

How to Approach and Talk to Someone You Suspect Has a Problem

Be empathetic and understanding. Stand in the person's shoes. Don't be invested in changing the person, that will come later.

Once the person knows you understand and are not going to try and take over or take the eating disorder away, then you can begin to help in other ways. (i.e. getting information, finding a specialist, making appointments, reassuring or comforting) This can take place only after the person feels understood and accepted.

Express concern about what you have observed and speak from your own experience. Use 'I' statements and describe what you have observed. The person will be less defensive when approached with the idea that they seem sad or not themselves, etc.

Provide information and resources for treatment such as referrals, names of therapists, treatment programs, etc. Do not argue or get into a power struggle. Expect to be rejected in the beginning and do not give up. It is very likely the person will deny the problem, become angry, or refuse to get help. Stick with your feelings and how you've experienced the situation.

Accept your limitations. It's easy to believe if you just say the right thing the person will get help. You can only do so much. Don't give up. People often need to hear something several times before they act on it. A person has the right to refuse treatment. However, if you believe the person's life is in danger you must seek immediate help from a professional. An intervention may be set up to help facilitate the person agreeing to get help. Eating disorder treatment usually takes 2-5 years. Unless very strict circumstances are adhered to, if a person refuses to eat, they may ultimately need inpatient treatment.

Eating disorders are very complicated and difficult to treat. Getting professional help is a necessity.