

MODULE 3

# UNDERSTANDING EATING DISORDERS

Printable screenshots from the videos produced for [canped.ca](http://canped.ca)

IF WE CONSIDER

AN ADOLESCENT WITH AN EATING DISORDER  
**CAN'T TOLERATE THEMSELVES  
AT THEIR PRE-ILLNESS WEIGHT**

WE CAN UNDERSTAND

**WHAT EATING DISORDERS ARE ABOUT  
& WHY EATING DISORDERS DEVELOP**

Eating disorders are about...

- Different things for different people
- Not feeling 'good enough'
- Feeling:
  - fat
  - ugly
  - disgusting
  - guilty
  - scared to grow up
  - out of control
  - worried or stressed
  - lonely
  - you don't deserve to eat  
or take up space



## Eating disorders are about...

- Wanting to disappear or be invisible
- Coping with:
  - anxiety
  - inferiority
  - depression
  - strong feelings of anger or rage

## Eating disorders are...

- Not a fad or phase, or stubborn behaviour
- Not caused by bad, difficult, or unreasonable children or teenagers
- Not rational

**You cannot reason with an eating disorder**

**EATING DISORDERS ARE VERY  
SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESSES  
& THEY ARE **NO ONE'S FAULT****

## Eating disorders

- Help someone feel better about aspects of their life
- Develop for many reasons
- Culture and the media influence the way we think

## Eating disorders

- Constantly bombarded with messages



## Eating disorders

- These messages don't cause problems for most kids
- However, if your child:
  - is perfectionistic
  - is anxious
  - puts '110%' effort into everything they do
  - has *obsessive-compulsive* tendencies or disorder
  - doesn't feel good about themselves
  - takes things very literally
- Become overwhelmed into thinking that 'fat is bad' and 'fat is the enemy'

## Eating disorders

- For these youth if 'fat is bad' and 'eating makes you fat', then 'eating must be bad'
- One of many early 'triggers' for an eating disorder
- Don't hear enough in the media about the dangers of dieting and weight loss

## People with eating disorders...

- Feel some guilt or shame about their symptoms and behaviours
- May feel:
  - fat
  - disgusting
  - not good enough
  - terrified
  - guilty
  - bad
  - out of control

## Anorexia Nervosa

- Someone with AN will feel better by not eating
- Genetically and temperamentally vulnerable person decides to go on a diet or 'lose a few pounds'
- They experience initial success which helps them to feel better, so they keep going
- Person passes a certain 'threshold' of weight loss, and brain becomes under-nourished

## Anorexia Nervosa

- At this point:
  - can't turn back
  - ED goals get 'programmed', brain is too under-nourished to re-adjust
  - obsessiveness develops
  - illness takes over

IT HAS NOW TURNED INTO  
A SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS:  
**AN EATING DISORDER**

## Bulimia Nervosa

- Tend to be closer to normal weight
- Restrict food intake on a regular basis
- Hunger then leads to strong urges to eat
  - Bingeing
- Feel guilt, shame or anxiety after eating
  - Purging
- Become 'addicted' to purging
- Purging behaviour:
  - vomiting
  - abusing laxatives, water pills, diet pills
  - over-exercising



## Powerful illness

- Eating disorders are powerful illnesses
  - They make the sufferer feel better at first
- Not eating can:
  - provide a sense of accomplishment
  - increase the person's self-esteem
  - make the sufferer feel powerful or in control
  - decrease anxiety
  - serve to push other problems away

## Unhealthy behaviour

- For those with AN weight loss and malnutrition causes:
  - increased anxiety, rigidity and obsessiveness
  - difficulty in changing behaviour
- Those with BN become:
  - stuck in a pattern of restricting, bingeing, and purging
  - overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety and guilt

## What happens when you...

1. Try to get your child to eat?
  2. Try to prevent them from purging?
- Every child and teen will react differently
  - It's possible that your child will:
    - feel terrified, sad or irritable
    - have an emotional break-down
    - become angry, throw things, slam doors
    - lock him or herself in their bedroom or bathroom

## When your child is melting down

- You are negotiating with your child's eating disorder, *not* your child
  - Not 'bad behaviour'
  - Fear and desperation
- If your child is allowed to restrict, or continue to purge, they will become weaker and sicker, and the eating disorder will become increasingly more entrenched

Imagine this scenario...

- Your child is diagnosed with Juvenile Diabetes
- They need daily insulin injections
- Without injections they will die
- The child has a needle phobia
- You gave up on vaccinations because it wasn't worth the struggle

Imagine this scenario...

YOUR CHILD **NEEDS THE INJECTION**  
BUT IS AFRAID OF NEEDLES &  
**WITHOUT IT THEY WILL DIE**

**WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW?**

What are you going to do?

- Strategies you would use for insulin injections will help guide you in how to help your child recover from an eating disorder
- You know:
  - you can't give up
  - not to yell or get angry
  - your child best
  - how to combine empathy & firmness to get your child to take their insulin
- The same is true for eating disorders