



Parents: How to recognize eating disorder behaviors and signs!

It is difficult to consider that something might be wrong with your child. I was close to my daughter; yet, I did not recognize what I know now were evident signs that she was indeed suffering from the symptoms of an eating disorder.

I am going to provide you with a list of things a parent can look for when considering an eating disorder as a possible issue. However, just because you see these behaviors, it does not necessarily mean that your child has or will develop an eating disorder. Just in case there is an issue, I want to mention something important!

The word Nervosa in Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa means “nervous” in Latin. According to Urban Dictionary, Nervosa has “come to be associated with a behavior, belief or habit that affects the body via the nervous system or the mind.” Eating disorders are trauma or stressed induced. My daughter has told me, “There are reasons why a person may have an eating disorder. However, the eating disorder is not the volcano, it is the smoke.” It is the fruit, not the root.

The volcano is the root issues and if you take the cap off a volcano, it is going to spew. If you are going to address the smoke, it is wise to expect the lava and pray about how to address this. Those tormented with eating disorders need patience, love, understanding, truth, and kindness.

The world of eating disorders has its own culture. It has its own language, symbols, and thought processes. Know the signs, symptoms and indicators. When I sat down with Kirstie and Amber in the *Driven To Be Free from Food Addictions and Eating Disorders* project, I was amazed and dumbfounded as they discussed the culture of the eating disorder community. Much of what is listed below, I learned from listening to those two compare their own stories. Their research and knowledge of the topic is amazing.

While the content of our book is not a substitute for medical treatment, we do believe that the workbook may help guide a person through processing the “volcano.” Eating disorders are serious and need to be treated with wisdom and care. There are a couple of URL links that give more details on medical treatment at the end of this paper.

Lastly, I want to mention that most of those with eating disorders are extremely intelligent even though their thinking is affected greatly or twisted by the proverbial volcano and the smoke. What we are dealing with isn't ignorance as much as it is the results of unhealed trauma, inner wounds, and unchallenged believed lies. – Lisa D. Piper

According to the Society for Adolescent Medicine:

- “Eating disorders, such as anorexia, is the third most chronic illness in adolescent females (in terms of time they are sick).
 - Eating disorders occur in both boys and girls.”
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Possible Eating Disorder Indicators:

Shame based behavior:

- Ashamed to eat in front of people
- Ashamed of the amounts of food eaten
- Avoiding mirrors, activities where people will see their body
- Hiding food, wrappers, or evidence of having eaten
- Disgust or self-hate towards body or weight
- Hiding behind bulky clothes

Obsessive behaviors:

- Obsessing over:
 - Calories, fats, carbs
 - Dieting and fad diets
 - Vomiting, Laxatives, diuretics, diet pills
 - Photos of thin “perfect” looking bodies or body parts
 - Photos can include anything from an entire person, or specific areas that depict thinness such as clavicles, rib cages, or thigh gaps.
 - Thinspiration/Thin-Inspiration boards or journals to hold photos or clippings that focus on desired physical goals
 - Exercising
 - Movies or books with eating disorder content
 - Measuring or Weighing Self
 - Measuring or weighing foods
 - Often the person will overestimate weight or calories to make sure they do not go over. For example, if a handful of almonds weigh 2 ounces, they may record 2.5 ounces.
 - Trying on clothing over and over again
 - Specific Ways to eat food or how much to eat: Food Rituals
 - In one video, Amber talks about only eating a popsicle to the wooden stick. Kirstie talks about eating only the top part of the upper part of a

bagel. Perhaps a food ritual is eating only 8 pecans or cutting bread into certain kinds of pieces before consuming.

- Overachieving or Perfectionism

Frustration or feeling overwhelmed:

- A person with an eating disorder may feel frustrated, agitated, upset, or overwhelmed when:
 - Making food-related choices, especially if they are unprepared
 - Unable to figure out how to go purge
 - If they are made to eat, their mind may go into overdrive on how they are going to hide and purge. The fear can be so great that they may avoid eating just because they do not know how they can get rid of what they've ingested.
 - Asked to go out to eat or told to eat something that they deem unacceptable
 - Given a menu and asked to pick out a food
 - There can be a lot of chatter going on in the mind. When the shame, guilt, chatter, and outside stimuli all collide, it can be overwhelming.
 - There is no control of what is being consumed
 - Told a food has a certain calorie count, but then feel as if they've been given false information

Perception & Behaviors:

- Fear of being overweight
- Does not see oneself as thin, even if underweight
- Approach eating disorder topics with care. If there is an eating disorder present, the person will likely deny this or can become hostile when approached
- Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
- Adolescents who become vegetarians may do so in order to avoid eating certain foods and thereby avoid questions from adults as to why they are not eating.
- There may be food texture issues involved with an eating disorder.
 - One girl completely avoided custard-type textures. Once she tasted the texture, a binge immediately followed.
- Self-hate. Speaks words of hating certain body parts or loathing appearance. May be unable to look in the mirror without grimacing.
- Depressed/Moody
- Fear of not being able to stop eating while bingeing
- Anxiety

OTHER INDICATORS:

- Irregular periods or no period at all (when there is no other explanation)
- The body may try to heat itself up by growing fine body hair called lanugo
- Scarring on the back of the fingers from self-induced throwing up
- It can be very painful to take the number of laxatives that a person with an eating disorder may take. This is not a fun issue. However, some describe that when the medicine has done its work, they feel clean. Perhaps those who vomit after eating have this euphoria as well. One woman described it as follows:
 - “it does not make sense. I know it doesn’t make sense to take laxatives. Even scientific studies show it doesn’t cause weight loss, it just makes a person dehydrated, but I was drawn and compelled to do it even though I hated it. The elated clean feeling at the end was my reward. I did not know that what I was experiencing was bondage. The drive to do what I did was overwhelming. I am free of that now, but I remember what it was like. The clean feeling was a lie. It never stayed. Having an eating disorder was like having a false protector. As long as I focused on the eating disorder and its issues, I did not have to look deeper at what was causing it. In a very weird sense, the focus on the food just kept me too busy to deal with the real problems.”

Media & Social Indicators:

Check social media and websites for:

- Eating disorder sites or activity in pro eating disorder groups or websites.
 - (There are communities who encourage one another in being the best at anorexia, bulimia or purging.)
 - Sites that promote:
 - ED (eating disorder), Ana (short for anorexia)
 - Mia (short for bulimia)
 - EDNOS (eating disorders not otherwise specified)
 - Verbiage/language used in eating disorder communities:
 - Ana, Mia, or Ed are not names of online friends. They represent different variations of the disorder. Even the name Deb can refer to depression.
 - These communities can be proud of their disorder, they do not believe anything is wrong and may boast about their exploits like eating 100 calories a day or exercising for an unhealthy period of time.

Spiritual note: Soul ties can be created with these communities and need to be renounced and severed. In addition, these tight communities are tied together with a bond and can produce rebellion, pride, and twisted thinking. We cover this in chapter 13 of *Driven to Be Free from Food Addictions and Eating Disorders*

Symbols and Community Sigus:

NOTE: Just because your child is wearing one of these symbols does not mean that it represents an eating disorder. They could just like the color or symbol and not know what it may represent.

- **Pro Ana means to be in favor of anorexia.** There are communities online who unite and embrace their eating disorder. They may be focused on becoming skinnier or “staying healthy”.
- **Pro Mia means to be in favor of bulimia.** There are also communities who come together to embrace this disorder. Be careful in what websites are permissible. Some Websites may advertise that they are created to support those with eating disorders, but upon looking deeper, they offer sources for reinforcing disordered behaviors. Often, the information on these sites glorify unhealthy bodies, and equip members (via forums) to give each other ideas on how to be better at their eating disorder.

Kids find acceptance and inclusion in what can prove to be deadly practices. Many members of Pro-ED communities believe that eating disorders are a lifestyle “choice” and not a disorder. As outlined in the book, *Driven to be Free from Food Addictions and Eating Disorders*, these thought processes are twisted and even when addressed, the person may not receive the fact that they are not thinking correctly.

- **Pro Ana symbols:** The bracelets are thin and red and often have a dragonfly charm or clasp. Wearing the bracelet is a sign of acceptance of the disorder. The bracelet is often worn on the left wrist.
- **Pro Mia symbols:** The bracelets are blue or purple and often worn on the right wrist. They may also have a butterfly clasp or charm. The bracelets may have beads, may be purchased or handmade.
- **Custom symbols:** Some advocates may combine the symbols or colors to make their own custom jewelry.
- **Self-harm bracelet:** Those involved in self-harm communities may wear a black beaded bracelet.
- **The bracelets serve the following purposes:**
 1. Identification to other community members
 2. Reminders to not eat

3. Encouragement for others in the community
4. Acceptance of the eating disorder and their community

Other Symbols of Note:



The symbol to the left is used as the symbol that denotes: Eating Disorder Recovery



The semi-colon has become a symbol for suicide. This is meant to raise awareness, but under twisted thinking, a person may use this symbol as a “badge of honor.”

The following information is from Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital Stanford:

“Many physical symptoms linked to anorexia are often due to starvation and malnourishment. They may include:

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| ✓ Belly pain | ✓ Extreme tiredness (fatigue) | ✓ Dizziness |
| ✓ Constipation | ✓ Sensitivity to cold temperatures | ✓ Growth of fine, downy body hair (lanugo) |
| ✓ Lethargy | ✓ Being abnormally thin (emaciated) | ✓ Yellowing of the skin |
| ✓ Fluid loss (dehydration) | | Very dry skin (when pinched and let go, it stays pinched) |

These symptoms may seem like other health problems. Have your child see his or her healthcare provider for a diagnosis. Early diagnosis and treatment are vital. They can help prevent future problems.

Anorexia Nervosa in children information link:

<https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=anorexia-nervosa-in-children-90-P02554>

Bulimia Nervosa in Children information link:

<https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=bulimia-nervosa-in-adolescents-90-P01592>