

How Schools Can Support Students with Eating Disorders

A school's ability to participate in interventions is a critical part of a student's recovery and well-being. Below are strategies that may depend on the student's stage of treatment. Implementing these strategies will likely get easier with time once it becomes routine. As a student progresses, some of these strategies may be adjusted and discontinued.

Identify School Personnel or Case Manager

This individual or student study team member can be in ongoing communication with student's care team, their family, and/or can support student at school during lunch and snack time.

Collaborate with Caregivers & Families

To ensure a supportive recovery environment between home and school all snacks and foods can be prepared at home and provided to identified school personnel to ensure availability of appropriate food options.

Supervise All Snacks & Meals

Students may dislike "standing out" from their peers so identifying a separate space to eat during lunch or snack times might be helpful. Students should try their best to complete the entire meal or snack within a specific time frame. Distractors such as card or board games can be very useful with managing distress when eating. Caregivers should be notified if a snack or meal is not completed.

Monitor Activity in Restrooms

For students with a history of self-induced vomiting, a specific time limit to use the restroom may be needed. Student may need access to what is typically a staff only bathroom.

Escort Student to Classes & School Activities

Some students might attempt to purge and/or impulsively exercise if the eating disorder is severe enough and they are alone. Additional monitoring during transition times and unsupervised periods during the school day may be necessary.

Modify or Release Student from Physical Education

Some health providers may recommend that a student limit or abstain from physical activity altogether due to their health status. The student's exercise should follow provider recommendations and alternative assignments or modified activity schedule may need to be determined and provided.

Review & Adjust Academic Expectations

Eating disorders can greatly impact cognitive abilities, alertness, and day-to-day functioning, thus, creating, monitoring, and adjusting an appropriate academic plan for the student may be needed. Open and ongoing communication with families and students is key to promoting trusting and supportive relationships.