

Parents, when your child is struggling with an eating disorder and body image concerns it is challenging, for both you and them. Below are a few tips to aid you in navigating this journey with your child.

1. Use a direct, loving, accepting message when confronting your child about an eating disorder.
 - a. i.e. I recognize that you are struggling with (name the symptoms) and want to help. What can I do to support you in this process?***
 - b. Remember that an eating disorder is **not** just about eating. To be most helpful, it is important to recognize the process and that the eating is likely just a symptom.**
2. When talking to your child, refer to the eating disorder as “our problem,” not “your problem.” This inclusive approach is less alienating for your child.
3. Try to have a regular heart-to-heart talk with your child during times of major changes.
4. Be aware of any subtle comments your child makes and the hidden messages he or she is trying to convey.
5. Keep your child away from dieting and do not encourage this behavior. Instead, instill in them the importance of learning balance, variety and moderation.*
 - a. i.e. There are no “good” and “bad” foods.**
6. Listen carefully if your child is complaining of not wanting to participate in something. They may be overbooked or feeling overwhelmed, and may not know how to tell you. They could be afraid to disappoint you.
 - a. It can be helpful to ask open-ended questions: “How was your day?” “You seem upset, what is going on?”***
 - b. Don’t be afraid to use feeling words: “You seem frustrated, do you want to talk about it?”***
7. Remember that it’s okay- perfectly healthy and natural- to veg out and do nothing sometimes. Everyone needs relaxation, alone time and time to enjoy friends and family.
8. Remember that your child is a unique human being, not necessarily a reflection of yourself. Check in with yourself to make sure you do not see your children as a vehicle for boosting your own self-esteem.
9. Comment on your child’s inner strengths on a regular basis. Don’t forget the less obvious ones.*
10. Avoid comparing your child to one another or labeling them. This can only foster resentment between the siblings or contribute to feelings of inferiority or superiority.
11. Let your child know that you love them unconditionally and simply because they are your child- not because of their accomplishments.
 - a. This can be done verbally (praise, verbalizing acceptance in a challenging situation) and nonverbally (hugs, quality time)**
12. Recognize that eating disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder are not only emotional disorders, but also medical conditions that need attention. Help is available for both conditions through psychotherapists, medical doctors, and dieticians. Sometimes medication is an important part of this treatment regimen.
13. Encourage your child to do their best instead of giving subtle or direct messages that only perfect performance, perfect behavior, or a perfect body are acceptable.

All points are taken verbatim from: Cooper, S. & Norton, P., *Conquering eating disorders: How family communication heals.* (2008).

*item wording altered slightly or words deleted

** not from the book