

ADVICE FOR FAMILY/FRIENDS OF AN EATING DISORDERED PERSON

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One of the most difficult things to do if you suspect a friend or relative has an eating disorder is to confront them with your concerns. The first instinct your friend or relative will probably feel is fear – fear that you saw through their defensive facade with food. Then, they will most likely go into denial mode and may be accusatory towards you with a "how dare you think such a thing" type of mentality.

Please know that if your loved one reacts in this manner, it is a typical defense mechanism that keeps the real psychological problems secreted away in the subconscious mind. Remember, your loved one is coping with huge emotional issues, so do not take it personally if they totally deny anything is wrong.

Just offer a friendly ear should they ever want to confide in you. While you may not get anywhere with your initial confrontation, you have planted seeds in their mind about their eating behaviors.

How do you know however, if your friend or relative really does have an eating disorder? And when is it appropriate to confront them with your concerns? The answers lie in a few things you can do to educate yourself so that you can be prepared for your loved one's reaction.

Read on for some helpful hints:

Do your research.

Learn what the warning signs are for the different eating disorders.

Understand that eating disorders are not necessarily about food, but about their daily struggles in life.

Unobtrusively observe your loved one and decide if you do indeed think they have a problem.

Choose a time to talk with your loved one about your concerns when you know there will be no disruptions.

Don't bring it up if you are arguing or during a meal.

Do make sure to bring it up at a time when you will be able to follow through and offer continuous support. For example, don't time the confrontation before a business trip or vacation when you'll be out of town for any length of time.

Seek guidance for yourself on how to best handle the situation. By talking with a counselor at work, through your church or even a clinic, they can advise you on the best way to confront your loved one.

Also, be ready with contact information on the chance that they will accept your help.

Whatever happens, know that you have tried your best with your loved one. Your job now is to just be a supportive presence in their life.

They may not always acknowledge their problem right away. In fact, it may take them hitting rock bottom or having a health scare to prompt them to seek help.

Eating disorders can be treated successfully; the patient just has to want to get better.

