Anorexia Nervosa in Adolescents

How Parents Can Support Their Child

With

Anorexia Nervosa
Executive Summary

This guide titled ‘Anorexia Nervosa in Adolescents’ has been written by student Ujala Khalid of Chisholm Institute as part of the course ‘Working with Families and Carers’. This guide has been prepared for parents/carers who support their child who have the symptoms of Anorexia Nervosa or who has been diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa. This guide lists the information about Anorexia, its symptoms, strategies for parents/carers to support their child, further it includes the name and contact details of organizations who provide support for parents who care for their child with Anorexia Nervosa.

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Contents
What is Anorexia Nervosa? ................................................................. 4
Physical signs .................................................................................. 4
Psychological signs ......................................................................... 4
Behavioural signs ........................................................................... 4
Legal Considerations ....................................................................... 5
Standards of Care ........................................................................... 5
Each person’s needs .......................................................................... 5
How the family member/carer can positively influence the adolescent’s behaviour? .......... 5
Best practice guidelines for assisting this family member/carer ........................................ 6
  Family Therapy ............................................................................. 6
Carers and family members’ participation ........................................... 6
Communicating with adolescents ..................................................... 6
Emotional Support and Encouragement ............................................ 6
Psycho-education ............................................................................ 7
Contact with Professionals ................................................................. 7
Examine Behaviour ......................................................................... 7
Maintaining a healthy Lifestyle ........................................................ 7
Nutritional Counselling ................................................................... 7
Psychological treatment .................................................................. 7
  Managing Stress .......................................................................... 7
Enhancing Self-efficacy ................................................................. 7
Empower the Adolescent ................................................................ 7
More Information and Support ....................................................... 8
Eating Disorder Victoria (EDV) ......................................................... 8
The Butterfly Foundation ................................................................. 8
Headspace ...................................................................................... 9
Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI) ..................................... 9
SANE Australia Helpline ................................................................. 9
Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) ..................................... 9
What is Anorexia Nervosa?

Anorexia Nervosa is a serious mental illness characterized by the maintenance of an inappropriately low body weight, a relentless pursuit of thinness, and distorted cognitions about body shape and weight. Anorexia is very common in young adults from age 13 to 19. Perfectionism, low self-esteem, depression, obsessional thinking and anxiety are often part of the condition. Young adults with Anorexia are unable to maintain what is considered to be a normal and healthy weight. They could also have lost a considerable amount of weight in a short period of time. Severe weight loss associated with dietary restriction can be life threatening, not only due to the associated medical complications but also due to the severe mental anguish that an eating disorder causes. Anorexia has one of the highest death rates with up to 20% in 20 years of all mental illnesses.

Physical signs

There are physical signs of anorexia such as rapid weight loss or frequent weight changes, loss or disturbance of menstruation in girls, fainting or dizziness, feeling cold most of the time even in warm weather, feeling bloated, constipated, or the development of intolerances to food, feeling tired and not sleeping well, lethargy, low energy, facial changes such as fine hair appearing on face and body.

Psychological signs

Young people with anorexia may display psychological signs such as preoccupation with eating, body shape and weight, feeling anxious or irritable around meal times, intense fear of gaining weight, unable to maintain a normal body weight for their age and height, depression, anxiety, reduced capacity for thinking, difficulty in concentrating, low self-esteem and perfectionism, increased sensitivity to comments relating to food, weight, body shape, exercise or extreme body image dissatisfaction.

Behavioural signs

Young adults with anorexia may have behavioural signs for example, dieting behaviour, appetite suppressants, repetitive or obsessive behaviours relating to body shape and weight, eating in private and avoiding meals with family or other people, anti-social behaviour, compulsive or excessive exercising, changes in food preferences, preoccupation with preparing food for others, self-harm, substance abuse or suicide attempts.
Legal Considerations
Adolescents who have anorexia may think that they don’t have any problem and the refuse to take treatment. According to Guardianship legislation; at this situation parents or carers can obtain ‘legal order’ to save their life. It’s a permit to make decisions on behalf of their child for a short period of time for their well-fare.

Standards of Care
Adolescents who have anorexia need support and their carers should follow reasonable standards of care. This will help them in their recovery such as

- Carers should be kind,
- Give respect,
- Not be abusive and explain their role in the treatment
- Support the child emotionally
- Provide psychological, nutritional, social and medical support

Each person’s needs
Each family member and the child with Anorexia Nervosa need to feel supported during treatment/recovery and even when the child’s weight returns to “normal”:

Each person needs support, recognition and acknowledgement.

Their needs can be:

- Counselling and treatment for stress, depression and anxiety due to the strain on the family and child from the illness
- Continual support for parents, in-order to remain supportive and positive to enhance recovery
- Education regarding the strategies that are used in treatments
- Re-assurance and support for the child that gaining and maintaining their weight is in the best interest for their health.
- Treatment of physical illness

How the family member/carer can positively influence the adolescent’s behaviour?
Family member and carers can positively influence the adolescent’s behaviour and aid their treatment and recovery by:

- Understanding the possible causes of an eating disorder is key in determining the best process for recovery.
- Making positive comments about the adolescent’s appearance. This gives the individual positive reinforcement which can lead to feelings of power, self-control or quality.
- The parent/carer should make themselves available to the adolescent to talk and support them when they are finding a period of time difficult.
Best practice guidelines for assisting this family member/carer

Family Therapy
Family therapy is a type of psychological counselling that helps family members improve communication and resolve conflicts. Clinical social workers, therapist or psychologist can provide family therapy. It’s a short term therapy. In this therapy all family members get involved and participate. The psychologist teaches skills to the family members about how they can help and improve connections with one another. This therapy assists them get out of trauma and grief. Family members can discuss about financial issues, troubled relationships, impact of illness or conflict between the child and family members.

Communicating with adolescents
Parents and carers should communicate with the adolescent about food, their eating habits and Anorexia. There should discussions when there is no food because they may be stressed and get aggressive. They should listen to their child.

Emotional Support and Encouragement
Adolescents with Anorexia need emotional support from their parents and carers. They can greatly influence their health because adolescents with eating disorders have mixed and confusing emotions all the time. They have stress, fear and frustration in themselves. Due to malnutrition on their brain, hormones and their body are potentially affected which causes unhappiness and disruption.

Carers and family members’ participation
Carers and family members’ participation can have a great impact on adolescent’s life. They can help the child in their recovery process.
Psycho-education
Carers and family members should provide psycho-education about the disorder, its symptoms and treatments. It can help the child to understand their needs and they can adopt strategies according to their requirements.

Contact with Professionals
Parents should have contact with professionals to get help to better understand what their child needs. Therapist, clinical social worker or psychologist can help in this matter.

Examine Behaviour
Carers and parents should examine their child’s attitudes about themselves such as body image, weight, food and their thinking. This will help them to understand their feelings.

Maintaining a healthy Lifestyle
Adopting strategies such as avoiding negative emotions, getting proper sleep, family members support can assist in preventing symptoms of Anorexia to reoccur. Parents should help their child to adopt this lifestyle. Parents and siblings should avoid any fights, aggressive behavior with each other as this will have a positive impact on child.

Nutritional Counselling
Nutritional counselling can be provided by psychologists, social workers, health professionals, consultant physicians and nutritionist. Nutritionist can help to make a nutritionist plan to maintain child’s health.

Psychological treatment
Psychological treatment is also known as “talking therapy”. This can help adolescents who have been diagnosed with Anorexia nervosa. This process helps them to change their thinking and feelings; hence resulting in ways towards recovery.

Managing Stress
In research it has been estimated that it can be psychologically healthy if a child experiences moderate amount of stress, although extreme stress can be avoided by leaving the situation or making changes in priorities, lifestyle or relationships. There are also other ways to manage stress. Parents and carers can use healthy techniques to support their child which will help them to avoid stress.

Enhancing Self-efficacy
Another strategy for the child is enhancing their coping self-efficacy i.e. handling difficult situations by being assertive with friends. Families and parents of the child can help them use this strategy. If the child changes their habit, they will acquire the skill. In this way they can view the process of changing their habit as skill acquisition.

Empower the Adolescent
Carers and parents should help to empower their child and should be involved in mental health advocacy, legislation, monitoring, evaluation, planning and research.
More Information and Support
Caring for a person with an eating disorder is a long-term and skilled commitment; yet families are often expected to pick up the burden of care in the home situation without any training or support. These agencies/support groups are here to help the families/carers and friends.

Eating Disorder Victoria (EDV)
EDV Support people affected by an eating disorder the opportunity to draw upon the support, experience and skills of others facing similar issues. EDV allow people to discuss and share their experiences, emotions and challenges, and to develop positive strategies in a safe and supportive environment.

Eligibility Criteria
The Eating Disorders is for anyone seeking information and support around eating disorders. Anyone can contact if he/she
- want to talk to someone about his/her eating disorder, disordered eating or body image concerns
- is supporting a loved one with an eating disorder
- want to discuss treatment options in Victoria

Benefits/Outcomes
- Discovering new coping strategies, stress management approaches or just enjoy the interaction with people in a similar situation.
- Listening to someone else’s ideas or strategies may provide ideas for each particular situation.
- Sharing experiences with others who can relate

Contact
Phone: 1300550236
Email: help@eatingdisorders.org.au
Level 2, Collingwood Football Club Community Centre, Abbot Street, Abbotsford Vic 3067
Website: www.eatingdisorders.org

The Butterfly Foundation
The Butterfly Foundation provides support for people with eating disorders and body image issues as well as those caring for them such as their families/carers and friends.

Eligibility Criteria
The Butterfly Foundation provides services to anyone who is having an eating disorder such as Anorexia Nervosa, families and carers can also get support from this organization.

Benefits/Outcomes
- Recognise and break free from common traps that can hinder or prevent recovery
- Improve the ability to provide consistent, calm, and conflict-reduced care for your loved one
- Understand what may be happening in your loved one’s mind
- Learn, practice and take home and apply new skills to support and encourage recovery
Contact
Phone: (03) 9822 5771
1430 Malvern Road Glen Iris VIC 3146
PO Box 7026 Glen Iris VIC 3146
Web: http://thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

Headspace
A free online and telephone service that supports young people aged between 12 and 25 and their families going through a tough time.
Contact
Web: www.eheadspace.org.au
www.headspace.org.au
Phone: 1800 650 890

Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI)
COPMI develops information for parents, their partners, carers, family and friends to support children of parents with mental illness.
Contact
Web: www.copmi.net.au
Phone: 13 11 14

SANE Australia Helpline
Information about mental illness, treatments, where to go for support and help for carers.
Contact
Web: www.sane.org
Phone: 1800 18 7263

Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA)
www.mifa.org.au
A national network of service providers, with members in every state and territory working alongside individuals and families affected by serious mental illness. Each state member has programs for people with mental illness and their families, including the Well Ways family education program.
Contact
Fairfield Place 276 Heidelberg Road
Fairfield, Victoria 3078
(PO Box 359 Clifton Hill Victoria 3068)
Australia
Phone: 03 8486 4200
Enquiries: enquiries@mifellowship.org