



Etone College
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Etone Mental Health

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Parent's Guide to Eating Disorders

What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions that can have a huge impact on someone's mental and physical health. They can affect anyone with any body shape or lifestyle – regardless of their gender, culture, age or ethnicity. Lots of young people who develop an eating problem or disorder are also going through other mental health issues. This can include anxiety or stress, feeling low or depressed, or struggling with their self-esteem.

Young people can use their behaviour around food and eating to try to cope with these difficult thoughts, feelings and experiences. They might limit how much they eat, consume large quantities of food quickly, or use methods such as making themselves sick to get rid of food from their body.

While it can sometimes be hard to understand from the outside, doing these kinds of things might:

- make someone feel they have a way of coping when things are difficult
- make someone feel in control, or give them a way of reducing anxiety or panic when they're overwhelmed
- numb or reduce uncomfortable or distressing feelings

Over time, these kinds of thoughts and behaviours around food might become very fixed and difficult to change – and may start to take over daily life. When this happens, it can have a hugely negative effect on a young person's social life and their relationships with friends and family. It can also lead to very serious physical health problems, and affect a young person's physical growth and development. In very serious cases, and without the right kind of support and treatment, eating disorders can cause death.



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Signs that your child might be developing an eating problem or disorder

Every child and young person will show, or not show, what's going on in different ways. The signs that they're struggling might also look different depending on what type of eating problem they have.

While it's not always easy to tell, some early signs that your child is developing an eating problem or disorder might include:

- becoming more controlling or limiting about what, how much or when they eat – including avoiding eating with other people
- obsessing about their body shape, having an inaccurate view of their body shape, or feeling afraid of putting on weight
- leaving the table quickly after meals (for example to hide food or be sick)
- exercising a lot, or much more than they used to
- seeming different in themselves – including seeming more tired than usual, or finding it difficult to concentrate
- wearing loose or baggy clothes to hide their weight loss
- losing or gaining weight

As a parent or carer, it's not always easy to know what's going on – and a young person with an eating problem may try to hide what they're doing. But you know your child, and you know when something is wrong.

If you're worried that your child is developing an unhealthy relationship with food, it's important to make an appointment with a GP. This is the first step to getting them the right help.

Support available at Etone College

Students can access support through various channels at Etone College. They are able to speak with their Heads of House to ask for a referral to the Success Centre. There is also lots of signposting of support around the school with the contact details to various local and national support groups and charities.