

Eating Disorders

KS4/5

50 mins

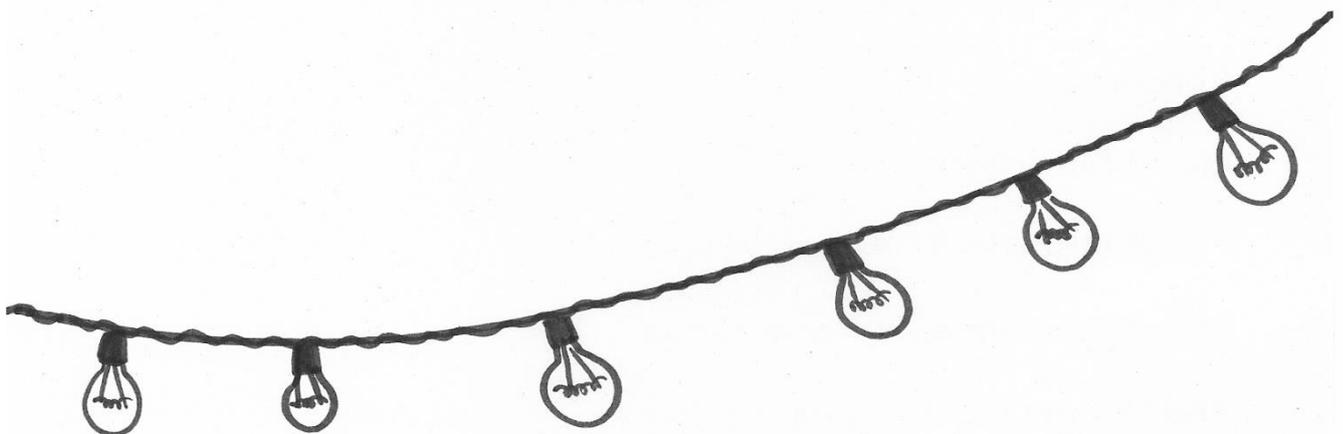
An activity that explores what it's like to have an eating disorder.

What you need:

- Copies of the CAMHS Eating Disorder comic
- Copies of, 'A personal perspective'
- Copies of 'Twelve things a recovering anorexic wants you to know'

Method:

- Divide class into groups of 5/6
- Distribute copies of the comic which was created by young people who have experience of eating disorders.
- Distribute copies of 'A personal perspective' and 'Twelve things a recovering anorexic wants you to know'
- Explain that their brief is to create a comic, poster or other means of raising awareness and understanding of eating disorders and highlighting how we can support others who are struggling with an eating disorder.
- After 40 minutes each group shares what they have created



12 things a recovering anorexic wants you to know

Written by Molly Wyatt (Good Housekeeping 2016)

Speaking about anorexia, and breaking away from the taboo that surrounds an eating disorder, can be an incredibly effective way to help somebody in recovery. I have had anorexia since I was seventeen and four years later I still struggle to properly talk about.

Anorexia is ridden with secrecy and shame, but talking about it as though it were any other illness can break that barrier. As part of Eating Disorders Awareness Week, here's 12 things I, as a recovering anorexic want you to know. And I hope this gives a voice to others who struggle to say how they feel.

- 1. I did not choose this illness.** This isn't a 'diet gone wrong,' I didn't see a photo of a model on the runway and aspire to have her figure; I didn't stumble across pro-anorexia sites and get lured in. No, this is an illness, and nobody chooses to have one.
- 2. The illness is with me 24 hours a day.** So I am sorry if I seem distracted or unengaged in conversation, but please know that the time you spend with me is really appreciated. Any distraction or relief away from my thoughts can be that boost that I need
- 3. My life has become about routine.** Anorexia is extremely controlling and has filled my day with routines. Having any control taken away is scary and makes me feel vulnerable. Part of me wants to keep that control close to my chest, but in order to progress I need to let go.
- 4. Recovery is not defined by weight gain.** The numbers on the scales do not reflect the whirlwind in my head. Weight gain and mental recovery don't necessarily work in sync. So just because I may appear to be 'healthier' I still have a long way to go.
- 5. Congratulating me on eating can be incredibly triggering.** So can commenting on changes in my appearance. Even compliments such as 'you look so much healthier' or 'you look great' can spark a great amount of self-loathing and anxiety. I know you mean well, I really do, but I am too well aware of my bodily changes.
- 6. Everyone's recovery is different.** For some, recovery may be a destination. For other's it may be an ongoing part of life. Much of the time 'recovery' may just be a question mark. Comparing somebody to somebody else's eating disorder is irrelevant; everybody is different, this is my journey.
- 7. Take it as a sign of trust if I eat with you.** But don't bring attention to it. I am scared that without anorexia, I am nobody. Reminding me of who I was and who I can be, is so uplifting and motivating. Since anorexia has consumed all my thoughts, I have forgotten what life can be like without it. Reminiscing on old times, or making plans for days out can make such a difference to giving me that little nudge to keep going.
- 8. I do eat.** Perhaps more than you think. Recovery isn't a case of going from not eating anything all day to stuffing my face with crisps and cake. I may even eat foods that you'd

be surprised I eat. Anorexia is not simply about eating nothing whatsoever, it is aligned with secrecy, obsession and guilt. I may eat alone much of the time so whatever it is that I eat in front of you will be a challenge.

9. Stop walking on egg shells, we can talk about it. Okay not all of the time, but speaking about it as though it were any other illness is so incredibly helpful. There is nothing worse than being ashamed of your own illness. You'll find that I probably have a lot to say about anorexia.

10. There is no light switch moment. Recovery isn't black and white, I can't 'just eat' and be fine. Recovery means I have to change my entire thought process and yes, it is tiring and draining and wonderful and enlightening.

11. I wish I was free. In a bizarre way, recovery is saying goodbye to a best friend. I have gotten so close with my eating disorder, I feel so safe and secure with my eating disorder. But deep down I know that without anorexia, I can be who I am meant to be. Me.

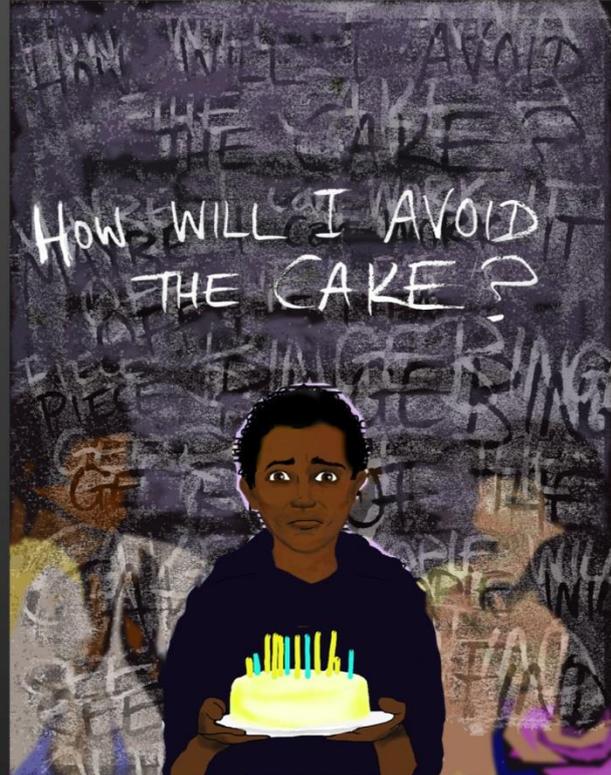
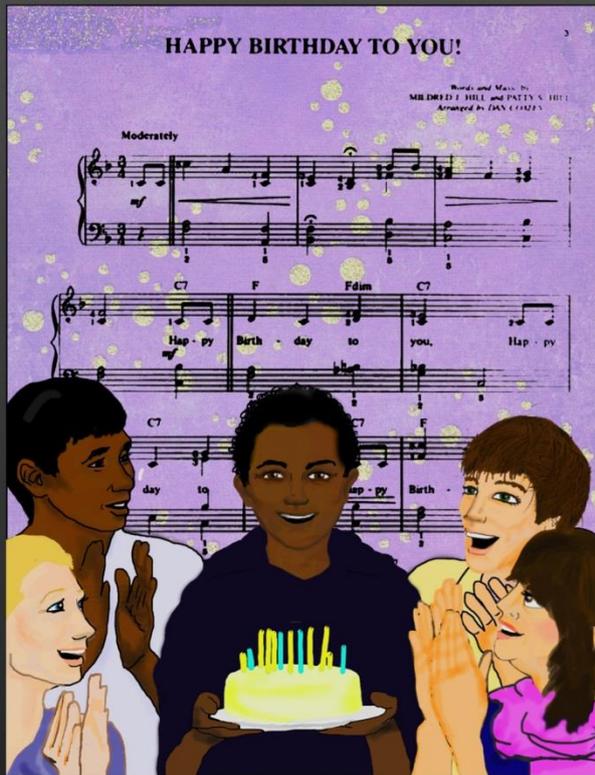
12. We all want to say thank you. Those that are living with or recovering from an eating disorder do appreciate the support they have. To all our friends and family, thank you for sticking by our sides and never giving up on us.

A member of the CAMHS Participation team gives a personal perspective on ED

"So it's eating disorders awareness week... And normally I wouldn't do this but I feel it's so important and it's good for people to be educated.... I have suffered with Anorexia, Bulimia and EDNOS (eating disorder not otherwise specified) on and off for over 8 years. In and out of managing/maintaining my weight, trying not to worry about food, to quickly relapsing straight back into being overly consumed in thoughts and feelings about food and my weight, starving myself and using many dangerous compensatory behaviours. I feel it's so important for people to know that eating disorders come in many shapes and sizes. Never assume that someone isn't struggling because they don't look 'underweight'! Although I have been very underweight in the past I personally was at my worst point physically and mentally when only slightly underweight. I have had trouble with my heart, faints, blackouts, problems with periods, osteoporosis and the worst part of all – absolutely hating myself! Yet on the outside I didn't look as though anything was wrong at the time. So many people struggle in silence and don't reach out for help because of peoples stupid uneducated opinions that they, 'don't look sick' or sick enough to get help. Well I say if anyone is struggling they should be entitled to help, support, compassion and constantly reminded how much they are loved. We should never value our worth on a set of pointless scales, with a stupid tape measure or 'how sick we are'! Our worth is measured by our individuality, our strength, our kindness, our inner beauty, self-acceptance and love!!! So here I am today, currently maintaining my weight, trying my best to kick ED's ass, doing the best I have in a long time and for a long time!! I thank everyone in my past and present, who has been there and supported me!"

CAMHS Comic

I could spend the whole day planning how I could avoid an evening meal, pizza with friends, my own Birthday cake. It's like an **obsession**, a fixation. It's not necessarily about being fat, but I have an image of what I should look like. This is the one thing I need to be in control of - when everything else in my life is so out of control.



I'm a **perfectionist** and this has become a competition with myself. If I eat the cake, can I burn it off? Or will it start a binge? I am not even the thinnest person at the party - and I am the one with an **eating disorder**. People tell me i'm looking well, I know they mean fat. I want to get better... but I also don't. I'm just so drained of myself.