

Children's Mental Health Matters!

a Maryland public awareness campaign

Facts For Educators

Eating Disorders

An Eating Disorder is a psychological condition that manifests itself in unhealthy eating habits. There are four diagnoses which are characterized by specific behaviors exhibited by the individual. Two primary behaviors are bingeing, the consumption of a large amount of food in a short period of time, and purging or self-induced vomiting. Misuse of laxative, diet pills, or water pills are also considered purging.

Bulimia Nervosa is the most common of the four diagnoses. It is characterized by a preoccupation with food and weight, bingeing and a compensation for bingeing by purging, excessive exercise or fasting. This pattern is accompanied by shame and secrecy.

Anorexia Nervosa is characterized by a refusal to maintain a normal weight for one's height, body type, age, and activity level; intense fear of becoming "fat" or gaining weight (extreme concern over one's weight); body image misconception; and loss of menstrual periods in females.

Binge Eating Disorder is characterized by bingeing, feelings of shame and self-hatred associated with bingeing, but no compensatory behavior such as purging.

Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified covers all maladaptive eating behaviors that do not fit into the above diagnoses. Examples include: restricting food intake, meeting some but not all of the requirements for the above diagnoses, chewing food and spitting it out, or bingeing and purging irregularly.

Why is this important?

- Of the currently more than 10 million Americans afflicted with eating disorders, 90 percent are children and adolescents.
- The average age of eating disorders onset has dropped from 13-17 to 9-12.
- The number of males with eating disorders has doubled during the past decade.

Students with an eating disorder may:

- Exhibit low self-esteem and a poor body image.
- Be prone to mood swings, perfectionism and depression.
- Suffer from many physical problems such as:
 - Excessive weight loss
 - Irregularity or absence of menstruation in females
 - Hair loss
 - Severe digestive system problems
 - Damaged vital organs
 - Tooth and gum problems
 - Swollen salivary glands due to induced vomiting
 - General malnutrition
 - Dehydration
 - Thinning of the bones resulting in osteoporosis or osteopenia
- Struggle in their relationships with their family and friends.
- Perform poorly in their academic performance.
- Jeopardize their overall health, including both physical and psychological health, with their unhealthy eating habits.
- Suffer from other psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, and alcohol and drug dependencies.

What can educators do about it?

- Discuss your concerns with the child's parents. Make sure to consult with the family.
- To assist with diagnosis of an eating disorder, always look for other

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Mental
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MCF
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psychiatric disorders. Eating disorders are mostly associated with other mental disturbances such as depression, mood disorders, and anxiety disorders.

- Schedule eating disorder information sessions for parents and caregivers. Discuss the symptoms and diagnoses of eating disorders and place emphasis on preventive measures.
- Correlate your efforts with teachers and school officials to add healthy lifestyle courses into the school's educational programs. Since treating eating disorders can be both lengthy and expensive, it is beneficial to use preventive measures before the problem arises.
- Research the best location and the most effective option for treatment in your area. Always be prepared to make a referral to parents and caregivers of the affected children with eating disorders.

A treatment plan should consist of cognitive behavioral, interpersonal and family therapy. A complete course of treatment should consider all of the contributing factors such as the person's own personality, environment, relationships and family.

Resources/Links

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Facts for Families: Teenagers with Eating Disorders
http://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/docs/facts_for_families/02_teenagers_with_eating_disorders.pdf

Academy for Eating Disorders (AED)
About eating disorders/diagnoses and more specifically, eating disorder diagnoses
<http://www.aedweb.org/>

Starving to Death: Does My Child Have an Eating Disorder?
<http://www.empoweringparents.com/Starving-Themselves-to-Death.php>

National Institute of Mental Health Eating Disorders
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/eatingdisorders.cfm>

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD)
<http://www.anad.org/>

National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)
<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>

PBS Learning Media: Body Needs
<https://mpt.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/tdc02.sci.life.colt.bodyneedsweb/body-needs/>

Adapted from Resources found on:
www.schoolmentalhealth.org
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MHAMD ~ 443-901-1550 ~ www.mhamd.org

MCF ~ 410-730-8267 ~ www.mdcoalition.org

The Children's Mental Health Matters! Campaign is a collaboration of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMd) and the Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) with support from the Maryland Department of Health - Behavioral Health Administration. The Campaign goal, with schools and community champions across the state, is to raise public awareness of the importance of children's mental health. For more information, please visit www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org