

## Coping Mechanisms

Because eating disorders can come from a place within their own perceptions, it is important for them to be kind to themselves. You can help them by doing the following:

- Make sure that your child has a positive support network filled with people who they care about, and more importantly, that care about them too. Mental health disorders can be isolating, make sure they know that they aren't alone
- Encourage relaxation – self-care is a hugely important part of our self-perception. This can be taking the time to follow hobbies, taking leisurely baths, listening to their favourite music, watching tv, reading a book – anything that is safe, and that appeals to them
- Social events – encourage suitable friendships and relationships
- Ask them to look for triggers – is there anything in particular that triggers their eating disorders? Does social media make them worse? Being around certain people?
- Encourage positive self-talk. There is not much more important than allowing ourselves to be kind to ourselves. We are often taught to be kind to other people, but it's just as important to be kind to ourselves too. Help your child recognise their strengths and encourage them to compliment themselves – not from a physical perspective, but an internal one. If they succeed at something – make them feel pride. If they do something well – tell them, and encourage them to tell themselves too – our own voice is often the loudest.

# Eating Disorders

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The Lotus Mental Health

[www.thelotusmentalhealth.org](http://www.thelotusmentalhealth.org)

## What are Eating Disorders ?

Eating disorders are severe mental health illnesses that manifest physically. People with eating disorders have severe issues with food, eating behaviours and body image. They can very easily become obsessed with the food that they eat, when they eat, how they eat, where they eat, who they will eat in front of, and how much they will eat. There are three main eating disorders they are:

**Anorexia nervosa:** anorexia is an eating disorder most often associated with under eating and obsessions about body weight. The obsessions are fuelled by extreme calorie counting, extreme exercise or severe under eating.

**Bulimia nervosa:** bulimia focuses on over-eating, then using ways to reverse their food intake such as vomiting or taking laxatives.

**Binge-eating disorder:** people with binge-eating disorder eat large amounts of food, and often making eating an event to look forward to. They will crave certain foods that they will eat excessively, or countdown to eating certain foods/meals to excess. After the 'event' they tend to be filled with guilt, shame, regret, and disappointment in themselves – even if the binge-eating has been planned in advance.

## What can you do?

Supporting your child can be emotionally difficult, and the effects of their mental health issues can affect the entire family.

There are things that you can do to help your child through their battles, and having coping mechanisms in place can be hugely beneficial. It's important to find what works for you, so here are a few examples to get you started...

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If your child(ren) are feeling anxious, there are things that you can encourage your child to do that can help them. They are:

- Nobody should go through difficult times alone, and this is something that your child needs to learn to understand, because of this, it is important for your child to learn how to open up to people about how they are feeling. A parent, carer, brother, sister, grandparent, auntie, uncle, cousin, a trusted friend, a counsellor – it doesn't matter who, as long as your child feels comfortable talking to someone who they trust, about how they are feeling.
- Encourage your child to get the thoughts that are in their head – out. An effective way that they can do this by keeping a diary. Simply writing down how they are feeling can be really useful. Not only will that work because it helps them put a place for their negative thoughts, but it can also be used as a point of reference for any particular triggers that they didn't realise they had.
- Writing a letter – this might seem a bit daft, but if they can write letters to themselves, they can use them to read back and see themselves, through their own words, that they have overcome battles in the past, and know that they are capable of overcoming them again.