

Summary Notes

SUPPORTING THOSE WITH A SUSPECTED EATING DISORDER OR EATING DIFFICULTY

INTRODUCTION

- Throughout this course, Gemma Fieldsend and Jessica Parker will guide you through these more in-depth modules around Eating Disorders and Disordered Eating.
- Please note that we will be talking openly and honestly about Eating Disorders. There are a range of support resources at the end of these notes that you are welcome to use.

Before starting this course, what is your understanding of the terms eating disorder and disordered eating?

SPOTTING THE EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Introduction

- During this course we will look at the warning signs to look out for in a child or young person
- Before we get started, I would like to share with you the 4 A's that we can apply in our work with children and young people with eating disorders
- It is vital to Be **Alert** to the possible warning signs of an eating disorder,
- **Approach** as you would any other sensitive issue
- Use **Active and Attentive** Listening skills
- **Advance**, it is important that we make referrals to eating disorders services for children and young people to get the appropriate treatment without delay
- This course will be focusing on the Alert of the 4 A's, where we will look at warning signs to look out for and then move on to looking at Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder and ARFID in more detail.
- Children/young people with an eating disorder often look perfectly 'normal'. Spotting potential warning signs involves looking out not only for physical changes, but also psychological and behavioural changes.
- **Remember that these characteristics will vary according to the eating disorder being experienced and it is not always obvious that someone has an eating disorder.**
- We will look at warning signs that you may notice or to look out for irrespective of which eating disorder it is; looking at physical, psychological and behavioural signs.

Warning signs – Anorexia Nervosa

- **Behavioural signs** If someone is developing anorexia, often changes in behaviour are noticeable before changes to physical appearance:
 - Saying they have eaten earlier or will eat later, or that they have eaten more than they have
 - Not being truthful about how much weight they have lost
 - Strict dieting and avoiding food they think is fattening
 - Missing meals (fasting)



- Avoiding eating with other people
- Hiding food
- Obsessive and/or rigid behaviour, particularly around food
- Irritability
- Excessive exercising – this might involve exercising when not physically well enough to do so, or feeling guilty or anxious about not exercising
- Vomiting or misusing laxatives (purging)
- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Wearing baggy clothing to hide their body, due to self-consciousness or to make weight loss less noticeable

- **Psychological signs** may include:

- Excessive focus on body weight
- Distorted perception of body shape or weight – for example, thinking they are much larger than they are
- Underestimating or denying the seriousness of the problem, or believing there isn't a problem at all, even after diagnosis
- Anxiety, particularly about eating in front of other people
- Low confidence and self-esteem
- Difficulty concentrating
- Perfectionism and setting very high standards for themselves
- Other mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

- **Physical signs** include:

- Weight loss
- Tiredness
- Feeling dizzy
- Growth of soft, fine hair all over the body (called lanugo)
- Hair loss
- Physical weakness
- Swelling in their feet, hands or face (known as oedema)

Warning signs – Bulimia Nervosa

- Signs of Bulimia vary, but someone doesn't have to have all of them to be suffering
- If someone is developing bulimia, often changes in behaviour are noticeable before changes to physical appearance. Signs include:
 - Eating large amounts of food (bingeing)
 - Purging after bingeing by vomiting, over-exercising, using laxatives or diuretics, fasting
 - Organising life around shopping, eating and purging behaviour
 - Secrecy, especially about eating
 - Hoarding food
 - Mood swings
 - Irritability
 - Social withdrawal
 - Misuse of laxatives and diuretics
 - Self-harm, cutting, burning self
 - Disappearing during or soon after eating (in order to purge)
 - Excessive exercising

- Psychological signs may include:
 - Feeling anxious and tense, especially around meal times or when eating in front of others
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Low confidence and self-esteem
 - Worries about weight and shape
 - Distorted perception of body shape or weight
 - Feeling of loss of control over eating
 - Feelings of guilt and shame after bingeing and purging
 - Other mental illnesses, such as depression or anxiety

- Physical signs include:
 - Tiredness
 - Swelling of the hands and feet
 - Poor skin condition
 - Damage to teeth
 - Swollen salivary glands
 - Calluses on the backs of the hands if fingers are used to cause vomiting
 - Changes to blood sugars that may lead to mood swings and fainting
 - Regular changes in weight, which may go up or down, though often remains “normal”, making bulimia harder to spot

- After the course, you may want to read Craig’s story where he shares his lived experience of bulimia nervosa: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/a-young-man-coping-with-bulimia-my-experience/>

Warning signs – Binge Eating Disorder

- If someone is developing binge eating disorder, often changes in **behaviour** are noticeable before changes to physical appearance.

- Signs include:
 - Buying lots of food
 - Organising life around bingeing episodes
 - Hoarding food
 - Eating very rapidly
 - Eating when not hungry
 - Eating until uncomfortably full
 - Avoiding eating around others
 - Social withdrawal and isolation
 - Irritability
 - Mood swings

- **Psychological signs include:**
 - Spending a lot or most of their time thinking about food
 - A sense of being out of control around food, or a loss of control over eating
 - Feeling anxious and tense, especially over eating in front of others
 - Low confidence and self-esteem
 - Feelings of shame and guilt after bingeing
 - Other mental illnesses, such as depression or anxiety

- **Physical signs include:**
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Tiredness
 - Weight gain
 - Bloating
 - Constipation
 - Stomach pain
 - Other stomach problems
 - Poor skin condition

Warning signs – Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID)

- Because ARFID includes a range of different types of difficulty that contribute to the avoidance or restriction of food intake, there is a wide range of possible signs and symptoms, not all of which would necessarily occur in one person.
- Possible signs of ARFID include:
 - Having a short list of acceptable foods
 - Eating foods of similar characteristics, such as crunchy in texture, or colourless
 - Preferences for particular food preparation methods
 - Avoidance of vegetables, protein sources (meat, beans, etc), fruit
 - Eliminates foods and never gains them back into their diet
 - Poor weight gain and growth (child may also be of normal weight and growth)
 - Nutrient deficiencies (iron, vitamin A, and vitamin C most common)
 - Skips one or more entire food groups
 - Becomes emotional or demonstrates stress around unfamiliar foods
 - Food limitations negatively impact normal social behaviours

How can you take what you've learnt here and ensure that you are more aware of the signs to look out for in young people?
