

Tips for Educators

Adapted from NEDA Educator Toolkit

*Reviewed by Douglas Bunnell, Ph.D, FAED, CEDS and
Paula Edwards-Gayfield, LCMHCS, LPC, CEDS-S, BC-TMH*

Eating disorders can have profound effects on cognitive and emotional functioning and may have a negative impact on student behavior and school performance. Eating disorders can decrease the ability to concentrate and focus, make students less active and more apathetic, and lead them to be withdrawn, and engage in fewer social interactions. They can also impair the immune system and make students more vulnerable to illnesses. It is important for educators to recognize these signs and to be aware that people with eating disorders do not fit one particular body type, gender, race, ethnicity or age group. These disorders can be extremely serious and educators can be essential first responders to vulnerable children. Only trained experts can diagnose an eating disorder but educators can be on the lookout for early warning signs.

Tips

The following tips may help you support a student affected by disordered eating, body dissatisfaction or an eating disorder.

- Be knowledgeable about signs and symptoms of eating disorders.
- Check if your school has specific guidelines on referrals for students suspected of having an eating disorder.
- Be prepared to refer students and families to appropriate eating disorder resources.
- Ensure that a protocol is in place for students to report teasing, bullying, or harassment based on weight or appearance.
- Be aware of the persistent myths about eating disorders. These disorders occur in children of all ages, genders, races, body types and socioeconomic level.
- If a student discloses a personal problem, consider the setting in which the disclosure has occurred. If it is during class or another setting where others are present, practice protective interrupting. For example: Thank you for sharing that...I'd like to follow this up with you after [class, recess, gym].
- Be aware that a student who has divulged very personal concerns has chosen the particular teacher or staff person to divulge for a reason. Acknowledge to the student how difficult disclosing personal concerns can be.
- Ask the student with the eating disorder privately how they would like teachers (and others) to respond when asked about how the student is doing and how they would like to be supported.
- When supporting the student's classmates, protect confidentiality and privacy by providing general information about how to be supportive to a friend who is experiencing an eating disorder.
- When you start a conversation with family or guardians, focus on empathy and concern and have resources available to refer to them.

For more information and resources on eating disorders, visit nationaleatingdisorders.org.

