Nelson, L., & Nathanson, D. (1997). Adolescent eating disorders, chronic dieting, and body dissatisfaction. In G.G. Bear & K.M. Minke, Children's needs II: Development, problems, and alternatives. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

[www.4woman.gov/BodyImage/Bodywise/bodywise.htm](http://www.4woman.gov/BodyImage/Bodywise/bodywise.htm): Bodywise Handbook.

[www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/edi/1.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/edi/1.htm): Helping Students with Eating Disorders.

[www.edhelp.com/adolescentsvcs.html](http://www.edhelp.com/adolescentsvcs.html): Center for Treatment of Eating Disorders – Adolescent Services.

[www.vsu.edu/hper/hyper2.htm](http://www.vsu.edu/hper/hyper2.htm): Eating Disorders.

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