

ADVICE FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

For individuals struggling with an eating disorder, the holidays can evoke feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. Although the media promotes holidays as a time of celebration, for someone with an eating disorder the holidays can be a reminder of an ongoing struggle to make peace with food. Providing support during the season and ensuring that the home is a place where they will not be judged is essential to the healing process. Here are some helpful tips as to how to create a positive environment.

- :: When friends and/or family have not seen each other in a long time, they may be tempted to comment on changes in weight or appearance. Be a friend and help dissolve conversations or comments about food, weight, or overall appearance. You will be creating a more positive atmosphere for people to enjoy each other's company and to remember the experience as a wonderful time.
- :: Perhaps sitting down to one meal as a family would help someone struggling with an eating disorder feel more comfortable, instead of "grazing" on food throughout the day. Do not forget to discuss these options with your family and welcome all input.
- :: Try to avoid emotionally charged discussions before or during mealtimes. The energy of a charged discussion can lead to feelings of anxiety. Often holidays are the only times people are able to catch up on experiences, political issues, sports, etc., but it is helpful to try and limit these types of electric conversations for after meals.
- :: Indulging is a natural part of the holiday season. People eat foods they normally wouldn't eat and often they end the day feeling very full and sometimes very regretful. For some people it is common to make comments like, "I feel so fat" or "I shouldn't have eaten that much." These comments can have a devastating effect on someone struggling with an eating disorder. Do not support or encourage these types of remarks.
- :: Try to be a good role model for your loved one with an eating disorder. It is important for your loved one to witness your healthy eating as a way to connect with their feelings and priorities. Remember, eating disorders are about emotions and not about food.
- :: It is not uncommon for eating disorder symptoms to increase during the holiday season. Try to avoid getting into power struggles over food and do not ever force someone to eat. Be positive and maintain a healthy, nonjudgmental attitude toward her behavior.
- :: If your loved one is withdrawn or isolating herself from mealtime and other holiday activities, gently try to bring her into discussions or activities. If she rejects your efforts, do not take it personally and try to understand this behavior as part of her eating disorder. Always remember to take care of your own needs and to enjoy yourself, your family, and your friends.
- :: Attempt to spend time connecting with your loved one struggling with an eating disorder in non-food related ways. Set time aside to take part in an activity of her choosing. Taking walks, playing games, or watching a movie together can help decrease anxiety by taking the focus off food and eating.
- :: Do not forget to communicate with concerned members of the household. What feelings are emerging? Do they feel that they are handling the situation well? Seeking support and learning

how to communicate feelings in a positive way is essential to understanding your role in the process of the recovery.

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