

space

Managing Inclusion Briefing  
**Eating Disorders and Voluntary Hostels**  
Space East and Norfolk EDA



# Managing Inclusion Briefing

## Eating Disorders and Voluntary Hostels

A person who has an eating disorder could be the cause of great uproar and distress in any shared living situation for various reasons.

**Firstly around the issues behind and around the eating problems which may include:**

- Low self-esteem
- Self-hatred
- Anger
- Frustration
- Depression
- Fear

**These may lead to:**

- Secretiveness
- Mood swings
- Obsessions/compulsions
- Rituals around food/eating/cleanliness
- Other physical and/or mental illness  
(see next page for more signs and symptoms)

Eating disorders can be seen as symptoms of distress, outer signs that the sufferer's entire way of being is in disarray but that, **somehow**, they are managing to survive. They are psychological and emotional illnesses with physical effect. It is the restrictive eating of anorexia, chaotic eating of bulimia or excessive eating of binge-eating disorder that cause these effects.

When we are deprived of nourishment chemical changes occur in the body - e.g. through starvation, vomiting, laxative or other substance abuse; or if nourishment is distorted by excessive, unbalanced eating. These changes affect physical, emotional and mental functioning.

Eating disorders usually grow out of the way sufferers feel about themselves and the power - or lack of power - they have over their lives. Such illnesses often have roots going back to childhood and are very hard to resolve.

Eating disorders can affect men and women, boys and girls, of any age, ethnic or economic group.

### How can I help?

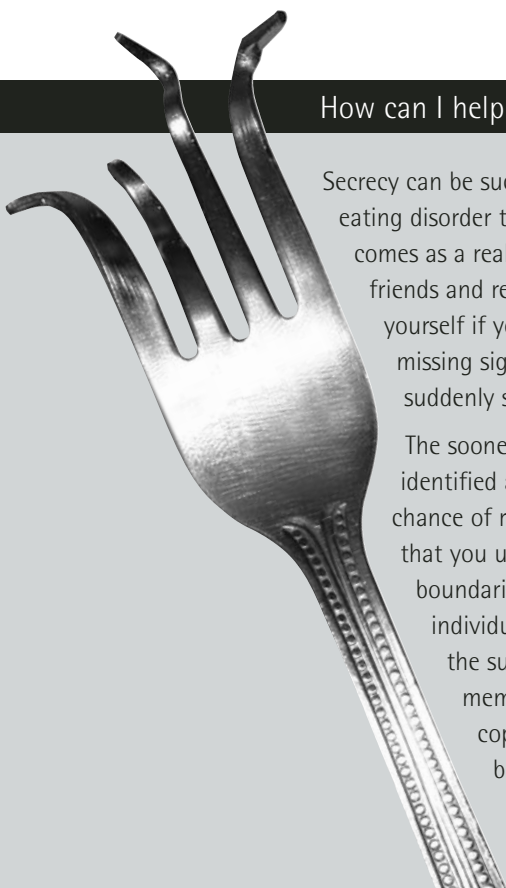
Secrecy can be such an important part of an eating disorder that its existence often comes as a real shock to the very closest friends and relatives. So don't blame yourself if you find you have been missing signs and symptoms that suddenly seem obvious.

The sooner an eating disorder is identified and tackled, the better the chance of recovery. It is important that you understand your own boundaries and duty of care to the individuals concerned. As well as the sufferer, the other hostel members will also need help to cope with the effects and behaviours that characterise the eating problem.

No-one can completely avoid food. We have to eat in order to live, so recovery is not as straightforward as simply trying to avoid the problem substance. However, misuse of food can be an addiction just like alcohol or drugs.

Once you suspect (or are sure of) a problem - through your own observation or that of another resident - you may need to approach the person concerned. But be aware that the response you get may be unpredictable. It could be denial, anger, relief, shame and tears, or any one of these responses, which may also vary over time. Don't forget, the eating behaviour is the way he/she is coping with a difficult and painful life.

Eating disorders have their roots in psychological and emotional problems, but the physical effects often cause most concern to the "onlooker". This may be because physical aspects of the illnesses are most simple to notice and focus on.



## Anorexia & Bulimia Nervosa & Compulsive Eating Disorder – Some Signs & Symptoms

Signs and symptoms are not necessarily exclusive to individual illnesses. Many of them will be present in any eating disorder. Also, people very often experience more than one eating disorder during the process of their illness.

### Anorexia

often a severely restricted in-take of food:

- rapid weight loss
- loss of periods
- swollen stomach & ankles
- dizziness
- cold all the time
- growth of fine, downy hair on face and body - "lanugo"
- fears of being "fat" - although very thin
- fear of being "normal" weight
- perfectionism
- mood swings
- ambivalence
- depression
- low self-esteem
- baggy clothes hide weight loss
- excessive exercise
- obsessed with thoughts of food
- bruising
- osteoporosis
- damage to internal organs - heart & lungs

### Bulimia

often bingeing on large amounts of food followed by vomiting:

- weight fluctuation
- loss of periods
- erosion of tooth enamel
- round "hamster" face
- sore throat, hoarseness
- calluses on fingers and hands
- fear of weight gain
- self-evaluation based on weight alone
- change in personality
- self-hatred
- mood swings & depression
- ambivalence
- secretiveness
- food vanishes
- debts
- signs of uncleared vomit
- excessive exercise
- obsessed with thoughts of food
- disappearing after eating

### Compulsive eating

bingeing but not vomiting:

- steady or sudden weight gain
- marked fluctuation in weight if yo-yo dieting is involved
- health affected by weight or through weight changes
- feelings of disgust around weight and shape
- depression & anxiety
- self-hatred & low self-esteem
- bingeing at least 2 times per week
- distress, detachment and feelings of suffocation around binges
- secretiveness
- food is chosen for treats, comfort or celebration
- relationships affected
- ability to work affected
- take on too much work, to keep busy & avoid facing problems

feelings which trigger and may be relieved by bingeing include:  
stress, tension, tiredness, self-hatred, anger, loneliness.

What makes recovery particularly difficult is the psychological aspect of the problems concerned. The physical effects may be alarming but, for the most part, they should right themselves as the body becomes better nourished.

First decide if you are the best person to talk to them, or if they would respond more openly to someone else.

Initially you will be trying to discover if the eating problems show that there are current problems that need to be dealt with - with accommodation or other aspects of living. Depending on the limits of your responsibility, there may be practical aspects that are part of your remit to sort out.

If the response is positive and you sense that the person really is ready to seek help, you could give them details of your regional EDA and encourage them to contact by phone, text, email or by going along to the centre, which in Norwich is in Colegate/St George's. If it helps, offer to accompany them, or make the call and then hand the phone over.

If the response is negative or hostile, but you are sure of your facts/feelings, you will at least have shown awareness of the situation and that you are prepared to be supportive.

In either case, you may want to contact the EDA on your own account, to talk through the implications of supporting all concerned in the situation.

Supporting someone with an eating disorder is not easy. It can be very frightening if someone is losing weight before your eyes, bewildering when someone keeps vanishing to the loo after meals, or seems to do nothing but eat. Frustration, guilt, anger and fear may also be problems that you struggle with in the situation - the EDA can help with that too.

Help line - 01603 767062  
[www.norfolkeda.org.uk](http://www.norfolkeda.org.uk)

Formerly VHG, is made up of more than sixty member organisations, the majority being registered charities. Most provide accommodation for single homeless people, people recovering from mental illness, women needing emergency accommodation, ex-offenders, people abusing drugs and alcohol and young people leaving care. Some provide temporary or emergency accommodation while others provide long-term supported housing. Others provide services such as housing aid, resettlement, day centre facilities or practical help for vulnerable people needing support.

The voluntary sector attempts to fill gaps left by statutory provision in the accommodation and resettlement fields and this input is recognised as essential by Probation, Social Services, and Health Services as well as Housing Authorities.

Space-East is a regional membership body for organisations providing support services and accommodation working in East Anglia.

We work with members to: Influence policy at a local and national level, provide up to date information, training, advice and advocacy, disseminate good practice, facilitate networking/ partnerships, Assist to identify and access sources of funding, Co-ordinate programmes of research and development & Promote Equality

[www.space-east.org](http://www.space-east.org)

**Norfolk EDA** is a Charity, established in 1976 to provide a safe and comfortable environment for anyone in Norfolk, over 16, who suffers with the problems of anorexia, bulimia, compulsive or binge eating disorder, and related issues. Confidential, free services are available to all sufferers, their families, friends and professionals involved in their care. Access by formal referrals from GPs and other professionals, or self-referral, and there are no formalities or permission required to access services.

Experienced, professional staff and trained volunteers work in liaison with other multi disciplinary services that include consultant psychiatrists, psychologists, specialist therapists and nutritional advisors.

#### Services include:

**Help line - 01603 767062**

**Supported Self Help Group Meetings**

**Open House sessions** in Norwich & Kings Lynn

**1:1 Appointments** in Norwich, Gt Yarmouth & Kings Lynn

**UEA** - come for a chat

**Overeaters Anonymous** Meetings Wednesdays 6-7pm

**Self-esteem Groups**

**Low Cost Alternative Therapies**

**Talks/Workshops**

**Low cost specialist counselling**

**Booklets and Leaflets**

**Website: [www.norfolkeda.org.uk](http://www.norfolkeda.org.uk)** - gives e-mail contact with Support staff, allows download of booklets & leaflets

#### Point of Contact:

Address: **Norfolk EDA, 34 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BG**  
 Helpline: **01603-767062**  
 Website: **[www.norfolkeda.org.uk](http://www.norfolkeda.org.uk)**  
 Email: **[support@norfolkeda.org.uk](mailto:support@norfolkeda.org.uk)**  
 Text/voicemail: **07906-817837**

Norfolk EDA can also provide you with the details of your regional EDA if you are not Norfolk based.

The Eating Disorders Association website is **[www.edauk.com](http://www.edauk.com)**