

Eating Disorders - Agree Disagree

KS4

20 mins

An activity to get people thinking about attitudes towards eating disorders

What you need:

- **AGREE/DISAGREE** labels and blutak.
- Space for students to move around the classroom and place themselves along an imaginary line stretching from one end of the class to the other.

Method:

- Place **AGREE** and **DISAGREE** labels on the wall at either end of the classroom.
- Explain that students are going to have a chance to think about where they stand on issues relating to eating disorders. There are no rights or wrongs - it is more important to explore attitudes and beliefs around the statements
- Read out each statement in turn and ask students to place themselves along an imaginary line between Agree and Disagree, showing the degree to which they agree with the statement.
- Ask why people have chosen to stand where they are.
- Refer to information below after each statement has been discussed.

Statements:

1. Eating disorders are a disease of vanity.

FALSE

People do not choose to have eating disorders. They are far more complex than being just about appearance. They develop over time and require appropriate treatment to address the complex underlying issues. Often they develop as a way of coping with feelings or situations that are causing distress, anger, depression or anxiety.

2. Reaching normal weight for someone with Anorexia means the eating disorder is cured.

FALSE

Weight recovery is essential to enabling a person with Anorexia to participate meaningfully in further treatment, such as psychological therapy. Recovering to normal weight does not in itself signify a cure, because eating disorders are complex medical/psychiatric illnesses.

3. Vomiting or using laxatives is an effective ways of reducing the calories you get from food.

FALSE

Even when vomiting immediately after eating, it does not get rid of all of the calories a person has consumed. By the time the food reaches the stomach, the body has already absorbed most of the calories. Similarly, laxatives don't prevent calories being absorbed, so they have almost no impact on weight loss. However regular vomiting and use of laxatives can cause serious health problems that can be life-threatening. Chronic vomiting can cause tearing or bleeding in the oesophagus (the 'food pipe'), digestive

problems and dental damage. Abusing laxatives can cause serious problems with bowel functioning, such as bloating, gas, pain and loss of control over bowel movements. Both of these behaviours can cause electrolyte imbalances that can be life-threatening.

4. Supporting someone with an eating disorder is very challenging.

TRUE

Some people think the solution to eating disorders is simple – just stop. And supporting someone with an eating disorder can be challenging. It can be difficult to understand why the person can't change their thoughts about themselves or stop their behaviour and return to 'normal'. Unfortunately, recovery is not as simple as 'just stopping'. People with eating disorders need to be supported to learn how to think more positively about themselves and more realistically about their body. They need to learn techniques for managing difficult emotions without turning to food or weight-control behaviours.

5. Binge eating is a form of eating disorder

TRUE

When most people hear the words 'Eating Disorder' they think of Anorexia Nervosa or Bulimia Nervosa. However binge eating is also a form of eating disorder. If you binge eat, you may eat large amounts of food in a short period of time (perhaps not at a normal mealtime) and feel a lack of control during these binges, but unlike someone with bulimia nervosa, you do not try to get rid of the food. You may feel your eating is out of control, eat what you think of as an unusually large amount of food, eat much more quickly in these binges, eat until you are uncomfortably full, eat large amounts of food when you are not hungry or eat alone.

Compulsive overeating is also a form of eating disorder, which involves 'picking' at food all day. There may be different reasons why you do this, but as with eating disorders, food and eating is used as a way of dealing with difficult feelings. If you compulsively overeat or binge eat, you may feel depressed or inadequate because you cannot control your eating, which can lead to further eating and weight gain.

