



Caregiving for EDs

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# How To Open Conversations About EDs: Parents

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Information resource by Freed

*I am a teacher and I think a student in my class has an eating disorder. How do I talk to them about it?*

*Sure, I can suggest a few things that might help you open a conversation with your student.*

It's important to remember that eating disorders are serious but treatable concerns that cause both physical and mental distress due to disturbances in eating patterns and related behaviours and thought patterns.

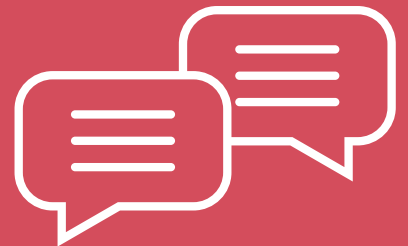
For a young person experiencing an eating disorder, it can be an especially vulnerable experience, and as a teacher, it's important to ensure that you approach the conversation with empathy in order to help the student get the help they deserve.

Here are some pointers that might help you initiate a conversation with a student who could be experiencing an eating disorder:

- It's important for you to be patient and supportive because having a conversation like this can be very difficult for your student. However, knowing that one's environment is a safe space can be a good starting point. Create a safe and supportive space in your classroom. Let your students know that you are here to support them, that it is safe to open up and share, and that they can trust you.



- When trying to start a conversation, be aware of what visible signs and symptoms you've noticed in the case of your student and watch out for any changes in behaviour and appearance.



- Approach the student privately. Broach the subject by asking open-ended questions such as "How are you feeling?" or "Is there anything you would like to talk about?"



- Share specific observations that have led you to believe that they may be struggling with an eating disorder. “I’ve noticed you haven’t been eating lunch recently” or “I’ve noticed you’ve lost a lot of weight recently”.
- Listen without judgement. Avoid commenting on their physical appearance or weight as that can be triggering. Instead, ask how they would like to be supported. For instance, would they like to speak to a qualified professional? Are they comfortable speaking to their parent? Is there a friend who you also know will be supportive that they would like to share this with?
- Part of trying to support them can also involve understanding their environment, are there conversations or specific people that may be a trigger for them? For example, are there boundaries that can be set in the classroom so that no one comments on anyone else’s physical appearance whether it’s praise or criticism.



If the parent is not yet aware, check in with your student on what needs to happen for them to feel confident that they will be understood by their parent and get the support and help they need and not feel judged or have their concerns minimised.

Know that recovery is not a straight path and looks different for different people (even those who might have the same eating disorder label).