



The Emily Program

Guidelines for Family and Friends

It can be difficult to know how to approach someone struggling with eating disorder symptoms. You may worry that you won't "do it right." The following tips may help you keep perspective and provide needed support to your loved one.

Remember, you are important to her/him and her/his recovery.

1. Accept your limitations; e.g. you can't make her/him want to get better.
2. Accept the other person's right to an independent life. Don't take charge.
3. Accept the person for who she/he is. Remember that she/he is an individual; she/he is not her/his eating disorder.
4. Be sensitive and be firm.
5. Compliment strengths that have nothing to do with appearance, eating, or food.
6. Seek support for yourself.
7. Respect how and where your loved one wants her/his eating disorder discussed. You absolutely need and deserve support, and you can get it while also honoring her/his need for confidentiality.
8. Don't make or avoid food purchase solely to accommodate a person with an eating disorder.
9. Don't make mealtimes a battleground, or use money or threats to control another person's eating behavior.
10. Don't make excuses for the person with the eating disorder. Remember that each person is responsible for her/his own behavior.
11. Don't monitor the person's behavior for her/him, even if they invite you to.
12. As much as possible, try not to allow your life to be disrupted by discussions of weight, eating, exercise, and food.
13. Be a good role model when discussing food and weight-related issues.
14. Having compassion for another does not mean being manipulated by them.
15. Do not comment about someone's weight and looks.
16. Do not play therapist.
17. Set an example: participate in family therapy (if recommended), talk openly about your feelings, and actively identify and resolve problems.
18. You can't speak for her/him, but you can listen to her/him.
19. Convey that you believe in her/him and know that she/he will find the answers she/he needs.
20. Recognize that recovery is a process. It takes time; it's seldom logical or linear.