



Eating Disorders in School

A Guide for Social Workers



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.

A Guide for School Social Workers

The Role of a Social Worker When Dealing with Eating Disorders

Social workers are often the link between students' families and the school. Social workers should be familiar with the warning signs of an eating disorders and should be able to:

- Establish policies that ensure immediate referral of students for medical complications.
- Arrange workshops for faculty and staff that meet certification requirements.
- Initiate parent and community education programs featuring speakers and videos promoting healthy body images.

Making Referrals

School policy dictates the specific procedure in making outside referrals. Since this is a multifaceted problem, a treatment team approach is recommended.

When dealing with a student or staff person with an eating disorder, always give a referral for a mental health professional that specializes in treating eating disorders in addition to a primary care physician. A referral of nationwide clinicians specializing in eating disorders may be obtained by calling the ANAD Helpline at 1-888-375-7767.

Following Up

- Have the student continue communication with the social worker, nurse, psychologist, or counselor at school. This relationship can be for therapy and/or support within the school.
- Obtain a release of information to maintain contact with private practice professionals or the community health professionals working with the student.
- Check in with the student's family frequently.



Social Workers: Talking With Parents/Guardians

Anytime a teacher confronts a student with an issue regarding poor behaviors, attitudes, or grades, communication with parents is the next step to ensure that the student is able to get back on track to reach his or her full potential. The same should be true when you suspect that a student is struggling socially, emotionally or physically. If you suspect that one of your students is struggling with an eating disorder, you need to contact their parents right away.

What to communicate to parents/guardians:

- You are concerned about their child.
- Indicate specific incidents that have aroused your concern or the concern of his/her teachers, coaches, peers.
- Keep the focus on the health and behavior of the child, instead of weight, shape, or mortality.
- Emphasize that only a mental health professional trained in the assessment and treatment of eating disorders can determine if there is a problem.
- Take a “let’s find out” attitude.
- State that research shows that treatment is necessary if an eating disorder exists. Tell parents that the earlier treatment begins, the better the chances are for a successful recovery.

What to expect:

- Expect the family to be in denial or avoiding the issue. This is very much a part of the initial phases of the family’s process.
- Understand that eating disorders have a genetic component and that some of the parents may also struggle with eating disorder symptoms.
- Keep persisting and addressing the issue with the parents even though they may get defensive or uncomfortable.
- Explain to the parents that signs of the disease or pre-disease are disguised and difficult to detect.
- Give parents information on recognizing signs and detecting soft signs so that they can evaluate their child. Connect the parents with ANAD to help answer questions and provide support.

Social Workers: Hospitalized Students

Modifications may be needed for students who require hospitalization during their recovery. Keep the following items in mind:

School Work & Assignments:

- Dialogue with the treatment provider about provider expectations and school expectations.
- Provide assignments in a timely fashion to avoid a backlog of work which may increase stress and decrease hope of completion.
- Limit expectations to essentials due to the reduced concentration ability and exhaustion of student due to treatments and therapy. Communicate this to teachers as they assemble the work the student needs to complete.
- Clearly communicate the needs of the student to his/her classroom teacher(s).
- Discuss any “triggers” that may hinder the student’s performance or comfort (i.e. pressure, anxiety, etc.)

Meet with Treatment Provider/Facility

- Attend staffing, especially the discharge staffing so that you know what is going on with the student.
- Discuss any additional modifications that need to be made for the student upon return to school, including whether or not the student may resume Physical Education classes.
- If recommended and allowed by provider, consider visiting the student at least once.

Lunch Schedule

- Schedule a class-free, “normal” lunch period.
- School personnel may need to eat with student.
- Meet with and encourage students in light discussion regarding school work, extracurricular activities, etc. during lunch.
- Report any difficulties with food plan or other problems to treatment providers.

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.