

How to Cope After Covid-19 and the Pandemic;

Dear Parents, Carers and Professionals involved in working with or supporting patients with eating disorder,

This has been an exceptionally challenging time for everyone, young and old alike. Whether you have been directly or indirectly affected by the Coronavirus pandemic and the social distancing/ social isolation lockdown measures, it has dominated our lives for many months.

Whilst many people are looking forward to 'normal life' resuming, this is also an uncertain period of transition which many are finding anxiety-provoking. We have put together this brief guide with some tips on 'How to Cope After Covid'. This is not an exhaustive guide and it is important to use this document in conjunction with any relevant government guidelines as well as any local/ specific guidance produced by your child's education provider.

This guide includes;

- 1) Looking after Yourself (Parents, Carers and Professionals)**
- 2) Looking After Patient with an Eating Disorder**

We hope you find this useful,

Oxford & Buckinghamshire Adult Eating Disorder Services

Oxford Health Foundation Trust

1) Looking After Yourself (parents, carers and professionals)

- You are human first and foremost; you have thoughts and feelings and you will have been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic and social distancing/ isolation measures just like everyone else. Whether you have been affected directly or indirectly, it is important to acknowledge the impact it has had on you and how you are feeling. Talk to your friends, family and colleagues about how you are feeling and ask for help if you are struggling or worried about the reintegration back to 'normal' life and your professional role, especially if you look after, work with or support young people. There are resources below which offer support for both personal and professional issues.
- Take time to find your new routine, think about your 'to-dos' and priorities and how you want to address these. Making a plan and being organised can help when you feel you have to juggle multiple demands. It might be helpful to stagger resuming responsibilities and tasks if at all possible.
- Ensure you have regular opportunities for rest and downtime; time to yourself to engage in self-care activities. Be kind and compassionate towards yourself as you would another.
- Remember, it's ok to struggle or feel overwhelmed at times. This is an unprecedented time and we need to help one another to adjust and function. If you need support and help, please reach out.

Resources for Professionals;

Support for Education Professionals

Education Support Partnership UK: a UK charity dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of teachers, teaching assistants, head teachers, lecturers and support staff in schools;

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

Education Support Partnership Helpline Number: a free, confidential helpline is available 24hours a day 7days a week to education staff across England, Wales and Scotland (Primary, Secondary, Further or Higher Education); UK-wide: **08000 562 561** or Txt: **07909 341229**

Oxfordshire County Council Employee Support Line: (available to school staff where the school has a service level agreement with the County Council for counselling provision); free, confidential and available to all staff and their immediate family members, 24 hour a day, 365 days a year; A confidential telephone advice and information line covering a wide range of issues including work, personal and family related: **0800 882 4102**

Support for NHS Staff

NHS Employers- Information and advice on mental health, physical health, financial wellbeing, domestic violence and carers for NHS staff: <https://www.nhsemployers.org/covid19/health-safetyand-wellbeing/support-available-for-nhs-staff>

National mental wellbeing support line: A free wellbeing support helpline **0300 131 7000** available from 7am – 11pm seven days a week, providing confidential listening from trained professionals and specialist advice, including coaching, bereavement care, mental health and financial help.

Mental Health At Work: <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/ourfrontline-health/>

Tea and Empathy NHS Facebook group: a national Facebook group which provides nonjudgmental, informal listening and emotional support to colleagues across the **NHS** who were finding work difficult; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1215686978446877/>

For Social Care Staff

Mental Health At Work: <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/ourfrontline-socialcare/>

The Professional Association For Social Work and Social Workers: Offers training, courses and support for newly qualified support workers: <https://www.basw.co.uk/resources/become-social-worker/support-newly-qualified-social-workers>

Hampshire County Council Occupational Health Service:

<https://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/public/LandC/Resources/healthsafe/o/occhea.pdf> ;

Occupational Health Service Enquiries: 01865 815421; Occupational Health Nurse/ Manager: 01865 815295; Health and Safety Team: 01865 816464.

General Support Services for Adults;

iTalk: a free and confidential psychological therapy service that accepts self-referral; <https://www.italk.org.uk/> or call **023 8038 3920** or email; info@italk.org.uk

NHS Mental Health Triage Service: call **111** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) or visit www.111.nhs.uk and speak to the NHS Mental Health Triage Service.

Samaritans: Freephone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; **116 123**

Mental Health At Work: <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/>

Anxiety UK: A Charity providing support if you have been diagnosed with an anxiety condition 03444 775 774 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 10pm; Saturday to Sunday, 10am to 8pm) or website; www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Men's Health Forum: Stress support for men by text, chat and email available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; www.menshealthforum.org.uk

Sane: Emotional support, information and guidance for people affected by mental illness, their families and carers: SANEline: **0300 304 7000** (daily, 4.30pm to 10.30pm); www.sane.org.uk/support

Cruse Bereavement Care: **0808 808 1677** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm); www.cruse.org.uk

Family Lives: information, support and advice on all aspects of parenting, child development and home life: **0808 800 2222** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm and Saturday to Sunday, 10am to 3pm); www.familylives.org.uk

Relate: Relationship support; www.relate.org.uk

24/7 Mental Health Helpline for Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire: It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week for people who need mental health care when their situation is not life threatening. It will support people of all ages including children and older adults. Adults: 01865 904 997; Children and young people: 01865 904 998

2) Looking After Patients with an Eating Disorder

This information is intended to help carers understand the process of change an individual recovering from an eating disorder might go through and provides tips on how to support their recovery.

Functions of the Eating Disorder

Individuals with eating disorders often experience conflict within themselves when they attempt to change their behaviours as there are both positive and negative aspects to their symptoms. This internal conflict can result in denial of the disorder, secrecy, lack of concern for physical symptoms, defensiveness or hostility.

For individuals with eating disorders, positive aspects of the eating disorder may include:

- Emotional: sense of security, comfort and routine; a way of managing difficult emotions
- Psychological: sense of mastery or achievement
- Social: increased attention or caregiving; a way of communicating with others
- Avoidance: avoid making difficult decisions or facing difficult situations; avoiding developmental challenges (e.g. puberty, sexuality)
- Identity: feeling special or unique
- Physical: e.g. increased endorphin production

Willingness and Resources

Change requires both a willingness to do things differently and the resources or skills to do so. Many factors affect a person's willingness to make changes, including: shame and fear; physical effects of starvation on the brain (which can affect emotion regulation and the individuals understanding of their condition); and depression (which is associated with hopelessness and low motivation).

Therapy is often required to develop the resources to initiate and maintain lasting change.

The Stages of Change

It may be helpful to think about the stage of change your loved one is experiencing (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1998). People move back and forth between these stages over treatment and may even change within an hour or a day

- Pre-contemplation: "Not ready to change" -
- Contemplation: "Thinking about change"
- Preparation: "Getting ready to change"
- Action: "Ready, Set, Go"
- Maintenance: "Hanging in there"
- 'Relapse': setbacks are a normal part of recovery.

Tips for Effective Communication

Communication is key to supporting a person with an eating disorder and can be improved by considering:

- Timing: allocate time for discussion when you can sit down without distraction
- Language: Use "I feel..." statements. e.g. 'When you do, . . . I feel upset'* rather than "you make me upset"

- Body language: open stance, arms uncrossed, facing your loved one
- Voice: warm tone, slow pace, moderate volume
- Affirmation: don't just focus on the outcome, also comment on strengths, effort, and intentions
- Avoid comments about food, eating, appearance

The "LESS is More" Principle

- Listen carefully
- Empathise - step into their shoes
- Share - activities that are not food related
- Support - provide a warm and loving environment

Setting and Maintaining Boundaries

Family or household rules are often disrupted by an eating disorder and may need to be re-established:

- Prioritise rules that are important e.g. hospital readmission if health deteriorates, eating dinner together as a family
- Ensure rules are clear to everyone in the family
- Be firm, consistent, and compassionate
- Notice and praise adherence to the rules
- Be compassionate when a rule is broken

The Importance of Self Care

You can only effectively help your loved one if you look after your own well-being:

- Recognise when you need to take time out
- Model your ability to sit with uncomfortable emotions e.g., "my emotions are too intense for me to think clearly at the moment. Let's come back to it later"
- Make time for yourself, family, friends
- Try not to let the eating disorder take complete charge of your life or routines

Seeking Help

- Encourage your loved one to get professional help. If your loved one is a child, you must insist on treatment
- Seek life-saving treatment for anyone in danger

It's not your fault

As a parent, you may feel responsible for every cut, bump, bruise, etc. that your loved ones experience. We think, *"If I had just done _____, none of this would have happened."*

Truth is, we are human. Parents are allowed to be human, too. Regardless of how you or your loved ones feels at this moment, it's not all your fault.



HOPE is everywhere,
you just need to FIND it.

Search Now ▶

Don't try to "talk sense" into them

Eating disorders do not respond to logic. There is something called the wise mind, which in DBT is defined that place where reasonable mind and emotion mind overlap.

Linehan states, "*Wise mind is that part of each person that can know and experience truth.*"

That wise mind is stifled by eating disorder thoughts and rules that have become the sufferer's truth. Getting frustrated with and trying to shove logic down the throat of a person who has an eating disorder will only cause tension, anger, and distance.

Instead of trying to "talk sense" into your loved one, ask questions.

Allow the professionals to be the bad guys that bark logic... they have the knowledge and experience to do so.

Get professional help- for both of you

Get help from a [professional](#)– both for yourself and your loved one who is suffering.

It could help you ease the stress when you give up the "*I have to fix him/her*" role and took on the position of him/her support team that held him/her accountable to the advice of his/her treatment team.

It may also give the patient a safe place to land instead of more people telling him/her what to do and how to change. Let the treatment team tackle the disease; you just learn how to be there to support and love unconditionally.

Be the guard dog

The world is not made for people in eating disorder recovery... societal pressures, diet culture, exercise obsessions, body perfection, and toxic talk are everywhere you turn.

A person who is trying to heal their body and mind from the destruction of an eating disorder is hyper-sensitive to all these factors. They need your help to fight these monsters!

Eliminate number talk in your household.

Throw away the fit bits, black out the calories on the nutrition labels, GET RID OF THE SCALE! No number talk- AT ALL!

Ask questions about their feelings

Instead of accusing them of using behaviors, ask them with sincerity questions such as, "*I can see you are in your head right now; want to talk?*" or, "*I've noticed you pulling away today; is there any way I can support you?*"

Don't label foods as good and bad!

Food does not have a moral code. There's a purpose for all foods! They are all contributors to your mental, physical, psychological, and social health. Allow all foods to exist in harmony in your dialogue and actions.

Speak up for them when needed

If you are in a toxic situation, conversation, or event, HELP THEM GET OUT OF IT! A person with an eating disorder may not be able to stick up for themselves right away. Be cognitive of their triggers and be their guard dog when needed.

Stop body talk

ANY body talk is toxic. Being critical of their body or your body can be detrimental. Instead of complementing their body or criticizing it, praise their character, their strength, and their qualities that have nothing to do with their looks. Do it for yourself, too. you may see a difference in your own self-worth!

Be willing to let go

Let's be honest: someone recovering from exercise addiction doesn't need to complete the family 5K you signed up for. Someone who is trying to learn how to love themselves doesn't need to be around critical Aunt _____ at the family reunion. A person learning to get rid of restrictive habits does not need to be schooled by the obsessive trainer on their "*clean eating plan*". Some situations, people, and things that will need to be avoided for a while, and that is okay.

Clean out "sick clothes" and allow for new clothing

Changing bodies are very hard to deal with in eating disorder recovery. I have had to get rid of not one but TWO closets full of clothes in my recovery. If you budget for new clothes, your loved one will not feel pressured to complete behaviors to "*fix*" their clothing issues. Trust me, this one is important!

You're a warrior too

It is never easy to begin the journey to recovery- as a sufferer or as a loved one.

Find someone who has been there to help address your thoughts, feelings, fears and concerns. The journey is a tough one to begin, but the outcome is freedom for ALL parties involved.

Remember, as Ron Blue stated, "*The longer term your perspective, the better your decisions will be.*"

You can do this, Warriors... and loved ones, *you* are Warriors, too!