

A Parent's Guide to Understanding Eating Disorders

During Superintendent's Conference Day this year, the Jericho School District had Eating Disorder Specialist's provide professional development for the school's faculty members. Therefore, I thought it would be beneficial to share this invaluable information with our families. Unfortunately, too many young men and women suffer in silence with this emotionally, mentally, and physically debilitating disorder. It is time that we help to promote healthy living by talking openly with our loved ones about the seriousness of eating disorders. For this first issue, I will provide you with an overview about eating disorders, warning signs, and some useful parent resources.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), an eating disorder is marked by extremes. It is present when a person experiences severe disturbances in eating behavior, such as extreme reduction of food intake or extreme overeating, or feelings of extreme distress or concern about body weight or shape. A person with an eating disorder may have started out just eating smaller or larger amounts of food than usual, but at some point, the urge to eat less or more spirals out of control. Eating disorders are very complex, and despite scientific research to understand them, the biological, behavioral and social underpinnings of these illnesses remain elusive.

Based on the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR), there are two types of eating disorders known as **Anorexia Nervosa** and **Bulimia Nervosa**. There is a third category called "**Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS)**," which includes several variations of eating disorders. Most of these disorders are similar to anorexia or bulimia but with slightly different characteristics.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) reports the onset of eating disorders typically appear during adolescence or young adulthood. However, eating disorders have also been documented in childhood or later in adulthood. According to Natenshon (n.d.), research has indicated that the onset of eating disorders may develop earlier; therefore, prevention during adolescents may even be too late. Eating disorders are a real disorder that can be treatable if appropriately intervened for.

*Welcome to the
Jericho High School's
Psychology Corner!*

~Dr. Danielle Largotta-Smith



*If you need more information
about this topic, please feel free
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The NIMH provides some useful information surrounding the disorder:

- ❖ Women and girls are more likely than males to develop the disorder
- ❖ The rate in men are increasingly at-risk for developing the disorder
- ❖ Typically Eating Disorders co-exists with other psychiatric disorders (e.g., depression, substance abuse, anxiety disorders).
- ❖ People with eating disorders also can suffer from numerous other physical health complications (e.g., heart conditions, kidney failure, gastroesophageal reflux disorder).

Eating Disorder Warning Signs



- Preoccupation with body or weight
- Obsession with calories, food, or nutrition
- Constant dieting, even when thin
- Rapid, unexplained weight loss or weight gain
- Taking laxatives or diet pills
- Compulsive exercising
- Making excuses to get out of eating
- Avoiding social situations that involve food
- Going to the bathroom right after meals
- Eating alone, at night, or in secret
- Hoarding high-calorie food

~Information obtained from Segal, Smith, & Barston, 2008

References:

American Psychiatric Association (2000). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed., text revision)*. Washington, D.C: Author.

Natenshon, A. (n.d.). When Young Kids Have Eating Disorders. In *When Young Kids Have Eating Disorders*. Retrieved October 4, 2009, from Eating Disorder Referral and Information Center database:
<http://www.edreferral.com/Articles/children.htm#Young%20Kids%20and%20ED>

National Institute of Mental Health. (n.d.). Eating Disorders. In *Eating Disorders* [Fact sheet]. Retrieved September 2, 2009, from National Institute of Mental Health database:
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/eating-disorders/complete-index.shtml>

Segal, J., Smith, M., and Barston, S. (2008). Helping Someone with an Eating Disorder: Advice for Parents, Family Members, and Friends. Retrieved October 18, 2009, from Helpguide.org database:
http://www.helpguide.org/mental/eating_disorder_treatment.htm#authors

Additional Useful Websites:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
<http://www.aacap.org/>

Academy for Eating Disorders
<http://www.aedweb.org>

American Psychiatric Association
<http://www.psych.org/index.cfm>

The American Academy of Pediatrics
<http://www.aap.org/>

National Eating Disorders Association
<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

National Institute for Health
<http://www.nih.gov>