

# Nova Luna Center

Eating Disorder Programs

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## **The Role Of The Educator: Some “Don’ts” For Educators and Other People Concerned About A Person With An Eating Disorder**

by Michael Levine, Ph.D.

- Don’t cast a net of awe and wonder around the existence of an eating disorder: keep the focus on inefficiency, misery, alienation, and disturbance.
- Don’t oversimplify. Avoid thinking or saying things such as “Well, eating disorders are just an addiction like alcoholism” or “All you have to do is start accepting yourself as you are.”
- Don’t imply that bulimia nervosa, because it is often associated with “normal weight” is somehow less serious than anorexia nervosa.
- Don’t be judgmental, e.g. don’t tell the person that what they are doing is “sick” or “stupid” or “self-destructive.”
- Don’t give advice about weight loss or exercise or appearance.
- Don’t confront the person with a group of people, all of whom are firing accusations at the person.
- Don’t diagnose: keep the focus on inefficiency, misery, alienation, and disturbance.
- Don’t become the person’s therapist, savior, or victim. In this regard, do not “promise to keep this a secret no matter what.”
  - a) Repeat what you have observed, i.e. your evidence for a problem;
  - b) Repeat your concern about the person’s health and well-being;
  - c) Repeat your conviction that the circumstances should at least be evaluated by a counselor or therapist;
- End the conversation if it is going nowhere or if either party becomes too upset. This stalemate suggests that the person seeking to help needs to consult a professional;
- Take any actions necessary for you to carry out your responsibilities or to protect yourself;
- If possible, leave the door open for further conversations.
- Don’t be inactive during an emergency: If the person is throwing up several times per day, or passing out, or complaining of chest pain, or is suicidal, get help immediately.