



EPSOM

COLLEGE

Eating Disorder Policy

Introduction

School staff play an important role in preventing eating disorders and also in supporting pupils, their peers, parents and guardians of pupils currently suffering from or recovering from eating disorders.

Scope

This document describes the College's approach to eating disorders. The School recognises some of its pupils will, from time to time, experience eating disorders as defined above. It will seek to support the pupil as far as possible, to recover and establish healthy eating patterns and this policy is intended as guidance for all staff, including support staff and governors.

Aims of this policy

- To increase understanding and awareness of eating disorders;
- To alert staff to warning signs and risk factors;
- To provide support to staff dealing with students suffering from eating disorders;
- To provide support to pupils currently suffering from, or recovering from, eating disorders and their peers and parents/guardians.

What is an eating disorder?

Anyone can get an eating disorder regardless of their age, sex or cultural background.

People with eating disorders are preoccupied with food and/or their weight and body shape, and are usually highly dissatisfied with their appearance. The majority of eating disorders involve low self-esteem, shame, secrecy and denial. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are the major eating disorders. People with anorexia live at a low body weight, beyond the point of slimness and in an endless pursuit of thinness by restricting what they eat and sometimes compulsively over-exercising. In contrast, people with bulimia have intense cravings for food, secretly overeat and then purge to prevent weight gain (by vomiting or use of laxatives, for example).

A child has an eating disorder if he/she eats in such a way that he/she puts their physical/and or mental health at risk. Eating disorders in young people are not about issues with food, but are a mechanism for coping with emotional distress.

Eating disorders affect both men and women and our school recognises this.

Any pupil who is stressed, unhappy or lacking in confidence may be at risk of developing an eating disorder. Perfectionism, anxiety and obsessionality are risk factors. Triggers may include stress due to exams, problems at home or school. In some cases an eating disorder may be triggered in a vulnerable personality by a period of illness which is accompanied by a period of not eating.

It is important for the school to act on any suspicions as soon as possible. Often by the time others recognise that there is an issue, patterns of behaviours are well established.

Risk Factors

The following risk factors, particularly in combination, may make a young person particularly vulnerable to developing an eating disorder:

Individual Factors

- Difficulty expressing feelings and emotions;
- A tendency to comply with other's demands;
- Very high expectations of achievement.

Family Factors

- A home environment where food, eating, weight or appearance have a disproportionate significance;
- An over-protective or over-controlling home environment;
- Poor parental relationships and arguments;
- Neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse;
- Overly high family expectations of achievement.

Social Factors

- Being bullied, teased or ridiculed due to weight or appearance;
- Pressure to maintain a high level of fitness / low body weight for a particular reason e.g. sport.

Warning Signs

Staff may become aware of warning signs which indicate a student is experiencing difficulties that may lead to an eating disorder. These warning signs should **always** be taken seriously and staff observing any of these warning signs should seek further advice from the Second Master or Assistant Head: Pupil Welfare.

Physical Signs

- Severe weight loss
- Dizziness, fainting
- Constantly cold
- Changes in skin or hair condition
- Swollen cheeks

- Callused knuckles
- Tension headaches
- Sore throats / mouth ulcers
- Lethargy and difficulty sleeping
- Tooth decay
- Downy hair on face/arms
- Erratic or cessation of menstrual periods

Behavioural Signs

- Emotional or irritable behaviour or depression
- Restricted eating
- Skipping meals
- Scheduling activities during lunch
- Strange behaviour around food
- Wearing baggy clothes or several layers of clothing
- Excessive chewing of gum/drinking of water
- Increased conscientiousness
- Social withdrawal
- Distorted body image
- Secretive and ritual behaviour
- Visits the toilet immediately after meals
- Concentration problems
- Avoidance of eating in public
- Binge eating large amounts of food.
- Vomiting or purging
- Excessive exercising

Psychological Signs

- Preoccupation with food
- Sensitivity about eating
- Denial of hunger despite lack of food
- Feeling distressed or guilty after eating

- Loss of self confidence
- Fear of gaining weight
- Moodiness
- Excessive perfectionism
- Negative self image
- Anxiety Feeling out of control and lonely
- Self hatred

Objectives

- To help each pupil maintain healthy eating habits while they are away from the home environment and making their own decisions about what they eat;
- To identify those who have a problem and help them as well as support their friends;
- To work in partnership with parents/guardians to ensure a pupil's whole well-being is being addressed;
- To teach each pupil about healthy eating in the PSD programme and biology lessons which will be supported and encouraged by the Medical Centre Staff;
- To give each pupil the confidence to confide in an adult if they themselves, or a friend, have a problem;
- To consider each pupil as an individual and take into account their age, culture and personal circumstances.

Strategies for achieving the aim and objectives

- Have an up to date policy for members of staff to follow should they be made aware of/suspect a problem;
- Make sure each pupil and their parents/guardians are aware of the Healthy Eating Policy through the PSD programme;
- Fortnightly welfare meetings to discuss pupils of concern with the relevant members of staff;
- PSD, Biology and Medical Centre staff to liaise at least yearly and keep up to date on relevant teaching material relating to healthy eating and eating disorders.

Procedure

- If a member of staff has been told of or suspects a problem, they must report it immediately to the Medical Centre, the child's Housemaster or Housemistress, Second Master or Assistant Head: Pupil Welfare. If the child goes directly to the Medical Centre with the problem and asks for it to be kept confidential, then the Code of Professional Conduct must be adhered to;
- The pupil will be weighed and assessed by the Medical Centre staff to ascertain if there has been a weight loss or to discuss any problems he/she may have;

- The Housemaster/mistress and Senior Sister will discuss together (keeping within nurses' confidentiality guidelines) any other issues that may be relevant and an action plan agreed which should ideally involve contact with parents/guardians;
- The schools doctor's advice will be sought if felt necessary;
- Parents/guardians will be offered channels of support with named organisations that can help;
- Regular updates will take place between all staff concerned to ensure everything possible is being done to help and support the pupil;
- An appropriate monitoring of the pupil's academic and extra curriculum programme will take place by the Housemaster/mistress. This may mean exclusion from certain activities if felt it would be of benefit to the pupil;
- If a disclosure has come from friends then the Housemaster/mistress will reassure them that they are being taken seriously and that action will be taken. It may help to refer them to the Eating Disorders Association website, which has a section for friends and sufferers.

Action

- Follow the procedures at all times;
- Support the pupil in any practical way that is not to the detriment of his/her peers;
- Support friends and peers of any pupil with an eating disorder by offering them the chance to talk to the Housemaster/mistress or Medical Centre staff;
- If the school doctor feels the general well-being of the pupil or that of his/her peers is compromised, he/she may be excluded from sport, trips off site or school;
- If it was a member of staff who first brought the problem to light, ensure they are given help, advice and support as necessary.

Resources

BEAT – www.b-eat.co.uk

National Eating Disorders Association – www.nationaleatingdisorders.org