

**Presentation**  
**Courtesy of TEEN CONTACT**  
[www.teencontact.org](http://www.teencontact.org)  
(972) 233-TEEN

**Topic:** Eating Disorders

**Title:** What you need to know about eating disorders

**For:** Parents of elementary, middle, and high school students

**Length of Time Needed:** 30-45 minutes

**Objectives:**

1. To inform parents of individuals who may be at an elevated risk for developing an eating disorder
2. To inform parents of causes of eating disorders
3. To inform parents of warning signs of eating disorders
4. To inform parents of prevention strategies that parents can employ

**Materials Needed:** overhead projector, screen, overheads or handouts

**Activity:**

1. **Who may be at an elevated risk for developing an eating disorder?** Ask this question to the group parents. Allow time for discussion and ask individuals to share their ideas. Afterwards, share the following information using the overhead with the parents

**TRAITS OF THOSE WHO DEVELOP EATING DISORDERS**

-Typically these individuals as children are conscientious, eager to please, hardworking, and good students. They strive for perfection; however, inside they feel defective and inadequate. In an effort to be special or to stand out, they develop eating disorders to be thin.

-Research has shown these individuals may also be afraid or unaware of how to express powerful emotions verbally. Therefore, they will turn to developing an eating disorder to express the unspoken thoughts of, "I won't let you control me!" or "I'm starving for attention!"

-Many of these individuals are perfectionists with low tolerance for change due to the fact that change may represent chaos.

\*\*\* Three of the most powerful risk factors for the development of an eating disorder are (1) a mother who diets, (2) a sister who diets, and (3) friends who diet. \*\*\*

**2. What are some causes of eating disorders?** Ask the parents to discuss this as a group. After several minutes of suggestions, present the following information on an overhead. Be sure to discuss with parents as you go.

There are many theories on this subject, and no one theory encompasses all individuals suffering from eating disorders. However, some or all of the following factors may contribute to the development of an eating disorder.

### **Contributing Factors**

- 1) Biological Factors- temperament, family history of eating disorders
- 2) Psychological Factors- perfectionistic, dichotomists, lack of identity, difficulty with expressing anger
- 3) Family Factors- overprotective families which cause feelings of being smothered, high expectations of achievement and success without support
- 4) Social Factors- having appearance-obsessed friends or romantic partners, being involved in organizations that are appearance-obsessed, feelings of loneliness
- 5) Media Factors- television programming of unhealthy body images, magazine photos

**3. What are some of the warning signs of eating disorders?** Ask the parents to suggest what they feel may be warning signs of development of eating disorders. After several minutes of discussion, share the following information on an overhead.

### **Food behaviors:**

Skipping meals  
Eating tiny portions  
Not eating in front of others  
Ritualistic eating behaviors  
Always having an excuse to not eat  
Becoming “disgusted” with former favorite unhealthy foods  
Boasting about how healthy the meal he/she consumes is  
Drastically reducing or eliminating fat-intake  
Reading food labels religiously

### **Appearance and Body Image Behaviors:**

Losing or trying to lose weight  
Fearing weight gain  
Wearing baggy clothes to hide emaciation

Inspecting oneself in mirror for long periods of time and finding something to criticize  
Detesting all or many body parts

**Exercise Behaviors:**

Exercising excessively and compulsively  
Tiring easily

**Thoughts and Beliefs:**

Despite typical average or above-average intelligence, the individual may think in simplistic ways. EX: "If I am thinner, I will feel better about myself."  
Becomes irrational and denies anything is wrong  
Having trouble concentrating  
Obsessing about food and weight  
Holding to rigid and perfectionistic standards for self and others

**Feelings**

Experiences difficulty talking about feelings  
Becomes moody and irritable  
Responds to confrontation with tears or withdrawal  
Frequently experiences depression, anxiety, guilt, loneliness, and hopelessness

**Social:**

Tries to please everyone and withdraws when this is not possible  
Tries to control what and where the family eats  
Experiences dependent or superficial relationships

- 4. What are some methods of prevention that can be employed?** Ask the parents to offer suggestions for prevention of the development of eating disorders. After several minutes of discussion, share the following material using an overhead.

**Eating disorders are easier to prevent than to cure, and parents are in the best position to do that work.**

- 1) Give your family and friends the gift of a healthy role model. Don't criticize your own appearance; it may teach others to be overly concerned and critical of their own bodies.
- 2) Don't criticize anyone's appearance, even in jest. Phrases such as "thunder thighs" can wound self-esteem.
- 3) Don't allow anyone in the family to tease other members of the family about appearance. Even playful banter can leave emotional scars.
- 4) Emphasize the importance of healthy and fit bodies. The goal should be

fitness, not thinness.

- 5) Praise your children for who they are, their personal qualities and what they do -not how they look.
- 6) Be wary of dieting yourself. You may want to choose to stick to a healthy routine of nutritious eating and exercising.
- 7) Encourage healthy eating, not dieting.
- 8) Don't forbid certain foods or label them as "bad." It makes them the "forbidden fruit."
- 9) Make mealtime pleasant. Enjoy eating with family and friends.
- 10) If a child is bound and determined to diet, consult a physician or registered dietician to supervise the effort.
- 12) Help your children build and commit to an active lifestyle. Physical fitness promotes a healthy self-image.
- 13) Talk to your children about normal body changes expected at puberty.
- 14) Talk to your children about the unrealistic images they see in magazines, on television, and in the movies.

**Evaluation:** Orally ask the following questions both before and after the presentation.

1. Who may be at an elevated risk for developing eating disorders?
2. What are some contributing factors to the development of eating disorders?
3. What are some warning signs of the development of eating disorders?
4. What are some prevention techniques that parents can employ?

**Resources:**

[www.anred.com](http://www.anred.com)

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June 18, 2003

**Permission is granted to reproduce**

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# **Who may be at an elevated risk for developing an eating disorder?**

## **TRAITS OF THOSE WHO DEVELOP EATING DISORDERS**

-Typically these individuals as children are conscientious, eager to please, hardworking, and good students. They strive for perfection; however, inside they feel defective and inadequate. In an effort to be special or to stand out, they develop eating disorders to be thin.

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mother who diets, (2) a sister who diets, and (3) friends who diet. \*\*\*

## **What are some causes of eating disorders?**

There are many theories on this subject, and no one theory encompasses all individuals suffering from eating disorders. However, some or all of the following factors may contribute to the development of an eating disorder.

### **Contributing Factors**

- 1) Biological Factors- temperament, family history of eating disorders
- 2) Psychological Factors- perfectionistic, dichotomists, lack of identity, difficulty with expressing anger
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## **What are some of the warning signs of eating disorders?**

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## **What are some methods of prevention that can be employed?**

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