

# Eating Disorders and Telling Someone

*The information in this article is by no means intended as a substitute for medical advice from a qualified health practitioner. It does not recommend any one treatment, therapy or medication. Please seek medical advice as different medications suit different individuals.*

*Once you have admitted to yourself that you have an eating disorder, you are faced with another step; to seek support. Telling someone can be very difficult, especially for the first time. You may feel embarrassed, guilty or ashamed.*

*Possibly, you may also feel afraid of the person's reaction. Below are some suggestions and things to consider when you are facing the prospect of sharing your concerns with someone else.*

## Things to Consider

Although we can never predict someone else's behaviour, we can spend hours wondering how they may react when we tell them. Often we think of a negative scenario, to prepare ourselves for the worst.

However, the only way we are ever going to know how someone will react is if we take the risk to tell them. It can be useful to remind yourself of the benefits of telling someone, such as getting support and not having to hide a secret anymore.

Consider who you would like to tell. It may be a friend, a family doctor, a family member, or a partner. If you are a young person, perhaps think about telling a teacher or a youth worker that you feel you can trust or are comfortable with.

People will have varying reactions; some may be surprised, uncomfortable, confused, or worried. Others may be angry, scared and unsure of what to say. Some may have seen the signs and are glad you have told them.

Remind yourself that they may need a few days to deal with their own feelings and reactions. If you have a negative experience telling someone, it is important that you don't let this stop you from getting the professional help and support that you deserve. Consider who else you may tell such as a friend, family member or professional.

Remind yourself that you have nothing to be ashamed of.

## Some Suggestions That May Be Useful When Telling Someone

If you are concerned about telling someone such as your family, you may like to have a friend or someone else with you.

Phone an anonymous or confidential service, such as the EDFV Support and Information line, or Lifeline. This can be useful to practise the words you may use, and also to see how it feels to admit it to someone else.

Consider the time and place that you will tell someone. When they are stressed or preoccupied may not be the best time to tell them.

Write down what you would like to say, or give someone a letter.

Prepare yourself for their emotional reaction.

Plan how you would like to respond if the person gets angry, or does not accept what you are saying. What would you like to say to them? What would you like to do?

Remind yourself that you are only responsible for your own thoughts, feelings and actions, not other people's. You are not responsible for their pain, anger or guilt etc.

Remind yourself that you have taken the step in telling someone, regardless of their reaction.

Give the person some information, or some phone numbers of relevant organisations. The EDFV is happy to send you brochures and reading lists that you may pass on to family and friends.

Remind yourself of the importance of telling people. This process is often a valuable way to find out who will be our support network through the illness.

## You Need to Remind Yourself That...

While no one can walk the pathway to wellness for you, it is important to remind yourself that you do not have to walk this path alone.

Support and understanding from those around us can be a powerful tool in recovery, especially because living with an eating disorder can be so isolating.

Opening up and sharing the journey with those who care about you, will no doubt help you to break free from this isolation; the less isolated we feel, the less shame exists about the disorder.

Ultimately you will discover that the benefits you get from opening up to people who can provide you with the positive support that you deserve, far outweighs the loneliness, isolation and shame that are often experienced with an eating disorder.

*"Remember that whatever support you choose - family, friends, professionals, programs or other avenues - you deserve to be respected in all of your relationships. The connections you make should be empowering and helpful, and if they aren't, assert your needs and change the situation."*

*Hall & Ostroff, 1999,  
Anorexia Nervosa: A Guide to Recovery,  
Gurze Books, page 96 - 97*

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*Your First Step to Recovery*

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