



To: Our colleagues throughout Quebec From: The Centre of Excellence for Mental Health



## What is an eating disorder?

An eating disorder (ED) is a mental disorder that involves preoccupation with weight and body shape. It is not a lifestyle choice, but rather a manifestation of a student's distress and maladaptive coping. EDs are treatable, with early intervention being the key to reducing physical complications and prolonged difficulties.

### Facts about EDs

- EDs typically develop during adolescence or young adulthood, but can develop at any age.
- Though most common in females, 1 in 4 cases occurs in males.
- You cannot tell if a person has an ED by their size or weight.
- EDs are not only about food, body image or weight; they have many complex causes, including emotional difficulties and neurobiological factors.
- EDs, if untreated, can lead to significant medical complications that are often a result of inadequate nutrition. In extreme cases EDs can be life-threatening.

## Warning Signs

- Preoccupation with food intake or restriction, and/or with exercise and body size
- Sudden or rapid weight loss, or frequent changes in weight
- Fatigue, fainting, dizziness
- Moodiness or irritability; student may appear anxious and/or depressed
- Social withdrawal and/or avoidance of social situations involving food
- Student's friends express concern
- Decline in academic performance

### Students at risk

Students who develop an ED tend to be high achievers and have perfectionistic tendencies. They may seek frequent reassurance and have problems with friendships and relationships. They may appear lonely, anxious or depressed, and may be impulsive or have difficulty regulating their emotions. If you are concerned that a student may have an ED, refer them to a medical or mental health professional in your school or community.

### How can you help?

- Be non-judgmental and compassionate – a student with an ED is experiencing emotional struggles and distress; don't assign blame.
- Help students recognize strengths and successes but also convey to students that "it's OK to make mistakes".
- Model self-acceptance and foster an environment of respect for all body types.
- Don't dwell on topics of eating, food, weight
- Provide positive food messages: no good or bad foods, rather "every day foods" and "sometime foods"
- When referring to exercise, speak of it as a source of joy, health, and a good way to socialize.
- Teach adaptive coping skills and strategies to cope with stress (e.g. mindfulness, having down time, socializing with family and friends)
- Engage the student in thinking more positively such as asking what they are good at, what their interests are etc.
- Collaborate with home and/or community services that may provide guidelines for supporting the student.

### Helpful RESOURCES

<http://www.anebquebec.com/aneb-ados/html/en/home/home.html>  
<http://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/04/eating-disorders.aspx>  
<http://nedic.ca/>  
<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>  
<http://www.nedc.com.au/>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qp80hbqBrfQ>

If you have found this postcard to be helpful and informative, please share it with colleagues.  
Dissemination of information about mental health is the first step toward promoting better mental health!

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