

# Eating Disorder Warning Signs For Parents & Guardians

## Be Mindful of These Common Signs

1

Sudden, unexplained changes in eating patterns, resulting weight loss or gain. Refusing to eat certain foods; desire to become vegetarian or vegan. Many complaints about stomach aches and feeling full. Making excuses to avoid meals or leaving the table mid-meal.

2

Emotional changes: increased anxiety, unexplained frustration and tears, withdrawal from friends and social activities, increased isolation at home, more difficulty sleeping or increased need for sleep.

3

Significant dialogue about feeling/being “fat”.  
Constant comparisons to others.

4

If child/adolescent is on social media, there may be evidence of seeking out weight loss tips, or even pro-anorexia sites; fascination with others who are very thin.

5

Evidence of binge eating, especially in secret; purging (vomiting) in bathrooms or bedroom. If your child has access to funds and does his/her own shopping, be alert for laxative wrappers in the garbage.

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6

Initially your child may maintain a full schedule with school and sports, and grades may not be affected. Often individuals susceptible to an eating disorder are perfectionistic and driven so will keep up a good external appearance. Eventually performance in school and athletics will be affected due to poor concentration, fatigue, weakness, or being short of breath. Your child may be cold when others are not.

7

Be sure to speak with your child/adolescent about your concerns. Try to remain calm – it might be helpful to rehearse what you want to say. Be caring but firm and be prepared for arguing or withdrawal. Explain that you are very concerned, and you intend to find professional help.

8

If several of the above signs are present in your child, seek help immediately. The first place to begin is often with your child's pediatrician – however, be aware that not all physicians have good training in eating disorders. At times they may inadvertently contribute to your child's denial by minimizing or downplaying weight loss. Be sure to speak with your physician and/or his office staff about your concerns BEFORE you bring your child in for an exam.

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9

If an eating disorder is diagnosed, you will need a team of specialists (therapist, dietitian, physician or psychiatrist) to provide comprehensive care. If there is a delay before your child's first appointment, ask your physician to periodically monitor weight and vital signs to be certain your child is not declining.

10

**YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME!** Eating disorders are complex mental health conditions that develop for many reasons. However, you can and will be an important part of your child's recovery. Learn everything you can about eating disorders.

There are many good books for parents, including *When Your Child has an Eating Disorder* by Abigail Natenshon; *When Your Teen has an Eating Disorder* by Lauren Muhlheim and Laura Collins; and *A Parent's Guide to Eating Disorders* by Deidre Salcido. All are available at Amazon.

Seek support for yourself from one of the sites listed on our resource page. Many national organizations have virtual support services especially for family members. [Learn more at mieda.org](https://www.mieda.org).