

SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

May 2023



DISORDERED EATING

Eating disorders can affect anyone of any age, young people are at particular risk. The earlier an eating disorder is treated, the better chance someone has of fully recovering. Teachers and staff in schools can play a key role in spotting the early signs of an eating disorder and providing support.

What are the different types of eating disorders?

There are multiple types of eating disorders. Some will overlap with each other, and diagnosis can often change depending on the symptoms experienced.

The most common eating disorders, and the ones you will probably have heard of, are:

- **Anorexia Nervosa** - This is disordered eating in an effort to control your weight, predominantly by restricting the amount of calories and nutrients the body requires. This can be done through not eating enough food (and therefore not enough calories), exercising too much and exerting more calories than you take in, or both. It is driven by a need to keep your weight as low as possible, and often comes with a negative body image.
- **Bulimia** - This is where a person will use unhealthy, damaging measures such as making themselves sick or taking laxatives to get rid of food eaten. It is often seen alongside binge-eating, wherein someone will eat a large amount of food in a short amount of time, and will be driven by feelings of guilt to bring this food back up. It can be particularly damaging to the throat and lead to dental problems.

What are Eating Disorders?

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses affecting people of all ages, genders, ethnicities and backgrounds. People with eating disorders use disordered eating behaviour as a way to cope with difficult situations or feelings. This behaviour can include limiting the amount of food eaten, eating very large quantities of food at once, getting rid of food eaten through unhealthy means (eg. making themselves sick, misusing laxatives, fasting, or excessive exercise), or a combination of these behaviours.

It's important to remember that eating disorders are not all about food itself, but about feelings. The way the person treats food may make them feel more able to cope, or may make them feel in control, though they might not be aware of the purpose this behaviour is serving. An eating disorder is never the fault of the person experiencing it, and anyone who has an eating disorder deserves fast, compassionate support to help them get better.



- Binge-eating Disorder - Also known as BED, this is where someone will feel compelled to eat a large amount of food very quickly, regardless of whether they are hungry, until they feel uncomfortably full. 'Binges' are often planned in advance, usually done alone, and may include hiding certain food or evidence of the eating. People that suffer from BED will often report feeling guilty or ashamed after binge eating.
- Alongside these common eating disorders, there is one which is not driven by thoughts and feelings over body image or weight. This is known as Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder, or ARFID for short. It's when someone actively avoids certain foods and therefore limits how much they eat. The most common reasons for this are:
 - Sensory issues with food - they may have negative feelings over the taste, texture, smell or even appearance of certain foods.
 - A general low interest in eating food, they may not recognise the feeling of hunger
 - They may have had a traumatic experience with food, such as choking, which has led them to fear eating.



ARFID commonly exists alongside other conditions, such as anxiety, autism and ADHD for instance. Many SEN children for example have specific eating habits owing to sensory issues.

How to help someone with an eating disorder

Because of the secretive nature of eating disorders, it can be very difficult to identify if someone is suffering with one, let alone know what to do.

It is not uncommon for people to react defensively when approached with the words 'eating disorder'. For some, they might not even recognise they have one, or others might be in denial and feel upset by this comment. If you believe someone you know is suffering from an eating disorder and you want to help, the best thing to do is voice your concern to them in a sensitive and caring way. Tell them you're worried about them, and encourage them to visit their GP. For more information on what to do if you think someone you know has an eating disorder and how they can be treated, visit the website Beat, the UK's eating disorder charity.

What can I do to help prevent eating disorders?

There are several things you can do as educators to help prevent and combat eating disorders.

- Make sure to boost your students' self-esteem and identify anyone who might be feeling a little low. Provide your students with diverse examples and representations of different body types, and encourage them to pick out things they like about themselves and each other.
- Be aware of how your words and lesson choices could impact someone who is suffering with an eating disorder. For some, talking about food or weight can be a very triggering topic. Always be considerate of this when teaching about eating disorders.
- Challenge misconceptions about eating disorders. Common misconceptions include things like: 'Eating disorders only happen to young girls' or 'Someone must be underweight to have an eating disorder'. These simply aren't true. The more we can bust these myths, the more we can understand the illness.

Further information and guidance

- www.seed.charity
- www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk
- <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/eating-problems/>

KEY REMINDERS

- The Contextual Safeguarding Priorities for SMC are Neglect and Mental Health and Wellbeing

SAFEGUARDING TEAM

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL): Andy Turner

Deputy DSLs (DDSL): Rosa Flanagan/Amy Wiles

		Designated Safeguarding Lead : Mr A Turner 	Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Miss R Flanagan 	Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Miss A Wiles 
Safeguarding Officer Mrs S Appleyard 	Safeguarding Officer Mrs N Gibbon 	Safeguarding Officer Miss K Leathley 	SM6 Safeguarding Lead Mrs R Lenham 	

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