

## **How to Help A Loved One with An Eating Disorder During the Holidays**

- Do not make a big issue about what your loved one is eating. A little bit of encouragement is okay.
- Do not focus too much on food, it may only fuel the disorder.
- Ask how he/she is doing and see if he/she need help.
- Do not become angry about how he/she feels, just do your best to support he/she.
- Offer a lot of support and be aware of what may be creating anxiety & try and understand what he/she feels. Be understanding, kind and supportive.
- Spend quality time with your loved one.
- Make sure that the primary focus of the holidays is not on the food, but rather on the family & the valued time you will share together.
- Allow for other activities that do not involve food, such as games, singing carols together, opening gifts, decorating & spending time just talking together.
- Allow him/her to make a dish that he/she would feel comfortable eating.
- Before the holiday itself & before family gatherings, make agreements about how you can best help your loved one with food. Honor the agreements you make.
- Do not give he/she loud & attention drawing praise when she does eat.
- Do not talk about diets, weight loss, or weight gain. It causes great anxiety & may increase w felt need to engage in eating disorder behavior.
- Do not stare.
- Learn enough about the illness & the triggers to help your loved one develop skills as well as strategies to defy eating disorder thoughts & urges.
- Know something about his/her struggles, triggers, & behaviors. Then, if you see those, you can approach him/her in private after a meal & suggest ways he/she might be helped in some of those behaviors & learn ways you can be helpful & supportive.
- If you see he/she is struggling, ask if he/she wants to talk, but ask in private.
- Focus on how he/she is feeling inside, what issues he/she is worrying about, what he/she fears, needs, rather than just how much he/she is or is not eating.
- Try not to focus too much attention on the eating disordered behaviors.
- Be patient and nurturing.
- Treat h/she with love & respect no matter what is going on.
- Let he/she know that he/she is loved.
- Help he/she take his/her mind off of food by generating a conversation with him/her about general or important topics.
- Don't allow him/her to excessively isolate.
- Be there for him/her emotionally with messages of love.