

SUPPORTING OUR CHILDREN WITH EATING DIFFICULTIES

NSFT Psychology in Schools Team, NSFT Eating Disorders
Team, Wednesday's Child

OVERVIEW

- Why eating difficulties and disorders are on the rise?
- Understanding eating difficulties better
- How can we help our children?
- When do we need to get help?

THE PANDEMIC & EATING DIFFICULTIES

Increase in referrals for eating disorders

Increased stress

Isolation

Focus in media around exercise/diet – more screen time

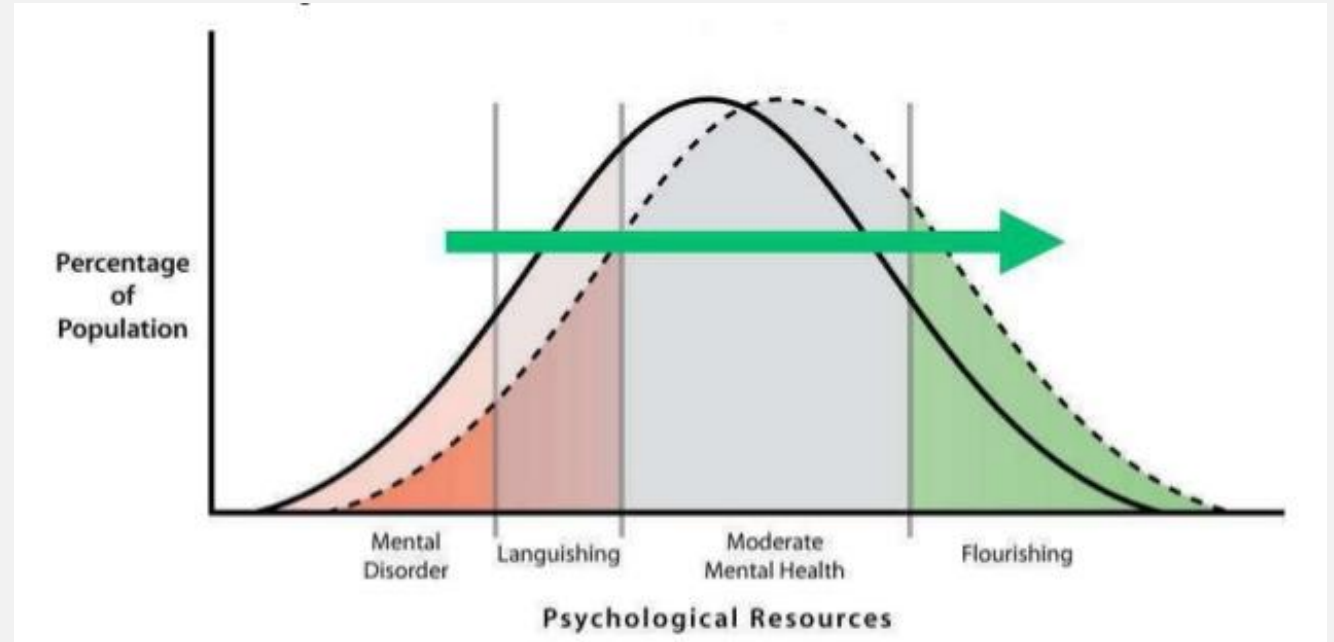
Loss of structure/routine

Less access to supportive networks and previous stress coping strategies



SPECTRUM OF EATING/EXERCISE

- 1-in-5 children have an issue with eating
- 5-10 Years
 - Male 0.5%
 - Female 0.2%
- 11-34 Years
 - Anorexia 0.3% (0.1%)
 - Bulimia 1% (0.3%)





EATING DISORDER RISK FACTORS

Mix of psychological, environmental & genetic factors

- Psychological
- Sensitivity to negative emotions/anxiety/low mood
- Perfectionism
- Controlling emotions

Environmental

- Pressure at school/bullying/abuse/criticism for body shape/eating habits/difficult family relationships/job or hobby where thin is seen as ideal

Genetic

- Changes in the brain/hormone levels/ family history of eating disorders

FOOD

- Managing difficult feelings
- Restricting food intake and regulating weight = feel a sense of control
- Alternatively, feeling 'out of control' with food, and / or developing hidden behaviours
- Self-esteem/confidence challenges: Preoccupation with body image



EXERCISE



- Compulsive and excessive exercise is often seen as a symptom of an eating disorder
- This does not need to be represented by formal sport or workouts, but could be seen as a need for constant 'lower body movement' and agitation if forced to sit still
- Exercise, just like food behaviour, is seen as something over which the young person can have 'control', while inducing weight loss, increasing endorphins and falsely improving a sense of confidence in body image
- The danger to young people is exacerbated by a social narrative which 'applauds' exercise and fitness (but which often forgets that it is dangerous when taken to an extreme)

slido

How do you think your child might use food/exercise to help manage emotions/stressors?

 Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.



INFLUENCERS

- Biology
- Culture
- Family/relationships

HOW TO HELP?

Notice and reduce unnecessary external stressors if possible

“I see you” - Let your child know there is space and time to be heard – curiosity, don’t make assumptions, give space for their feelings

Build in helpful habits and ways of talking about food/exercise? Family meal times.

Identifying when more help is needed?



GOOD HABITS: PREVENTION

- As a priority – wear the oxygen mask (to take the aeroplane analogy). You have to look after yourself in order to support your child. Seek help and support for you
- Give space for your child's story
- Family meal times prioritise – food and conversation
- Modelling balance, awareness of use of language (not demonising food) and own behaviour around food – what you do and not just what you say
- Be mindful of your own use of language (particularly 'diet dialogue')

PARENT TOP MUST DOS

- Consider your household like a vessel sailing through a storm. Because one crew member is poorly, it doesn't help if you all start panicking and causing the boat to capsize
- Develop non-negotiables
- Seek professional informed support
- Avoid blame of self or others

UNIQUE TO EATING DISORDERS

- Deliberate and sustained intake restriction
- Over eating
- Changes in how the young person feels about themselves/their body/their view of food
- Increased activity and distress if this is curtailed
- AND
- Significant and disproportionate distress about their view of their body

RED FLAGS

- Changes in behaviour
 - Excessive exercising
 - An interest in cooking, but not eating what cooked
 - Controlling/anxious at mealtimes
 - Wanting to eat alone/in secret/hiding food
 - Going to toilet after meal
 - Eating lots of food with no weight gain/reducing intake to low calorie foods
- Physical signs
 - Serious unexplained changes in low or high weight
 - Exhaustion
 - Feeling cold

RED FLAGS CONTINUED

- Obsession with appearance/body
- Feeling guilty after eating
- Stressed at mealtimes
- Discarded food / wrappers
- Repeated or prolonged use of the toilet
- Increase in activity and lower body movement
- Obsessive talk about food, weight or body image (and consumption of media related to food)
- Inability to spontaneously enjoy activities they once did
- Rituals around weighing food, tearing into small pieces

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE WORRIED?

- Try to talk to your child about their problems, they may be hesitant. Be curious about changes you have noticed-see BEAT website for advice about this conversation
- Let your child know where they might go for help-school nurse, MHST, school pastoral support team
- Make your own contact with above or GP call to discuss your concerns, don't give up if you are worried, request a face to face appt with GP for your child. For a specialist referral physical checks are recommended
- Call Emotional Wellbeing Hub to discuss your concerns who can direct you to additional NSFT support or refer onto specialist EDT if suitable. 0345 600 2090
- Contact Wednesdays Child for further discussion about their local specialist support options-email on hello@wednesdayschild.co.uk
- See other resources

RESOURCES

BEAT-Wide range of information and support options for parents and young people-www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Adult helpline 0808 801 0677 or email: help@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Beat youthline 0808 801 0711 or email: fyp@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Wednesday's Child
<https://wednesdayschild.co.uk/>

WHAT HELP IS OUT THERE?

- **School staff:** tutor, pastoral support, head of year
- **Suffolk School Nursing - ChatHealth (11-19)**
Text Service for confidential health advice from the school nurse (available mon-Fri 9.30am-4.30pm)
- **NSFT Wellbeing services:** you can self refer to Wellbeing under 18's service www.wellbeingnands.co.uk
- **Kooth.com** – online counselling and support for 11-25 year olds in Suffolk (free)
- **Emotional Wellbeing Hub:** Information, advice, and support for anyone concerned about the emotional wellbeing and mental health of a child or young person aged 0 to 25 years.
- **GP**