

Parent and caregiver conversation checklist for eating disorders



We created a do's and don'ts checklist you can use to help you talk with your child if you're worried that they may be struggling with an eating disorder. These tips focus on lowering shame while building safety and connection. Remember that progress usually happens in small steps, not big changes. Staying calm during the conversation often matters more than finding the perfect words. And if your child resists, it usually means they're scared, not that they're being defiant.



DO: What will be helpful and allow your child to feel seen and understood



DON'T: Parents should avoid methods that increase shame or blame

Before the conversation:

- Choose a calm, private time (not during meals)
- Regulate your own emotions first
- Lead with curiosity, not certainty
- Plan to listen more than you speak

How you can start the conversation:

- Use observations, not accusations
"I've noticed you seem really stressed around food lately."
- Share concern from a place of care
"I'm talking to you because I love you."
- Acknowledge you might be wrong
"I could be misunderstanding, but I wanted to check in."

During the conversation things to consider:

- Validate feelings even if behaviors worry you
"That sounds overwhelming."
- Stay calm if your child gets defensive or quiet
- Allow silence and pauses
- Reflect back what you hear
"It sounds like food feels like the only thing you can control."

When talking about getting help:

- Frame support as care, not punishment
- Emphasize teamwork
"We'll figure this out together."
- Be honest and steady about next steps
- Reassure them they are not in trouble

Ending the conversation:

- Keep the door open
"We don't have to solve this today."
- Reaffirm connection
"I'm here and I'm not going anywhere."

Language/topics parents should try to avoid:

- Don't label or diagnose
"You have an eating disorder."
- Don't comment on weight, appearance or portions
- Don't compare them to others
- Don't use fear-based statements
"You're going to ruin your health."

Conversation pitfalls to stay clear of:

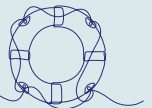
- Don't argue with their feelings
- Don't minimize
"It's not that bad."
- Don't rush to fix or give advice
- Don't interrogate or demand explanations

Advice around help-seeking:

- Don't use ultimatums or threats
- Don't frame help as loss of control
- Don't wait for "proof" if you're concerned

Need additional support?

Hotlines & support lines



ANAD helpline (Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD)):

888.375.7767 — Peer led helpline; Line provides emotional support and referral information.

NAED (National Alliance for Eating Disorders):

866.662.1235

Calls are answered by a licensed clinician specialized in eating disorders; Line provides support and referral information.