

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD

While Supporting Them In Their Eating Disorder Recovery

Stay Calm

When your teen is riding the wave of anxiety, you want to stay on the shore and calm them down. This is easier said than done – but getting upset will only further raise anxiety and make it harder for your child to eat.

Use Validation & Reassurance

When you hear your child say they don't want to eat, it is more helpful to simply listen and stay calm than it is to argue or reason with them. You can even say, "*I understand that you don't want to eat. I hear you. This is really hard.*"

Empathize with your child's fear or anxiety, and express confidence that they will be okay. You can say, "*I know you are scared, and I also know you can do this.*"

Your child may respond with hostility or derision, but it is probably helping anyway.

Have Compassion

Once threatened, eating disorders can make children and teens angry, hostile and threatening. They may even make your child blame you for ruining their life. *Remember, it is the eating disorder that is dangerous and threatening, not the food, and not you.* It is an act of love that requires persistence and commitment, and may save your teens life. Give not only your child compassion, but also yourself. This is really hard work.

Be Confident

Calm and confident parents inspire trust in their children, making it easier for them to eat. If you're unsure, frazzled or showing fear, your child will take the cue. Try to avoid complaining about how hard it is on you too but they need you to be there for them.

Sometimes, The Best Response is No Response

That's right, staying quiet, or even just, "mm-hmm", can be helpful. This relieves you from having to come up with fresh responses, and doesn't give your child anything to argue with. It can feel calming for everyone.

Resist the Urge to Reason

One of the greatest challenges parents face at mealtimes is resisting the urge to reason with their child, but it can be so helpful when you do. It's impossible to win a mealtime debate with an eating disorder. Your child may be logical and reasonable in so many areas of their life, but may be totally unreasonable with their eating disorder.

Use Compassionate Redirection

It's difficult to refrain from responding to what your child says, but when you try to reason with the content of your child's thoughts, it leads to arguing and conflict. Instead, try to use redirection in an empathetic and compassionate way.

This handout contains excerpts from, "When Your Teen Has An Eating Disorder: Practical Strategies to Help Your Teen Recover from Anorexia, Bulimia & Binge Eating" by Lauren Mulheim, PsyD