

“What To Do If Your Child Has an Eating Disorder”

by New Life Ministries and Jim Burns, Ph.D.

Eating disorders are a widespread health issue in our culture. For as much as we've done to educate our kids about the dangers of eating disorders, many young people still struggle because of self-image issues. One teen magazine editor recently remarked that one of the top ten things teen girls tell her is that “I think about my looks all of the time.” And, this issue is not only a female problem. The University of Maryland's Health Office reported that the numbers of male students seeking treatment for eating disorders has dramatically increased in recent years. Today, many teens obsessed with being skinny have resorted to taking diet pills. This is a dangerous trend! Let me state very clearly that unless specifically prescribed by a physician, no child should be taking diet pills!

Almost without exception, young people who have eating disorders should see a professional counselor. Eating disorders are complex and are much greater than the average parent can handle alone.

I found some great tips on dealing with someone who has an eating disorder on *New Life Ministries'* website (www.newlife.com). I'm adapting them and offering them here for parents who know (or suspect) their child has an eating disorder.

Do's and Dont's for Dealing With Eating Disorders

Do:

- 1. Know the signs of eating disorders.*** Check out our free article on the HomeWord website, [*Information on Eating Disorders.*](#)
- 2. Learn what community and healthcare resources are available.***
- 3. Understand that eating disorders are complex.*** Recovery is not just a matter of getting your child to eat more or to stop vomiting.
- 4. Discuss your concerns with your child.***
- 5. Be compassionate.*** Try not to lecture. Be a good listener.
- 6. Be empathetic.*** Try to understand things from your child's perspective. It's likely that your child has made decisions based on their feelings (e.g. “I'm so fat!”) rather than on facts and logic.
- 7. State what you have observed.*** Provide evidence of the problem.
- 8. Express your concerns for your child's health – not just their weight.***
- 9. Let your child know that they must be evaluated by a doctor, and possibly a counselor.***

10. Have patience. Your child may have setbacks along the way.

11. Respond during emergencies. If you find your child is throwing up several times per day, passing out, complaining about chest pain, or talking about suicide, get help immediately.

12. Find support for yourself. Talk to a trusted friend, pastor, counselor, or find a support group for parents of kids with eating disorders.

Don't:

1. Don't make promises you can't keep. For example, don't agree *not* to take your child to see a doctor if they promise to eat more, stop throwing up, etc.

2. Don't be what you are not. Most parents aren't qualified in professional healthcare or in counseling. Don't try to be a substitute for a professional.

3. Don't nag your child about eating or not eating. Don't focus family conversations on food or weight.

4. Don't be judgmental. Don't refer to your child in anger as being, "sick", "stupid", or "self-destructive".

5. Don't claim, "I know how you feel" – if you don't know.

