

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ANOREXIA NERVOSA & ASSOCIATED DISORDERS

PRESENTS

# GROCERY BUDDIES

A New Support Service



# ANAD

YOUR FUTURE IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

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## Welcome from ANAD Leadership

Hello!

We're so glad you decided to read through ANAD's *Grocery Buddies Guide*. This guide was inspired by the many Helpline calls we've received from parents and friends requesting a resource they could use right away with a loved one who was struggling with an eating disorder. We also have heard from people in recovery who were nervous about doing their own shopping after being in formal treatment.

Therefore, we hope this guide will be a helpful resource to anyone wanting to help a loved one or friend make wise choices in a grocery store. We also hope it can inspire those who are nervous about grocery shopping to ask a loved one or friend for help with holding themselves accountable to their recovery goals

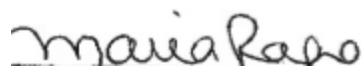
While this guide is designed for grocery shopping, we think the principles in it will be applicable in a variety of settings. We believe open and honest communication is key, and we encourage this throughout all of our free support services.

ANAD wants to help with every step of eating disorder recovery. Check out our [website](#) to learn more about our free support services.

We'd love to hear from you about how this guide was helpful to you! Call us at 630-577-1333 or email us at [hello@anad.org](mailto:hello@anad.org).

Thank you for being part of our ANAD community!

Warmest regards,



Maria Rago, Ph.D.  
Board President



Lynn Slawsky  
Executive Director

# Introduction

Grocery stores can be minefields for someone with an eating disorder. Everywhere they turn, they see another food that can trigger anxiety, avoidance, temptation, or disordered thinking. When the thought of food and grocery shopping is this stressful, even seemingly simple tasks like meal planning and shopping can feel difficult to accomplish. That's where you, the Grocery Buddy, come in.

**The goal of ANAD's Grocery Buddies Support Service is to train loved ones and friends to help people in eating disorder recovery stay accountable to their recovery goals as they go grocery shopping.** Because the grocery store can be a highly triggering environment, a supportive voice will be incredibly beneficial to their decision making. As the grocery buddy, you will help your loved one (the shopper) as they work towards their goals.

ANAD believes this service can help empower loved ones to support a shopper as they face their fears and work on reducing anxiety surrounding meal planning and grocery shopping. The Grocery Buddy is not there to make decisions for the shopper, but to help lessen the anxiety that surrounds the grocery store in the hope of making grocery shopping an enjoyable experience. In this training, you will learn how to communicate with your shopper, work with them to plan what to buy, learn how to identify and deal with some of their anxiety triggers, and encourage them to make choices in line with their recovery goals..

Many buddies will be partners, parents, or others sharing their shopper's household. In those cases, payment for groceries should be handled in your usual manner. If the buddy is not a member of the household, or if there is any question about who should pay for the groceries, make sure to discuss that before heading to the grocery store. Primarily, this service is designed to teach you to support someone who lives mostly autonomously, and is responsible for their own grocery shopping (both in choosing food and purchasing it). If this does not describe your shopper, you will still find many helpful suggestions, but may need to modify some of them for your own situation.

Keep in mind some boundaries that will keep you both feeling safe:

## Grocery Buddy Will:

- Be a supportive friend/family member to the shopper
- Encourage the shopper to follow the mutually agreed upon grocery list
- Check in with the shopper if they become anxious
- Keep the shopper on track with their personal goals

## Grocery Buddy Will Not:

- Decide what foods their shopper should buy
- Become controlling over the shopper outside of the agreed upon boundaries
- Provide detailed nutrition advice

# Grocery Buddy Training

This support service is for you, the Grocery Buddy. In this training you will learn how to identify potential anxiety triggers with the person you're supporting (the shopper), make a plan for how to deal with those anxieties, and identify the best ways to be supportive. Once you have finished the training, schedule a time to sit down with your shopper and take them through the content below. While you should feel free to share these training materials with them, know that we're training you on how to give support, not training your shopper. If needed, and possible, it is a good idea to include the shopper's therapist and/or dietitian in this initial process of setting boundaries.

## Using this Training

Everyone in recovery is unique, will be at different points in their journey, and will move at their own pace. This training is meant as a guide and to be very flexible. The level of support needed from someone fresh out of a treatment center will look very different from someone who is asking for some additional support for their long term recovery during a stressful time.

Much of this training is designed to help you effectively communicate with your shopper. Based on that communication, you may skip some steps or add some of your own. That's fine! Use the parts you find valuable, and add things where you feel it's needed. You may even find that you can apply parts of this training to places other than the grocery store.

***No two buddies or shoppers are the same.  
Everyone needs different types and levels of support.***

# Scheduling

One of the first steps will be determining a time when you and your shopper can sit down together and make a plan of action. You will have some work to do before you even get to the food or shopping aspects of this training. Talk with each other and come up with a time when you can spend about an hour together to plan out your grocery trip. This can be immediately before you plan to go to the grocery store, or in advance.

Another thing to plan ahead for with your grocery buddy is time management. Maybe grocery shopping usually takes a person 45 minutes. But if you add extreme anxiety, it might double or even triple the time, because decision making can be so confusing and overwhelming for shoppers. Have a discussion about this as you plan your grocery buddy outing. How much time are you able to spend? What amount of time does your shopper expect? It is a good idea for you both to have an upper limit on how much time you can devote (say, 2 hours in the store).

***Whatever time you decide on, make it a priority.  
Part of being supportive means honoring your commitments.***

## Step 1: Make a Plan

*Establish a baseline. What food is comfortable? What food is uncomfortable?*

Before heading to the store, you need to know what kind of support your shopper is hoping for. That means talking with them about their fears and anxieties related to the grocery store, food, and the act of shopping. Some people may be nervous to even enter a grocery store, while others may be worried more about following a plan, or buying/avoiding specific foods. You need to know what your shopper is nervous about before you're able to help them. In the attached worksheet, you'll go through a series of check-ins designed to help you and your shopper identify anxiety triggers, their past responses, and how you might help them through it.

Make sure to talk through each question. This sheet is meant to facilitate conversation, not just to write in an answer and move on to the next one. If your shopper is hesitant, use open ended questions like, 'how did you handle that?' and 'what was that like?' Make sure not to judge what they are sharing with you, and remember to be empathetic. Even if you don't understand, you can still be supportive.

Some anxieties may not be specifically food related. Your buddy may worry about the claustrophobia of small aisles, being judged by a cashier, being watched while browsing, or any

number of other things. It's important for your buddy to be able to talk about their fears, and brainstorm responses to them. Remember to listen non-judgmentally. Don't tell your shopper that their fears are silly, or that there is nothing to worry about. Their anxiety is real, and it's important to respect that. Get creative, and try to come up with ways that you can assist: maybe you stand between your buddy and other people to give them some room, or plan to engage the cashier in conversation during checkout to take pressure off your shopper. These are just a few ideas you may be able to employ, and we encourage you to come up with more of your own.

Discussing potential anxiety triggers might be difficult for your shopper, and it might be difficult for you to hear. The things that your shopper may be nervous about might relate to negative past experiences associated with their eating disorder. Give them time to open up, and don't push them to share information that they are not comfortable sharing. Tell your buddy that while you can better help them if you know *what* they're worried about, it's up to them to decide if they want to share the *why*.

***Do your best to be non-judgmental and open.  
Really listen to your shopper's experiences and feelings***

#### WORKSHEET - Appendix 1

Use the worksheet at the end of this guide (pg. 14) to talk with your shopper about their specific anxieties, experiences, and begin to think about how you'll help them. The worksheet has questions for the shopper, but you should discuss their answers together.

## Step 2: How You'll Help

*Support looks different for everyone. What does your shopper need?*

Before you go to the grocery store, you and your shopper will need to come up with a plan. You've already identified some potential anxiety triggers, and should have a good idea about how to handle some potential issues. While you may have discussed some specific ways you can help, you may still need to plan some logistics around supporting your shopper. The two of you need to talk specifics. What will your role be at the store? Will you carry the list and push the cart? Will you follow your shopper's lead and make conversation? Support looks different to everyone, so checking with them about what specifically they need from you is important. You don't have to be perfect, and there is always room for discussion, but having this time to plan will help avoid frustration while you're at the grocery store.

While you're at the store, the shopper will be making their own choices about what foods to choose and purchase. But what if some of those choices are not in line with the plan the two of you have discussed? What should you, the buddy, do if you see your shopper making choices they specifically said they didn't want to make?

ANAD suggests using a check in question. Work with your buddy to come up with a phrase you both agree on to try to interrupt choices that might be coming from a disordered place. Try something like, 'does that fit in the plan?' or 'are you sure that's what you want?' Maybe your buddy has a meal plan that calls for whole milk, and they are reaching for skim. A check in question might help them pause, and potentially make a different choice. If they still go with their initial decision, that's ok. It is not your job to force your shopper to follow the plan exactly, but to encourage them when they make choices that fit with their recovery.

Remember that they will not be perfect right away. Maybe your shopper will make a lot of choices that the two of you had hoped to avoid. That's ok; it just means that there is room to improve on your next trip.\* Later in this training, we will talk about how to check in afterwards, and make a plan for your next trip based on the level of success from your first trip.

***Think things through together, and be willing to experiment.  
You and your shopper might not yet know exactly what support they need.***

*\*It is important to note that ANAD does not condone the purchase of alcohol, laxatives, or diet supplements during grocery buddy trips.*



## ***If You Become Concerned***

If your shopper ever appears to be moving backwards in their progress, tells you that they are in a crisis situation (including but not limited to: not having eaten in several days, bingeing/purging with frequency, injuring themselves, having dissociative episodes, or are experiencing abuse, suicidal thoughts or violence), you should reach out for more help. Never promise to keep secrets for your shopper relating to their eating disorder, and let them know that in serious situations, you'll be enlisting help from their support team.

Depending on your relationship to the shopper, that might mean speaking with their family, therapist, dietitian, or someone else. You cannot be everything to your shopper, and sometimes that means you need to enlist the aid of the people best able to help them.

If you're unsure of what to do, or with whom to speak, call the ANAD helpline at (630) 577-1330 or email [hello@anad.org](mailto:hello@anad.org) for referrals. Alternatively, in a crisis you can call one of the numbers below.

### **Crisis Resources:**

The National Suicide Prevention Hotline:  
1-800-273-8255  
<http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

National Suicide Prevention Helpline Lifeline  
Crisis Chat:  
<http://chat.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/GetHelp/LifelineChat.aspx>

Suicide Crisis Text Line:  
Text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the  
USA, anytime, about any type of crisis.

National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI):  
<https://www.nami.org/#>

Mental Help America:  
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>

To Write Love on Her Arms:  
<http://twloha.com/>

RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National  
Network)  
1-800-656-HOPE  
<https://www.rainn.org>

National Domestic Violence Hotline  
1-800-799-SAFE  
<http://www.thehotline.org>

Alcoholics Anonymous  
<http://www.aa.org>

Narcotics Anonymous  
<https://www.na.org>

## Step 3: Nutrition

*What kinds of foods will you be shopping for?*

First, your shopper needs to have an idea about what foods they need to purchase. If they have a nutritionist or dietitian, they may already have a meal plan to work with. If so, you should encourage your shopper to follow that plan closely. It was designed specifically for them, with their particular nutritional needs in mind. ANAD strongly recommends that your shopper work with a professional to come up with a specific meal plan. If that is not something they have considered, you may want to suggest that they look into meeting with a nutritionist or dietitian.\*

It is often suggested that people with eating disorders eat what their family is eating. If that is the case for your shopper, then this grocery trip may be specifically for extra food for meals and snacks that the shopper eats separate from family meals. Please do not combine “grocery buddies” time with regular family shopping. That has the potential to become overwhelming for the shopper.

If your shopper does not have a meal plan set up for them, they may ask you for help coming up with a shopping list. ANAD recommends starting with the guidelines from [ChooseMyPlate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov) as a starting point. Later, you’ll work with your shopper to create a grocery shopping list. For now, though, review these broad guidelines. They have advice relevant to everyone.

Encourage your buddy to choose a variety of foods from all different food groups, but be aware that some things may cause more anxiety than others. Your shopper will be choosing their own foods, and deciding how much input they need/want from you. Some people may already know what they will be shopping for, others may ask you to help them with their choices. You and your shopper will work together to see what kind of support you can best offer.

***You are not a professional, but having a basic idea about general nutrition is important to helping your shopper. It’s good for you as well!***

*\*ANAD Grocery Buddies Support Service is not meant to replace the advice or information provided by physicians, dietitians, or any other healthcare providers. ANAD recommends consulting a professional for personalized nutritional advice. The grocery buddy is meant as a means of support, and encouragement and is not trained to provide advice on what to eat. For help getting connected to nutritionists in your area, email [hello@anad.org](mailto:hello@anad.org)*

## Step 4: The Grocery List

### *Planning food choices*

Once you get to the grocery store, what food should you purchase, and how should you get it? Some people will have a meal plan provided by their registered dietitian or other health care professional. Others won't. In case you need ideas about balanced meal and snack options, take a look at the resources provided on [ChooseMyPlate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov).

Now it's time for the shopper to make their own grocery list! This is something else that will be different for everyone. Do you have a detailed list that follows the layout of the grocery store? Do you just bring the meal plan and find things that fit as you go? Or do you land somewhere in between? Some people will have anxiety about having to go in certain areas of the store. Maybe your list won't involve foods found in that area. Maybe you are recruited to grab a few items from a high stress area (if a trigger food is stored near something essential to the list).

Talk with your buddy to see how comfortable they are, and plan accordingly. Maybe a post-it note with your food items on it is plenty, or maybe they're prefer to look at the layout of the store to plan out the fastest trip possible. Communication is key here. The way you're used to grocery shopping may not work for your shopper, so try to keep an open mind.

When planning, decide what to do if all of the items are not purchased within your agreed upon time frame. Some ideas include: after shopping, go online and buy the rest for delivery, or have a back-up list of the 15 or so most important items, and can make sure to get those before you leave.

***Your list will be your guide while you're in the store.  
The planning you do now can help make the actual shopping trip go smoothly.***

## Step 5: Going To the Store

### *Executing the plan*

This is what you've been preparing for. Before going in, check with your shopper one more time about what the two of you have agreed upon. You should have a plan for how to handle some potential anxieties, a list of what foods to look for, and ideas on how you will support your buddy. Maybe your shopper is nervous, or more relaxed. Be flexible and patient, and know that it's ok to leave early and try again if they need to do so.

Neither you nor your shopper will be perfect. You may mess up and try to tell them what to buy, and they may not be able to exactly follow the list. It's ok. Forgive each other's mistakes, cheer the successes, and know that no matter how it goes, you can come up with future goals based on this trip.

***Be patient with one another.***

## Step 6: After Shopping

### *Decompress and debrief*

After going to the store, try to relax on the way home. Whether driving, walking, or riding public transit, take the time to let your shopper know that they did a great job (or that you're proud of their efforts), then keep it light! Having some time to decompress is valuable after making it through a stressful situation.

Once you're home and getting those groceries put away (or before, depending on what you and your buddy agree upon), check in about how it went. Did you meet any goals? Is there anything you or your shopper would like the other person to do differently next time? What are the goals for next time? If you have time, discuss how the trip went as compared to the anxieties listed on the worksheet.

You don't need to hit every point immediately, but make sure to spend at least a little time debriefing. Talking about how this trip went will help you and your shopper create realistic goals that can advance their recovery. Ultimately, the goal is that your shopper is able to go to the grocery store alone with minimal anxiety, and be able to purchase (then properly consume) a variety of foods without support. For some people, that goal may be close, and they just need you to cheerlead while they work at it. Others may be further, and need more intense levels of support as they work on their recovery.

***Find the positives and celebrate them.***

## **About Food Use**

### *The limits of this support service*

After leaving your shopper, post-grocery store visit, you may worry that they may not use the food in the way you'd both planned. It's a normal thing to be concerned about, but it's also important to realize that your shopper is ultimately responsible for their own food use. While you can help them deal with anxiety around shopping, you likely cannot be there to help them get through every meal and snack. That's ok. You cannot be every piece of your shopper's support system, and making sure that they are able to get a variety of nutritious foods to work with is a huge step.

Your shopper will likely have some slip-ups following their plan. Some food may get thrown away unused. Other foods may disappear more quickly than was planned. That's normal, and not under your control. One goal may be for your shopper to work towards intuitive eating: listening to their body and using those cues to eat when they are hungry, and stop eating once they are full.

If you and your shopper agree to it, you could consider doing a few check-ins around meal times to support them as they work on following the meal plan. However, that is something you and your shopper should discuss. Unsolicited check ins have the potential to come across as intrusive rather than supportive, and you may only have a certain amount of time you can devote to your loved one. Discussing your boundaries and your shopper's boundaries surrounding the time outside the planning and store visit could be valuable.

***If you agree on check-ins, follow through.  
If your shopper wants boundaries, respect them.***

## Step 7: Setting Goals

### *For future trips*

When planning your second trip, it is important to ask your shopper how they used the food from the first time. Discuss what was easy to use, what was harder, and what their goals are for the next round. Maybe you need to adjust the amounts you're purchasing, or plan to leave out more trigger foods. Remind your buddy that being straightforward about their struggles and goals will make it easier for you to help them.

Update the anxiety list. Based on the shopping experience with you there to support them, some anxieties may be lessened, or your shopper may have identified a new anxiety. Go through the worksheet again to reevaluate your shopper's worries from the last trip, and adjust them. Use these to help establish new goals for the second trip.

***There is no such thing as perfect.  
All positive steps should be celebrated!***

### **Potential Long-Term Goals**

- Shop alone
- Try new recipes
- Incorporate goal foods (comfortable, reach goals).
- Realize that all food is ok in moderation
- Eat intuitively

# Appendix 1:

## Anxiety Worksheet

When dealing with anxiety, it's important to recognize warnings, triggers, and to think about how you have coped in the past. Thinking this through ahead of grocery shopping can help you and your buddy plan ways for them to help you. It may also be useful to discuss it with your therapist if you have one.

Discuss the following with your buddy:

1. Imagine yourself going into your chosen grocery store and shopping. Make a list of any situations that might trigger anxiety related to grocery shopping. Some might include standing in front of items that have been causing fear, needing to select or buy a feared item, becoming overwhelmed and needing to leave the store.
2. Rank each anxiety on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is very mild anxiety and 10 is extreme.
3. Think about or write down what makes the anxiety better or worse.
4. How have you handled that anxiety in the past? What was successful and unsuccessful?
5. Create and write down an action plan for how to handle that anxiety if it should occur during your grocery shopping experience with your grocery buddy. Let your buddy know how they can help.

Ideas that you can include are:

- a. Bring a detailed shopping list for structure.

- b. Understand that you don't have to buy every single thing you need in this one trip.
  - c. It's okay to take a break if you get overwhelmed.
  - d. Have a time limit, such as I do not need to shop more than 30 minutes today.
  - e. Monitor your self-talk. Make sure you speak kindly and respectfully to yourself rather than critically.
  - f. Give yourself credit for trying.
  - g. If your grocery buddy is a close friend or family member, make sure they know what they do is helpful and unhelpful.
6. Debrief after the grocery shopping experience. Consider what worked well and what you may want to change for next time. Remember: The way to mastery is just one step at a time!