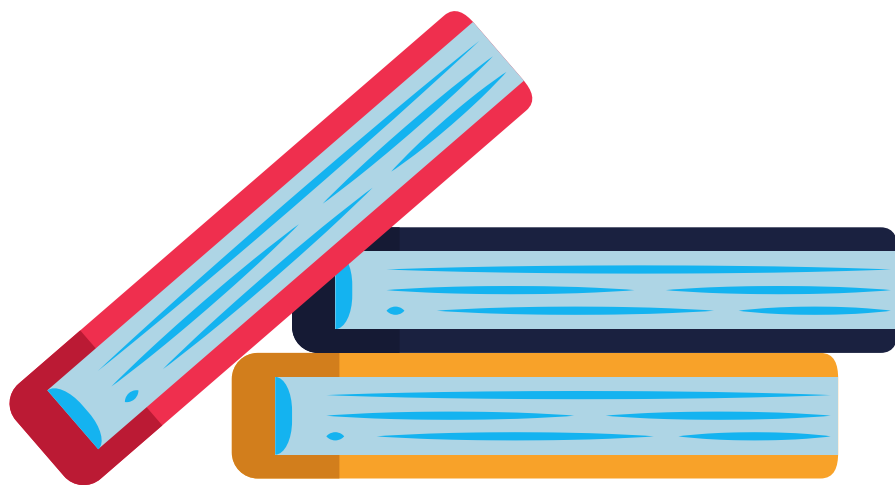




Eating Disorders in School

A Guide for Educators



About ANAD

ANAD is a non-profit, 501 (c)(3) organization providing free, peer support services to anyone struggling with an eating disorder. Our peer-led programs are available to anyone struggling with disordered eating and body image, regardless of eating disorder type or diagnosis. Through support and education, we strive to relieve suffering and provide hope.

Our work is made possible by the compassionate and dedicated volunteers who are the heart and soul of ANAD. They answer helpline calls, facilitate support groups, mentor those in recovery, and share their own stories to support others on their healing journeys.



About This Guide



ANAD advocates for the development of healthy attitudes, bodies, and behaviors. ANAD believes that early detection of eating disorders save lives. So we work to educate parents, teachers, families and communities about the dangers through a variety of mediums including our website, newsletter, and educational outreach events & programs.

Our mission in providing schools with guidelines is to help school personnel provide an optimal learning environment while promoting healthy physical and emotional development of all students. The School Guidelines Program provides teachers, coaches, guidance counselors and parents with the information, tools, and support which can help them to effectively assist at-risk students, as well as those who already have been identified as having an eating disorder.

The Impact of an Educator

Educators have the ability to bond with their students, to understand and resonate with their feelings and emotions, communicate on their level, be compassionate with them when they are down, and to celebrate with them when they are up. But, sometimes the behavior of students demonstrates that something is wrong.

Therefore, teachers must pay attention to any suspicious signs they notice in their students. Part of the responsibility of educators is to find out what is going on with the students beyond what they see in the classroom, or what their grades indicate. Teachers must be prepared and permitted to intervene in a way to ensure the health of their students.

Creating a Safe Environment

As an adult working with adolescents, teachers can help identify those at risk and promote an environment that discourages negative body image and disordered eating behaviors. The following list of ideas can help you in this endeavor:

- **Advocate** for a safe and respectful school environment that prohibits gender, culture, and racial stereotyping as well as sexual harassment, teasing and bullying.
- Help to **promote** the self-esteem and positive self-image of the individual student, with regards to their culture, gender and individual needs.
- **Provide** students with diverse role models, of all shapes and sizes, who are praised for their accomplishments, not their appearance.
- **Conduct** media literacy activities that allow students to critically examine how magazines, television and other media—including those targeting specific cultural groups present the concept of beauty.
- **Guard** against size discrimination and bullying in your classroom.

Questions to Ask Yourself

A teacher who models good health habits provides more valuable health lessons than any textbook. But, teachers need to assess their own attitudes and behaviors about weight to ensure that they do not inadvertently model body dissatisfaction or promote size discrimination. Consider the following:

- Do you inadvertently promote “fear of fat” in students by your words and actions?
- Are you dissatisfied with your body size and shape?
- Are you always on a diet or going on a diet?
- Do you make negative comments about other people’s sizes and shapes?
- Are you prejudiced against overweight children and adults?
- Do you purposefully incorporate role-models of all shapes of sizes in your classroom?
- Do you allow students to bully one another over appearance, size, or shape?
- Do you bully others based on their appearance, size, or shape?

Adapted from Ikeda, Joanne, and Priscilla Naworski. Am I Fat? Helping Young Children Accept Differences in Body Size. Santa Cruz, CA: ETR Associates, 1992.



Eating Disorder Warning Signs in Students

School teachers may be in a unique position to help identify students with eating disorders, but often they are unaware that such problems exist in their student population. Documenting unusual behaviors and patterns in students may be a great way to be able to approach the student or start a conversation with a social worker, counselor, or nurse with your concerns for the student's wellness. Although the following behaviors may indicate that a student has an eating disorder, please be aware that only an expert can diagnose an eating disorder.

Food Related Behaviors:

- Eating the same thing every day
- Taking very small bites
- Cutting food into tiny pieces
- Pushing food around the plate
- Opting out of lunch on a regular basis
- Display of anxiety during meal times
- Drinking diet soda instead of eating food at lunch
- Excluding entire food groups from their diet (i.e. no carbs or no fat)
- Secrecy regarding eating
- Immediate need to use the bathroom after eating
- Weight loss, weight gain, or fluctuation in weight
- Frequent attempts at dieting

Non-Food Related Behaviors:

- Excessive exercise in P.E. class, sports, dance, etc.
- Mood swings, increased irritability, or depressed mood
- Decreased concentration
- Changes in homework patterns (inefficient work habits)
- Inconsistent or impulsive attention towards grades
- Perfectionist attitudes and behaviors
- Social withdrawal
- Increased conflict with friends
- Sudden or dramatic change in behavior
- Continually talking about food, weight, and body image
- Continually asking for reassurance of appearance
- Talking about bingeing, purging, laxatives, diet pills, diet products
- Talking about excessive exercise

Suggested Intervention Plan for Educators

Start the Conversation

If you are uncomfortable talking directly with the student, consult your school's policy on who you should tell regarding your concerns. This may be a social worker, counselor, nurse, or someone else in the administration. Remember to bring any documentation you have supporting your concerns.

If you are comfortable approaching the student, do so in a **sensitive** and **non-accusatory** manner. Approach the student directly and elicit an open-ended conversation about what is going on in the student's life.

- Arrange to speak with the student in private and leave plenty of time to avoid feeling rushed
- Communicate your care and concern in a non-judgmental manner (avoid "you" statements")
- Indicate what you have noticed about the student's behavior (give specific examples)
- Listen to what the student says without interruption
- Don't make promises you cannot keep, such as promising not to tell a parent or coach about your concern
- Decide **with** the student what will happen next

If the student denies any problems:

- Describe what you are seeing and let the student know you will be following up with them.
- If your concern persists, and the student continues to deny problems, suggest you both go to the social worker, counselor, nurse, etc.
- If the student is unwilling to go to the social worker, let the student know that you will be talking to the social worker and/or parents.

If the student admits having difficulty:

- If the student expresses concern over food or weight issues, either specifically or in vague generalities, make a referral to the social worker.
- Teacher should follow-up with social worker with his/her observations.

Suggested Intervention Plan for Educators

Communicate with Parents & Guardians

If you suspect that one of your students is struggling with an eating disorder, you need to contact their parents or guardians. and your designated school personnel right away.

The first response of the parents may be to become defensive, verbalize denial or minimize what you are describing. It is important not to personalize this response but to stay focused on the purpose of your communication, which is to partner with the parents to help their child.

When communicating make sure to:

- Express your concerns about their child
- Indicate specific incidents that have aroused your concerns
- Keep the focus on the child feeling healthy and functioning effectively instead of weight or shape
- Emphasize that only an expert in eating disorder can determine if there is a problem
- Take a “let’s find out” attitude.
- State that importance of treatment and early intervention. Provide resources such as the ANAD Treatment Directory to help parents find local providers.

Important to Remember:

- Accept that a parent’s initial response may be denial.
- Understand that eating disorders have a genetic component and that some of the parents may also struggle with eating disorder symptoms.
- If you are still gravely concerned after multiple attempts of communicating with parents about the physical or emotional safety of the child, contact your local child welfare agencies, or call the ANAD Helpline at 1-888-375-7767 as a resource.

Appendix A: ANAD On Campus Resources

Virtual Support Groups

Our support groups provide a free, virtual space where people can come together to find community in recovery. These peer led groups fill a gap in care, providing an accessible, understanding space for folks at every stage. In addition to our general support groups, ANAD offers a **Teen & Young Adult Support Group** for students as well as **Caregiver Support Groups** for parents and loved ones.

On Campus Groups

ANAD works with local colleges and university to help set up on-campus support groups. Contact hello@anad.org to learn more about bringing an ANAD support group to your school.

ANAD Helpline

Our helpline is available Monday through Friday from 9A – 9P CT and offers connections to eating disorder support near you, and a warm voice when you need it. If you would like a referral to a professional or group, or just need to talk for a moment, call the helpline at the number below.

1-888-375-7767

Visit anad.org to learn more about eating disorders, available resources, and ANAD's programs.