

What Can I Do To Help?

Self Help Pack for Siblings of a Young Person with an Eating Disorder

Developed by the Eating Disorder Development Team.

NHS Lothian CAMHS

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This self help pack has been developed for teenagers who have a brother or sister currently suffering from an eating disorder. You might be confused about their diagnosis and are unsure about how you should respond. You might be feeling worried or scared about what this means for your sibling and their future. You may also feel worried that you have done something to cause this, or angry at the changes you've noticed at home. This self help pack will talk you through eating disorders - signs and behaviours to look out for, the causes, and its treatments. It will also provide you with some guidance on what is helpful or unhelpful to say to your sibling and some practical advice on little things you can do to help.

It is perfectly normal for you to worry. The development of the eating disorder is not your fault. Nor are you likely to be making it worse. We will talk through some of the causes of eating disorders later.

It is also extremely important that you take the time to look after yourself you will be experiencing a difficult time in your life right now, and deserve your own space to deal with this too.

The pack has been designed to complement the family sessions you are having, and there is some space at the end for you to note any further questions you may have to take to your family worker. It might be helpful to complete the pack with your parent/carer, or even with your sibling.

Good luck!



What is an eating disorder?



Food is essential for us to function as human beings. Some of us eat more than others, some require more than others, and we all have our likes and dislikes. Having body fat and a healthy body weight allows our bodies to work properly, and to provide us with energy to function, grow and move around.

People can, at times, become unhappy with their body – they may worry they are too fat, too thin or don't have long enough legs etc. Generally, however, these worries will eventually pass.

Those who go on to develop an eating disorder may misuse food to control difficult emotions. The longer food is misused, the more impact it will have on how they feel about themselves.

Please note that eating disorders are not contagious, nor does it make you 'crazy'. It is also not attention seeking behaviour and has much more to do with difficult emotions inside than starving or overeating to change their appearance. Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses, but the good news is that they ARE treatable, and someone will have a much better chance of recovering the sooner they seek help.

There are four main eating disorders which we will talk about today; Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder (BED) and Other Specified Eating or Feeding Disorder (OSFED).

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia Nervosa is an eating disorder marked by consistent weight loss, or having a low body weight by restricting what you eat and/or over exercising. They may also eat large quantities of food over a short period of time (binging), and/or make themselves sick, and take laxatives or diet pills (purging). They will think about food, calories and fat content a lot throughout the day, and will lose weight in order to feel in control.

What are the signs of Anorexia Nervosa?

- Being afraid of gaining weight/losing weight quickly. They might therefore avoid eating at mealtimes or hide/dispose of food. They may also do a lot of exercise. Your sibling might try to get you to eat their snacks or finish their meals for them. If this is the case please speak to an adult.
- Believing they are fat/overweight when they are actually underweight. They might deny they have a problem, spend a lot of time looking at their body in the mirror, or compare their body to others. They might also wear baggier clothes than usual.
- Making themselves sick and/or using laxatives/diet pills to help them lose weight.
- Thinking a lot about food/weight/their body. They might talk a lot about food, ideal weights and body shapes. It is unhelpful to engage in a discussion about any of these topics with your sibling. You might also notice your sibling weighing themselves more than usual and perhaps might ask you your weight to compare. Again this would be inappropriate to do and we would suggest you speak to an adult about this.
- Mood swings and feeling sad/angry. They might then spend a lot of time in their room, be very sensitive to comments others make, and be quick to argue with family and those close to them.
- Being restless and hyper. The drive to lose weight might cause them to be more active than usual. You might notice them pacing around the house more than normal, and they might find it difficult to concentrate on anything. For example, they might struggle to sit through a TV show without getting up.

- Not drinking enough fluid, making them likely to become dehydrated. This might also make them feel dizzy and prone to fainting!
- Poor sleep and feeling tired a lot. They might stay up really late at night and struggle to get up in the mornings. This will also likely make them grumpy!



Physical Symptoms of Anorexia

- Bloated stomach/face/ankles
- Wair that is thinning and/or falling out
- Feeling cold (poor circulation)
- Ory or rough skin
- Periods stopping
- Having brittle bones and being more likely to break a bone.

Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia Nervosa is an eating disorder marked by cycles of eating a large amount of food over a short period of time (binging) and getting rid of the food by making themselves sick or using laxatives (purging). Some may fast or over exercise instead of, or as well as, using laxatives or being sick. People do this when they feel upset or stressed. Usually, those with Bulimia are a 'normal' shape and weight, so it can be trickier to spot. However, they can constantly think a lot about food throughout the day.

What are the signs of Bulimia Nervosa?

Cycles of binging and purging. They might therefore spend a lot of time in the bathroom, particularly around mealtimes. They might also take a large amount of food from the kitchen when no-one is around to eat in secret. They will likely feel guilty or ashamed about this. If you suspect your sibling is doing this, it is best to speak to a parent or carer than to confront them so it can be dealt with sensitively and won't make them feel bad.

- You might have experienced arguements with your sibling if you have tried to eat any of their 'stashed foods' or foods they like to binge on.
- Thinking a lot about food/weight/their body. They might talk a lot about food, ideal weights and body shapes. It is unhelpful to engage in a discussion about any of these topics with your sibling.
- Being afraid of gaining weight. You might therefore notice them leaving a lot of food on their plate during mealtimes or by playing around with the food, or trying to dispose of it.
- Mood swings and feeling sad/angry. They might then spend a lot of time in their room, be very sensitive to comments others make, and be quick to argue with family and those close to them.
- Feeling anxious or 'on-edge' a lot.



Binge Eating Disorder

Binge Eating Disorder is when someone thinks a lot about shape, weight and food, and eats a large amount of food in a short period of time in what feels like an uncontrolled way. This is called a binge. Binges will normally be ritualistic and planned, and is most likely to happen in response to difficult emotions, but can also become part of a habit.

What are the signs and symptoms of Binge Eating Disorder?

- Eating a lot of food over a short period of time, even if they are not hungry
- Being overweight or gaining a lot of weight quite quickly
- Being unhappy about themselves
- Feeling sad
- Feeling anxious and 'on-edge'

Someone with Binge Eating Disorder will likely be secretive about their behaviours, and will usually binge in the privacy of their own bedroom or at home when no-one else is around. You might notice a lot of food disappearing from the kitchen, or finding food packaging hidden around the house. Again, they will be feeling guilty and ashamed about this so it's not a good idea to confront them directly about it. Instead, confide in an adult your concerns and they can deal with it sensitively so as not to upset them.

Other Eating Disorders

It is important to mention that eating disorders don't just stop there. Your sibling might instead be diagnosed with 'Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorder' (OSFED) where they will present with an eating disorder but don't meet the full criteria to be diagnosed with any of the above mentioned eating disorders. This is still just as distressing an illness and the signs and symptoms will be very similar to those outlined above.

To read more about the types of Eating Disorders and other symptoms or signs of the illness, check out the BEAT website. This is an official Eating Disorder charity and has lots of resources for friends and family concerned about a love one with an eating disorder.

https://www.b-eat.co.uk/

Activity 1.

Take some time to think about what you noticed was different about your sibling as they developed their eating disorder? What signs and symptoms would you have spotted? Talk this through with a parent/carer or member of CAMHS staff.



Activity 2.

Sometimes it can feel like your brother or sister has been 'taken over' by the eating disorder, whilst at other times feel like their 'old self' which can be confusing! To support them, it might be helpful to separate the eating disorder from your sibling by thinking about it as something separate which has taken over them when they feel stressed. Use the space below to name the Eating Disorder and jot down some of the qualities you imagine it would have. You might even wish to draw it out!



What Causes Eating Disorders?

Lots of research has been done to find out the causes of eating disorders. It is highly likely that they develop due to a complex combination of many factors going on in someone's life. These factors can be broken down into four main categories; your relationships with others around you, your personality, the environment around you and biological (what you might have taken from your parents!). It should be noted however, that not everyone who experiences these difficulties will go on to develop an eating disorder, and people can also develop an eating disorder without having experienced any of these factors.

Your relationships

- Parents separating
- Death of a loved one
- Problems at school or at home
- Bullying
- Oifficult past experiences

The environment around you

- Very thin models in magazines and on tv/films
- Photoshopped/filtered images on social media
- Negativity around people being 'overweight'
- Pressure at school to look thin
- People around them reacting positively to weight loss

Your personality

- Not liking themselves
- Peeling anxious
- Feeling sad
- Wanting to have everything perfect
- Finding it difficult to show others how they feel
- Being very sensitive to criticism
- Feeling 'out of control'
- Diet that has been difficult to control

Biological Factors

- e Having a parent with an eating disorder, or a history of having an eating disorder
- e Having a period of illness

Treatment of Eating Disorders

It is likely that your sibling will already be in treatment. Your sibling may have attended their GP with concerns at first, or perhaps a parent/family member/teacher had noticed some of the signs we mentioned above and supported them to attend their GP.

When a young person is referred to CAMHS with an eating disorder, there are three levels of care possible.

- Outpatient This is when the person attends weekly or fortnightly appointments with their key worker but remains at home. This can involve medical checkups to make sure they are physically well, whole family appointments (including you!) and/or times when your sibling meets someone individually.
- 2. Day Programme Attends for the duration of the afternoon, attends groups to help them with their eating disorder, meeting someone individually, and getting support with eating their snacks and/or meals.
- 3. **Inpatient Service** This is when the person with the eating disorder is admitted to hospital for a short period of time. This is normally done as a last resort when the eating disorder is very strong.

Here at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) we also have an Intensive Treatment Service (ITS). Your sibling might attend this service which makes sure that someone can check on them more regularly.

Sometimes medicine might be given to make up for the lack of nutrients they would otherwise get from food, or to strengthen their bones. Your sibling may also be given medicine to make them feel happier or less anxious. Medication is also given to people with Bulimia to help them stop binging and purging.

With regards to the length of time it may take for a young person to be discharged from CAMHS after suffering from an eating disorder, there is simply too much variation to give a rough estimate. It may take months or even years.

Activity 3.

You will likely have heard a lot of technical words being used around CAMHS whilst your sibling has attended for treatment. In the space below, write down any words you don't understand and would like explained to you in more detail.



Activity 4.

Do you have any other questions about the treatment of eating disorders? Write these below and ask a parent/carer or member of staff to explain this to you



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Myths and Facts about Eating Disorders

"Eating Disorders are all about food."

The initial response you might want to give to someone you care about who is refusing to eat is, 'Just eat!!' Unfortunately, eating disorders are far more complicated than just not wanting to eat food, and this is not a helpful thing to say to someone with an eating disorder.

"Exercise is good for you - how can you possibly over exercise?!"

Exercise, generally, can be good for your body and well-being. However, exercising without eating enough to give you the energy can actually be harmful to the body and can leave you dehydrated and feeling extremely tired. It also increases the risk of physical injury.

"Eating Disorders only occur in girls."

Anyone can develop an eating disorder, regardless of gender, age, where you live etc. Approximately 1 in 9 adolescents with eating disorders are now males.

"But my sibling has gained weight - they must be cured!"

Unfortunately, weight recovery is only one component to recovering from Anorexia. Also, not all people with eating disorders are visibly underweight. Just because someone looks healthy does not mean they aren't struggling inside.

"I feel they are just doing all of this for attention"

Eating disorders can cause a serious health risk for its victims, and as a result it is normal for loved ones around them to worry about them and spend lots of time with them. This will understandably be difficult for you, and you are allowed to feel sad and left out at times. However, having your support and understanding throughout one of the most difficult periods in their life will certainly play a key role in helping your sibling recover from their eating disorder. Your sibling is most definitely not trying to take all of your parents/carers attention. If you worry about this, it is best to speak directly to your parents/carers, or to bring this up in family sessions at CAMHS.

Activity 5.

Have you heard any rumours or myths about eating disorders that you aren't sure are true or not? Write these below and ask an adult to clarify for you.



What Can I Do To Help?

One of the big things you can do to help your sibling is to simply be there for them. Try to become involved with their treatment, if possible. You might feel uncomfortable, but having you around could help make them feel more comfortable and supported, even if they don't say it at the time. If you struggle to go, why not write them a letter to let them know you are thinking about them?

Below are some more suggestions that you can do to support your sister/brother during their recovery.

- <u>Chat to your parents/carers</u> so they can understand the situation from your perspective. Don't be afraid to tell them how you are really feeling, and this can be scary! It is important to talk openly as a family to make sure everyone is being heard. If you ever feel that people are hiding things from you, try to explain that you appreciate them trying to protect you, but you would rather know the truth than worry about what 'might be'.
- 2. Although you might feel your sibling is almost a different person, and their mood swings can make you feel frightened or angry, try to <u>treat</u> <u>them like normal</u>. They are still the same person they've always been, but their eating disorder is making life difficult for them at the moment. Try to avoid direct conversations about food/weight/diets/bodies. Instead, spend some quality time together doing something fun that you both enjoy. Spending time together will help remind your sibling of all the good parts of life.
- 3. Your brother/sister might actually feel more comfortable talking to you than anyone else right now. You might not fully understand their illness or have a different view on the issues they are struggling with, but this might help them understand some of the difficulties they are experiencing. However, if you feel they are sharing things that make you feel uncomfortable, it is important to speak to an adult about this. For example, your sibling might ask you to keep certain things a secret that

they don't want their parents/carers knowing. This might be something to do with their eating or exercising. It is important for you to know that you should never feel pressured to keep these secrets. The best thing for you to do in this situation is to speak to an adult about your concerns and you should not feel guilty about doing this.

- Try to <u>avoid talking to your sibling about food/diets/weight/body</u> <u>shape</u>. If they try to do this, it is best to speak to an adult for advice and support.
- 5. Recovery can take a long time. It can be frustrating to see your sibling be so unwell for such a long period of time, but recovery is a long process and it is very common for young people to 'relapse' and unexpectedly become unwell again. If this happens, <u>remind your sibling that you're</u> <u>there for them no matter what.</u>
- 6. <u>Don't intrude on their personal space</u> if they ask for it. You might worry when they lock themselves in their room, but give them some space and perhaps gently knock the door and let them know you are there for them if they want to talk to anyone. However, if you are worried about them, speak to an adult about this.



Activity 6.

Use the space below to write down some of the activities you and your sibling could do together. It might be helpful to refer to this list when your sibling is feeling sad or anxious to help take their mind off the problem that is bothering them.



Mealtimes

- Mealtimes can be one of the most difficult times for someone with an eating disorder. You might feel uncomfortable, awkward, or simply unsure of what is the right or wrong thing to do. The simple answer is to <u>treat</u> <u>mealtimes as normal as possible</u>. Below are some tips on how to help make mealtimes with your sibling as smooth as possible.
- Come to the table with some light-hearted topics to chat about (ie. What you got up to that day, a TV show you are both watching, a new song you've heard that you think they might like...)
- Don't worry too much about what your sibling is eating. Your parents/carers will have had some support from CAMHS on managing mealtimes. This is not your responsibility.
- Avoid any conversation about food, body, diets, weight, or painful topics. Do not discuss the eating disorder.
- Try not to watch them too much whilst they are eating.
- Model healthy eating. Eat at a steady pace and try not to pick at the food. Your sibling is learning to do this all over again, so it important to have someone they can look up to. However, do not feel pressured to eat less or more than you want to. Your parents/carers will have the responsibility on the food and amount of food your sibling will have to eat, so it is important that you continue to eat as normal without worrying about them.
- Try to have a fun activity planned for after mealtimes that you can do together, one that involves sitting down and isn't too active. This can be an extremely difficult time for your sibling, as they will be feeling uncomfortable and distressed. An example would be a board game to do together, or put the radio on and chat.

Helpful and unhelpful things to say

"Just eat!" It is understandably frustrating

for someone to watch a person they love become sick.



Unfortunately it is not as simple as just eating and your sibling is struggling with very painfulemotions inside.

"Why can't you just eat?"

"You're looking a lot better now." This might seem like you are complimenting the sibling, but any comments directed towards their appearance can create difficult emotions.

"You look too thin."

"But you have a good life, why are you doing this?"

Pointing out the calories of something. This can be unhelpful for your sibling

DO NOT make assumptions about how they feel or why they are behaving a certain way. If in doubt, ask them.

DO NOT persuade them to change.

Model eating a range of foods Ask how they are doing. Be there for them to talk to. Be non-judgemental



Be supportive

Encourage them to speak to an adult/doctor etc. Offer to go with them.

Include them in social activities, but don't pressure them if they refuse.

REMEMBER it is not your responsibility to "fix" them. If you are unsure about anything or feel your sibling is at risk or in danger, speak to a trusted adult.

Activity 7.

Ask your brother or sister if they'd like to sit down with you and tell you what things they would find helpful and unhelpful for you to do. Use the space below to write these down.

DO

Dealin' With Feelin's!

The following section of this guide is designed to help you learn new ways of coping when you feel sad, stressed, angry or worried. You might wish to fill it in with a parent/carer, your sibling, or on your own.

Talking to People

It can be helpful to talk to someone you trust if you feel sad, stressed, angry or worried. Someone who cares about you will want to put you at ease and reassure you.

- Parents/Carers
- @ Grandparents
- Teachers
- Priends
- Siblings
- Quints/Uncles



Activity 8.

Write below a list of the people close to you who you think you would feel comfortable talking to about a problem.



If you are unable to talk to anyone close to you, call **Childline on 0800 1111**. The call is free from a landline phone, and they will not tell anyone that you have spoken to them. The call will also not appear on the telephone bill, so no-one needs to find out that you have contacted them.

If you would rather not call them, there is an option to speak to someone on their website in a private chat. Visit https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat/

Do Things You Enjoy

Doing things that you enjoy will in turn make you feel more positive. Examples of fun things to do might be;

- Spending time with friends
- Reading a book
- Listening to your favourite music
- Exercising
- Watching a movie
- Spending time on the computer
- Doing arts or crafts

Activity 9.

Have a think below some of the things you like to do for fun. Try to do at least one thing every day this week.



Relax

Having a sibling with an eating disorder can be stressful. You might find yourself worrying about them, or worrying about the stress it's causing on your parents/carers. It's therefore important that you take some time every day to relax. You should never feel guilty for relaxing, everyone is entitled to some peaceful time!

Below are some ideas that some people may do to relax, can you think of any other activities that relax you? Try to make a habit of doing at least one of these activities every single day. It is completely normal for your mind to start drifting away and to start worrying during these activities, but try your best to let go of any stress and focus on the activity you are doing.

- Having a bubble bath
- Swimming
- Reading a book
- Watching tv or a film
- Lie in bed listening to music
- Orawing



Activity 10.

Below are two relaxation exercises for you to try. The first is a basic breathing exercise that you might wish to use when at any point you feel anxious. The second is a script for a visual relaxation exercise. You could get a parent or carer to read this out to you, or you can record yourself saying it on your phone and play it back.

Breathing Exercise

- 1. Sit as comfortable as possible and arrange your posture so that your hands are at your side and that your legs are slightly apart. Try and feel really relaxed.
- 2. Now breathe in and out slowly, calmly and deeply a few times, filling your lungs with air and saying the word "relax" or "calm" as you breathe out.
- 3. Tense and relax your muscles in this order.
- 4. Now focus for a few minutes on the deep, warm, heavy and relaxed feeling all over your body.

Some people find visual mindful breathing helpful too, so imagine that you are breathing in the colour blue and breathing out the colour red.

Instead you might picture yourself blowing lots of bubbles really quickly, practicing as hard as possible to blow one big bubble, which involves slowing down the breath and being fully in control of it so that the bubble doesn't pop.

It's okay if this doesn't work or is too difficult - it does take a lot of practice, especially when you are feeling okay and not anxious.

Relaxation Script

Get your body comfortable and gently close your eyes. Slowly take three deep breaths, in through your nose and our through your mouth.

Spend a moment or two, relaxing your feet and legs.

Letting go of any tightness and letting them become heavy and relaxed.



Imagine a wave of blue light travelling up from the earth into your feet and legs, relaxing everything it touches.

Now relax your tummy, chest, and shoulders. Imagine this wave of blue light sweeping through and relaxing this area for you.

Pay attention to your arms and fingers; allow the blue light to move through. Feel how relaxed you are.

Finally bring the blue light to your head and allow it to flow out of the top of your head and into the air around you. Imagine you are standing in front of a massive tree. This tree has deep, deep roots and branches that reach out in every direction. This tree is home to your very own tree house. This is a tree house of your own design. Picture how you would like your tree house to look. (Pause between each idea) You can add swings, windows, trapdoors, plants, animals, your favourite things, your favourite colours, just allow yourself to design the tree house anyway you like.

Can you see it? Good. Now allow yourself to travel inside the tree house. (Pause) Are you inside? Good.

Inside the tree house, imagine anything that makes you feel good to think about. Place pillows, waterfalls, plants, trees, birds, pictures of mountains, anything that you would like that you feel good when you think about it. Go ahead and design the inside of your tree house now.

Know that when you go inside your tree house you feel really really relaxed. This is a place to let go of all your thoughts, all your worries.

Take a deep breath and allow yourself to feel very peaceful and relaxed inside your tree house.

This is a place that you can go any time you would like to feel more peaceful and calm. Know that your tree house is available to you any time you would like. You can visit here whenever you would like.

Now take a deep breath and imagine yourself walking down out of your tree house. Gently bring your attention back to the room.

Rub your hands together to make them warm. Gently place them over your eyes. You can open your eyes whenever you are ready.

Keep Your Cool

You will probably identify with being angry, particularly when you have a sibling! When they have an eating disorder, you might have angry feelings about your sibling and sometimes want to blame them.



Your sibling is not to blame for their eating disorder, but that doesn't always stop us from being angry from time to time. You might also be angry at your parents when you notice more attention is being directed towards your brother or sister.

Below are some physical signs to be aware of when you feel angry. You might have...

- Tight, clenched fists
- Sweating or feeling very warm
- Feeling light headed
- Feeling like you're going to explode!
- Clenched teeth
- Being unable to concentrate on anything other than the thing you're angry at

.

Activity 11.

What signs do you notice when you feel angry?

When we start to feel all the sensation of anger, our bodies respond with physical action. Some of the negative things we might sometimes do when angry is to shout or swear, or hit a person/object. Sometimes when people are angry they react before having the chance to think things through. Here is one way of trying to stop yourself from acting without thinking.

Imagine a set of traffic lights.

RED - STOP! You are in a situation and you feel the anger bubbling away. Picture a red light telling you to STOP!

AMBER - Cool off and think. This is where you take time to cool off and think. You might want to try some deep breathing, do something active, or move away from the situation that has made you angry. This will give you time to think of how to act next.



GREEN – Ready to go. Now you have taken the time to calm down, you are ready to act.

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Activity 12

What things might you do in the amber phase to calm you down?

The Good Stuff!

It is likely that at times, home might be stressful. It is still important to celebrate good things you have achieved. These might include;

- 1. Getting to school on time
- 2. Completing your homework
- 3. Helped someone
- 4. Made someone laugh

Activity 13.	
Throughout the week, try to think of three things that made you happy. below and share them with your parent/carer.	Record these
Mon	
Tue	
Wed	
Thu	
Fri	
Sat	
Sun	

Thank you for taking the time to work through this pack and we hope you have found it helpful.

Please use the space below to jot down any questions you might still have about the eating disorder. Take this pack along with you to CAMHS and ask your parents/carers or professionals to clarify these things for you.