

Eating Disorder and Disordered Eating School Prevention

Eating disorders or Disordered Eating?

Disordered eating and eating disorders share some commonalities, but they are not the same. An eating disorder is a clinical diagnosis, whereas disordered eating refers to abnormal eating patterns that do not meet the criteria for an eating disorder diagnosis but may still be distressing for the individual.

What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders often involve an obsession with food, weight, body shape, or anxiety about eating or outcomes of eating certain foods. Some eating disorder behaviors include restrictive eating, avoidance of certain foods, overeating, purging by laxative use, dieting pills, and/or vomiting, and impulsive exercise.

Quick Eating Disorder (ED) Facts

- EDs are complex and commonly are influenced by environmental, sociocultural, psychological, physiological, & genetic factors.
- 1 in 10 people will have an ED in their lifetime.
- Youth under 18 experienced a 107.4% increase in EDs from 2018-2022.
- EDs have the 2nd highest mortality rate compared to any other mental health disorder.
- More than 70% of people don't get treatment due to access barriers and stigma.

Create a Healthy School Environment

- Ensure Zero Tolerance of bullying and appearance-based teasing and harassment.
- Make physical changes to the environment so that it's inclusive for all body sizes, such as seating that allows a variety of bodies to sit comfortably.
- Experiencing weight stigma increases the risk factor for eating disorders. Consider how your own relationship with food and body is observed by colleagues and students around you. Ditch the diet talk!

Challenge Body Ideals

- Create opportunities for students to discuss the beauty/appearance ideal and how to challenge pressures to conform to this image.
- Increase media literacy to critically analyze messages and images portrayed in media.
- Use a body image acceptance approach and avoid statements on weight and size.

Eliminate Weight Monitoring

Do not weigh students publicly for physical education. Consider not doing weigh-ins for sports, especially for aesthetic and endurance sports (wrestling, swimming, rowing, gymnastics, figure skating, etc.), as students participating in these sports are at an increased risk of eating disorders and disordered eating.

Modify Nutrition & Health Classes

Most nutrition and health classes emphasize "good" versus "bad" foods, calorie counting, and reading labels. Educating about nutrition in this way alongside teens' possible discomfort with their changing bodies, are triggers for an unhealthy relationship with food and eating disorders. Be intentional with your wording and avoiding general statements about a food being unhealthy.

Teaching Resources

[The Intuitive Eating Workbook for Teens](#)
[Association for Size Diversity and Health](#)
[NEDA Educator Toolkit](#)