

How Do I Help a Friend or Family Member Struggling with Eating/Exercise Issues?

Set a time to talk

Find a private place and time to discuss your concerns. A good time would be when the person of concern appears to be in a calm emotional state.

Communicate your concerns

Share that you are worried and want to help. Explain that you think his or her eating or exercise behaviors may indicate a problem that needs professional attention. Be caring and straightforward.

Suggest professional help

Understand the limitations of your role and responsibility. Ask him or her to explore these behaviors and feelings with a counselor, dietician, physician, or other knowledgeable health professional. If you feel comfortable, offer to help make an appointment or accompany him or her to their first visit.

Provide your loved one with resources for GWU's Colonial Health Center or submit a CARE Report via <http://students.gwu.edu/care>

Avoid accusatory statements, blame, or shame

"I heard you throwing up in the bathroom," "You never eat lunch," or "You have a problem," are difficult to hear and may create defensiveness. Instead, use "I" statements such as, "I'm concerned that you're not eating enough," or "It worries me when you exercise so much."

Avoid giving advice or offering simple solutions

Suggestions such as, "You should try to eat more," "I think you look great," or "If you'd just stop, everything would be fine!" can be hard to hear and could potentially make things worse.

Understand that he or she may not be ready to talk yet

Someone who is struggling may not recognize that there is a problem or be ready to talk about it yet. It is not your job to convince your loved one that they have a problem. If your friend or family member does not acknowledge an issue, gently restate your concerns and put your energy toward being a good listener.

Be patient!

You cannot expect overnight recovery, even if your friend is in therapy. Be aware that this does not feel like a choice for him or her, and he or she will need to develop healthy skills that will take time. The most salient recoveries often start slowly!

Take care of yourself!

Often when we are worried about someone else we forget to take care of ourselves. If concern for your friend or family member is interfering with your normal functioning, you may want to seek outside help for yourself.

Safety first

If you are worried that your loved one may be in immediate physical danger (fainting, extreme confusion, extreme dizziness), get them to the nearest emergency room as soon as possible.

Some excerpts taken from National Eating Disorders Association, 2006