

Eating Disorders

A Guide for Parents



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Introduction

Who is this written for?

Eating disorders are common amongst teenagers, and it is important for parents to understand how to navigate eating disorders to support their child. This manual is written for parents who have teenagers to provide information about eating disorders.

How do I use this?

Use this manual as an informational guide to understand eating disorders and if your teen might be at risk. This manual will not solve every problem, but will provide tips on how to navigate eating disorders.



Source: podcasts.chconline.org

Chapter 1

What is an Eating Disorder?



Source: PsylutionsGroup.com

What is an Eating Disorder?

- An eating disorder is a condition that affects how you think about food, eating, weight, and shape.¹
- Eating disorders can lead to poor eating behaviors which can affect one's ability to function and can lead to depression, anxiety, self-harm and other health problems.²



Source: houstonpublicmedia.org



Source: Dreamstime.com

Eating disorders are more common in women, but eating disorders can occur in people of all genders, body shapes, and body weight.¹ The median age for developing an eating disorder is 18-21 years old.²

Types of Eating Disorders

The most common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder.

Anorexia

Fear of gaining weight and having an unrealistic view of body weight and shape. To limit weight gain, people will go through extreme measures to control their weight by limiting food intake¹ or exercise excessively.



Source: Dreamstime.com

Bulimia

Frequent occurrences of eating a lot of food in a short period of time and having no control over when to stop eating. To minimize guilt and shame after bingeing, purging is a common practice to get rid of calories.¹



Source: Dreamstime.com

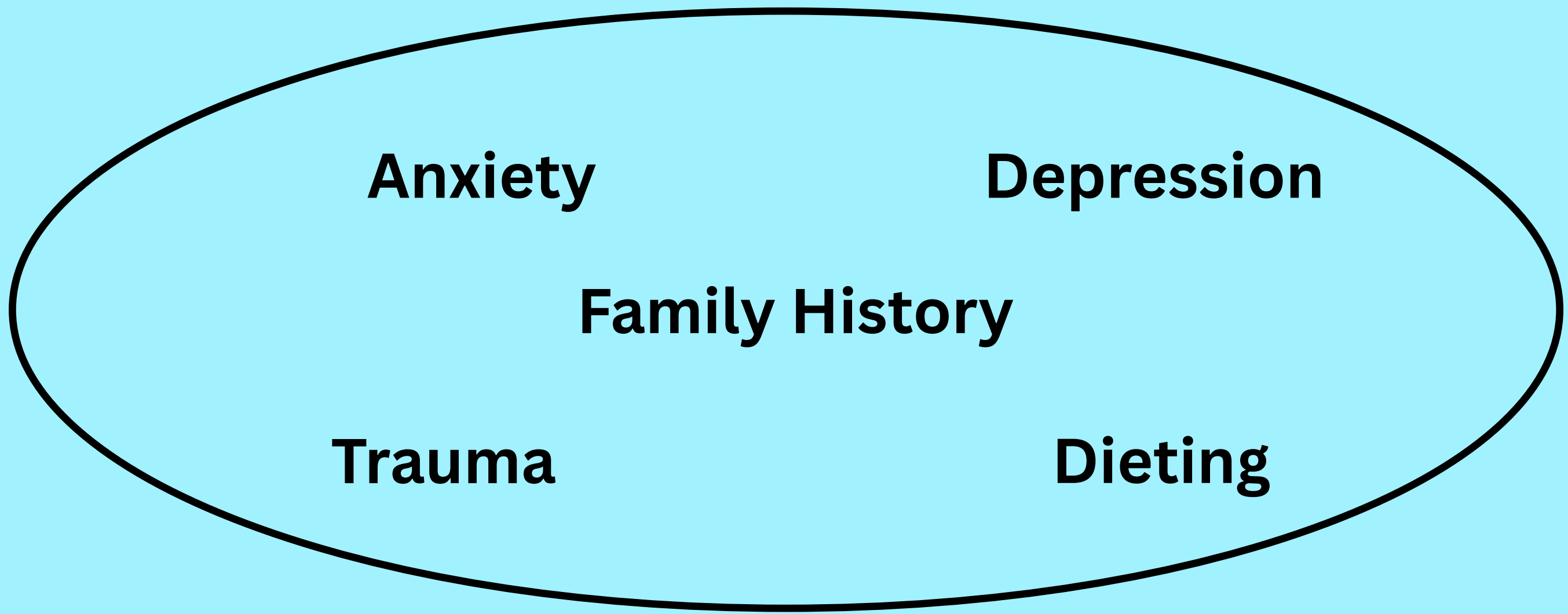
Binge-Eating

Frequent occurrences of eating a lot of food in a short period of time and having no control over when to stop eating often eating past feeling full. After a binge, guilt and shame causes people to limit eating for periods of time, which increases the¹ urge to binge again, and the cycle continues.

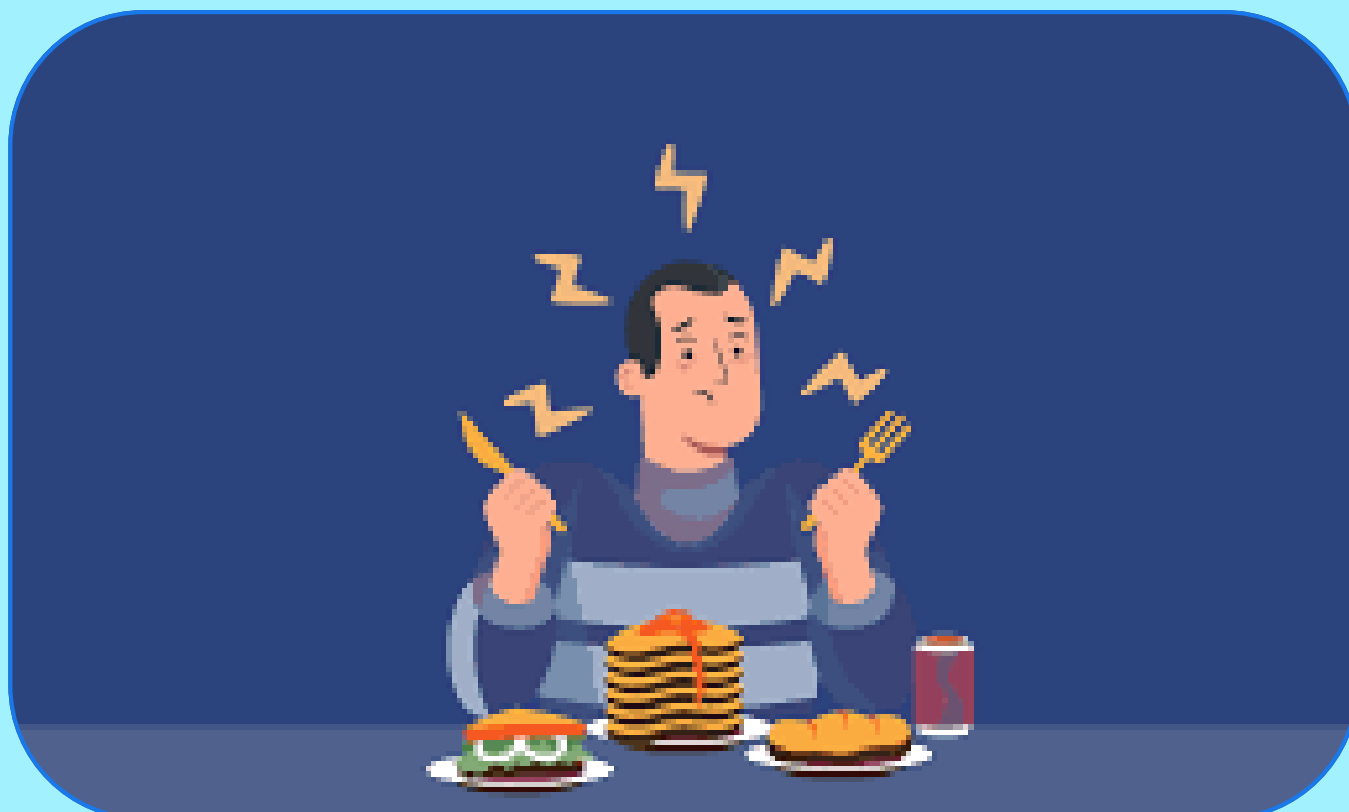


Source: talktoangel.com

What Causes an Eating Disorder?



The exact causes of eating disorders are not known, but these factors many cause an eating disorder.¹



References

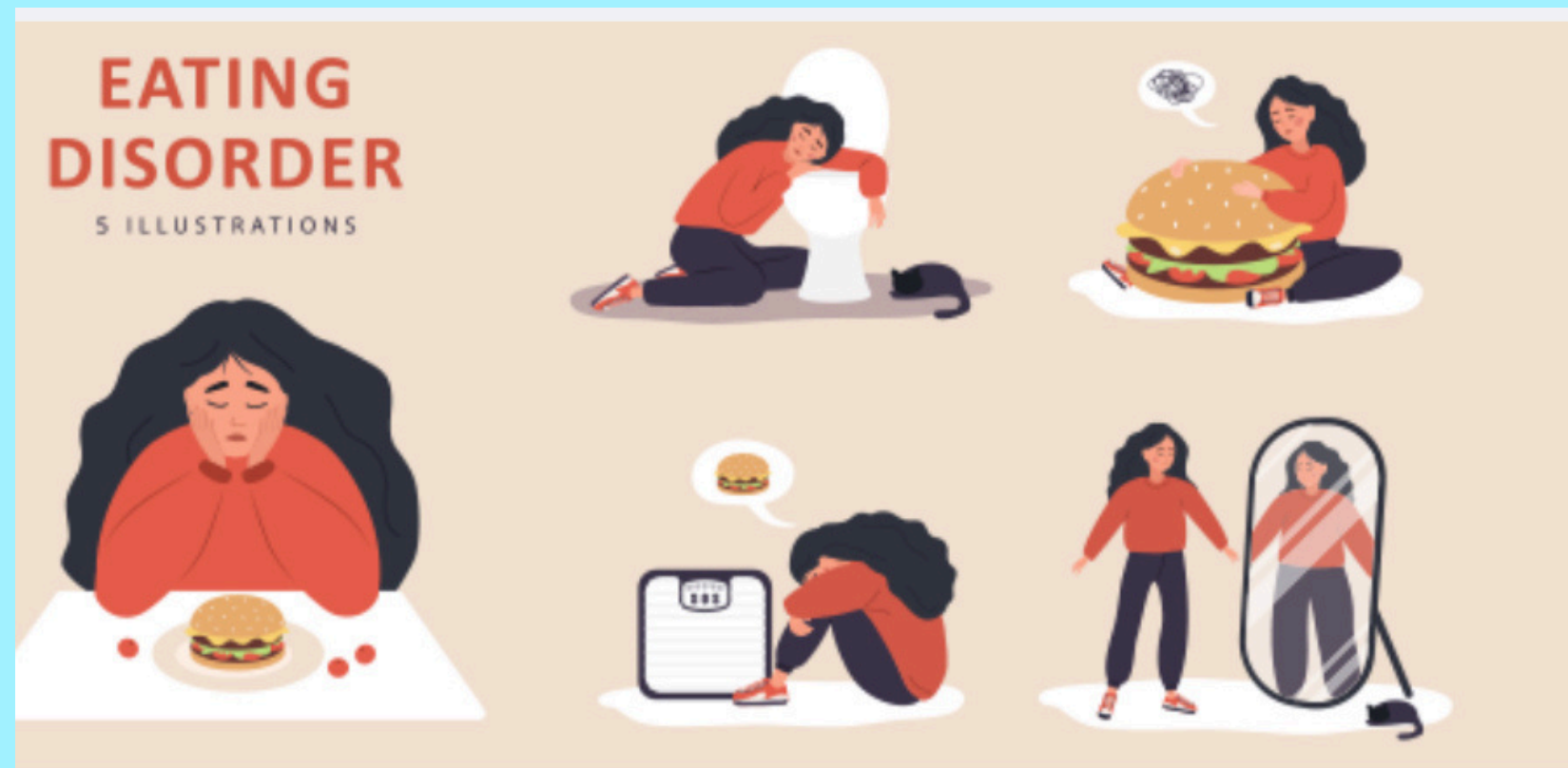
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Chapter 2

Signs and Symptoms



⚠ Identifying the Warning Signs ⚠



Recognizing the signs and symptoms early is essential for timely intervention and treatment for your child.²

These signs often include a fixation with weight and body image, avoidance of food-related social situations, drastic changes in eating habits and excessive exercise.²

Your child may also experience emotional and behavioral shifts becoming more withdrawn, irritable, or depressed.²



Signs of different Eating Disorders

Understanding the unique characteristics of specific eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia, binge-eating disorder, and avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder is crucial for accurate identification and support for your child.

Anorexia Nervosa

- Restricted eating¹
- Distorted body image¹
- Intense fear of gaining weight¹
- Sudden intense and excessive exercise¹

Bulimia

- Swollen cheeks or jaw¹
- Fluctuating body weight¹
- Vomiting, laxatives, over-exercising¹

Binge-eating

- Eating in secret¹
- Eating when not hungry¹
- Eating large amounts of food quickly¹
- Feelings of guilt, shame, or distress after eating¹

Restrictive food disorder

- Smell or fear of choking¹
- Nutritional deficiencies¹
- Lack of interest in food¹
- No concern with body image¹
- Avoiding food due to texture¹

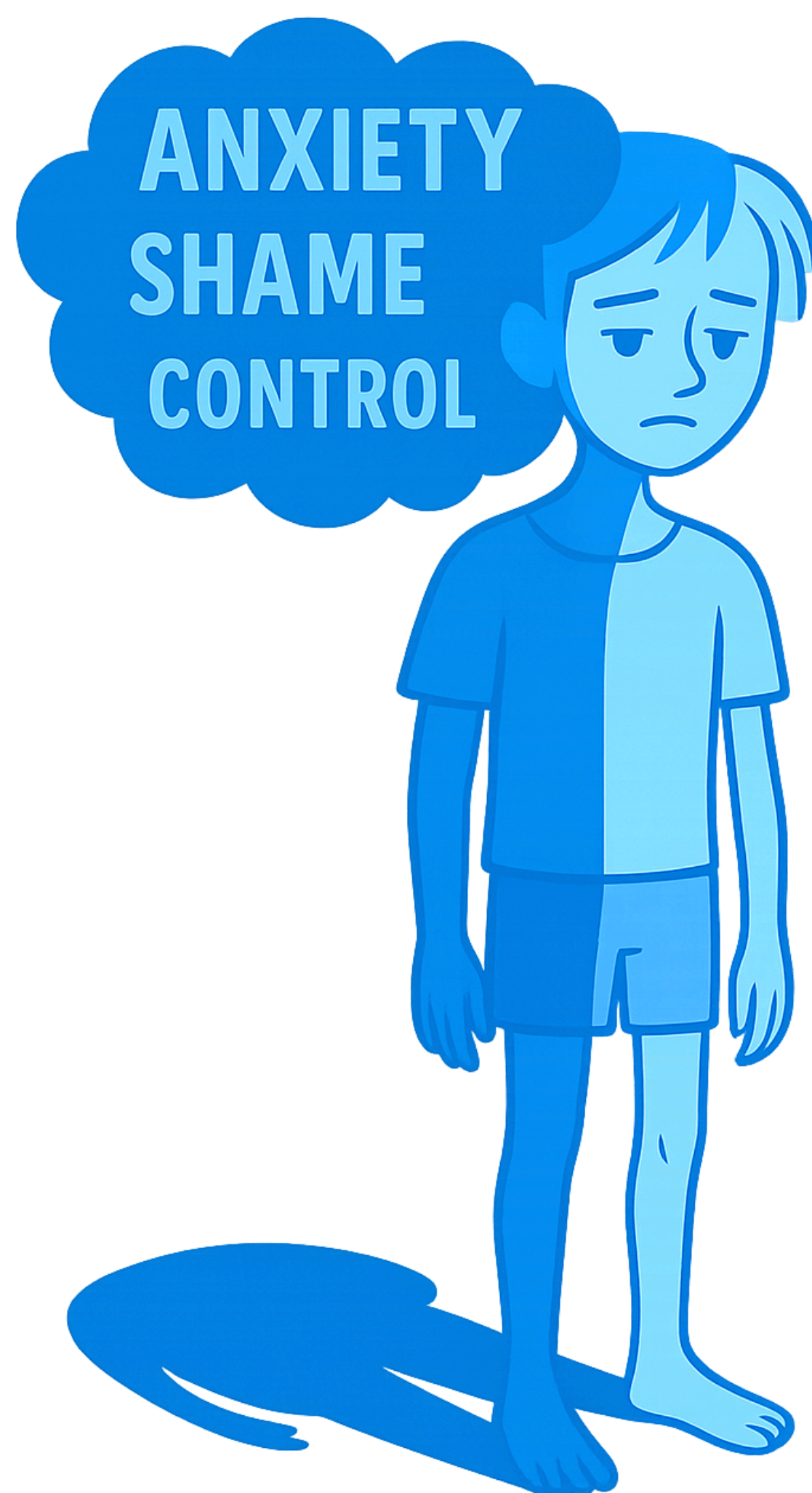


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Chapter 3

Effects of an Eating Disorder



Medical Concerns

Eating disorders can have severe effects on the body due to malnutrition, purging, and erratic eating behaviors.¹

Side effects include:

- Rapid weight change²
- Low heart rate²
- Hormonal changes²
- Fatigue²
- Breathing problems²
- Hair loss²
- Blood pressure changes²
- Heart rhythm abnormalities²
- Fainting²
- In extreme cases, death²



Mental Concerns

Eating disorders can have severe effects on the body due to malnutrition, purging, and erratic eating behaviors.³

Side effects include:

- Social isolation³
- Increased anxiety³
- Withdrawal³
- Depression³
- Suicidal thoughts or actions³



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Chapter 4

How to Support Your Child



Talk to Your Child

It is important to intervene as soon as your child shows signs of disordered eating. It has been proven that early intervention can significantly decrease the effects of eating disorders and lower the chances of relapse.¹

Your child may become withdrawn or moody making it difficult to talk to them. They may not want admit they have a problem but it is important you keep trying.²

Here are some tips:

- Stay calm and come prepared on what you want to say to them.²
- Do not assume you know what is wrong.³
- Use sentences beginning with “I”, not “you”.²
 - “I’m worried because you do not seem happy”
- Be clear that you want to help. It is important they know you are not mad at them or judging them.³
- Be patient - try not to get upset if they do not open up immediately.²
- Avoid talking about their appearance or anyone else’s.²

Support Your Child

Do not underestimate the importance of your love and support in your child's recovery.

It can be helpful to:

- Do your research. Learn as much as you can about eating disorders to increase your understanding.²
- Tell them frequently how much you love them and that you will always be there for them.²
- Suggest they partake in activities that do not involve eating or exercise such as creative hobbies.²
- Be honest with your feelings and encourage them to do the same.²
- Model healthy behaviors by having a balanced diet and partaking in moderate exercise.²
- Build their confidence by complimenting their character, not their appearance.²



Tips for Mealtime

Mealtime can be extremely difficult for your child. It is important to create a safe, supportive environment for them.²

Here are some tips:

- Make meal plans that both you and your child agree to.²
 - Ensure the entire family does not discuss portion sizes, calories, etc.²
 - Keep things lighthearted during meals, even if that's not how you feel.²
 - Do not focus on your child too much during the meal, make normal conversation.²
 - Family activities after dinner like watching a movie or playing a game can distract from purging habits.²
- *If your child is in treatment, consult their treatment team for tips specifically catered to your child.²

It's okay if a meal does not go well, move on and retry the next day.



Tips for Social Situations

Social situations be extremely difficult to children struggling with an eating disorder. Think family dinners or hanging out with friends.⁴

Here are some helpful tips:

- Help your kid decide what they want to eat before they go out.⁴
- Plan some downtime around social events to help them cope with stress.⁴
- Have a back-up plan for events incase things get too difficult.⁴
 - For example, eating in a separate room at a family gathering.⁴



Social Media

The current digital age poses an additional challenge when dealing with an eating disorder.⁴

Stories of recovery shared online can be a positive resource for your child. But there is also online content promoting disordered eating. This includes:

- ‘Pro-anorexia’(‘pro-ana’) content⁴
- ‘Pro-bulimia’(‘pro-mia’) content⁴

Advertising of weight loss programs can also be extremely harmful.⁴

Make sure to talk to you child about what they watch online and how they can know if it is a positive influence on them during their recovery.⁴



Take Care of Yourself

Taking care of a child with an eating disorder can be extremely difficult. You are constantly worried about your child's physical and mental well-being. This can be extremely exhausting which can affect your health too.⁴

Here are some ways to help yourself:

- Lean on your trusted friends and family. Take help when it is offered to you.⁴
- Take time for yourself, even if it is a simple activity, to recharge.⁴
- Join a support group, in person or online, for parents caring for someone with an eating disorder to create community.⁴



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Chapter 5

Treatment Options for kids



Therapy

Therapy is one of the best ways to help with eating disorders for both adults and children. Therapy is defined as a treatment intended to relieve or heal a disorder according to Merriam-Webster dictionary. Therapy can consist of many different types such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Family based Therapy (FBT), Psychodynamic Therapy and much more.

Though all of these therapies might be different in how they are carried out they all have the same overarching goal of helping relive a disorder. Based on current research, therapies have been determined to be most effective for eating disorders.¹



Family Behavior Therapy(FBT)

Family Based Therapy (FBT) is commonly regarded as the best form of therapy for eating disorders. There are five main fundamental assumptions that occur when discussing FBT. The first of the five main assumptions is that the therapist must hold an agnostic view of the cause of the illness. This is to understand that illnesses are not always the effect of a single cause. Second, the therapist takes a non-authoritarian approach in order to create a more comforting environment for the patient and family. Third, parents are encouraged to empower kids. Fourth, the eating disorder is separated from the parent to avoid blaming. And lastly, there is a utilization of a pragmatic approach to treatment.²

FBT also have 3 main phases of therapy. The main goal of the first phase is to encourage parents to take charge and help try to disrupt the behavior(s) causing the eating disorder. Usually this starts with full control of meals and physical activity. Over time, the parents will slowly decrease their presence in meal planning and physical activity and the child will take more control. This describes the second phase of the three step plan. The third and last phase is to show maintenance and continued action while also preventing relapse into the previous eating disorder.²

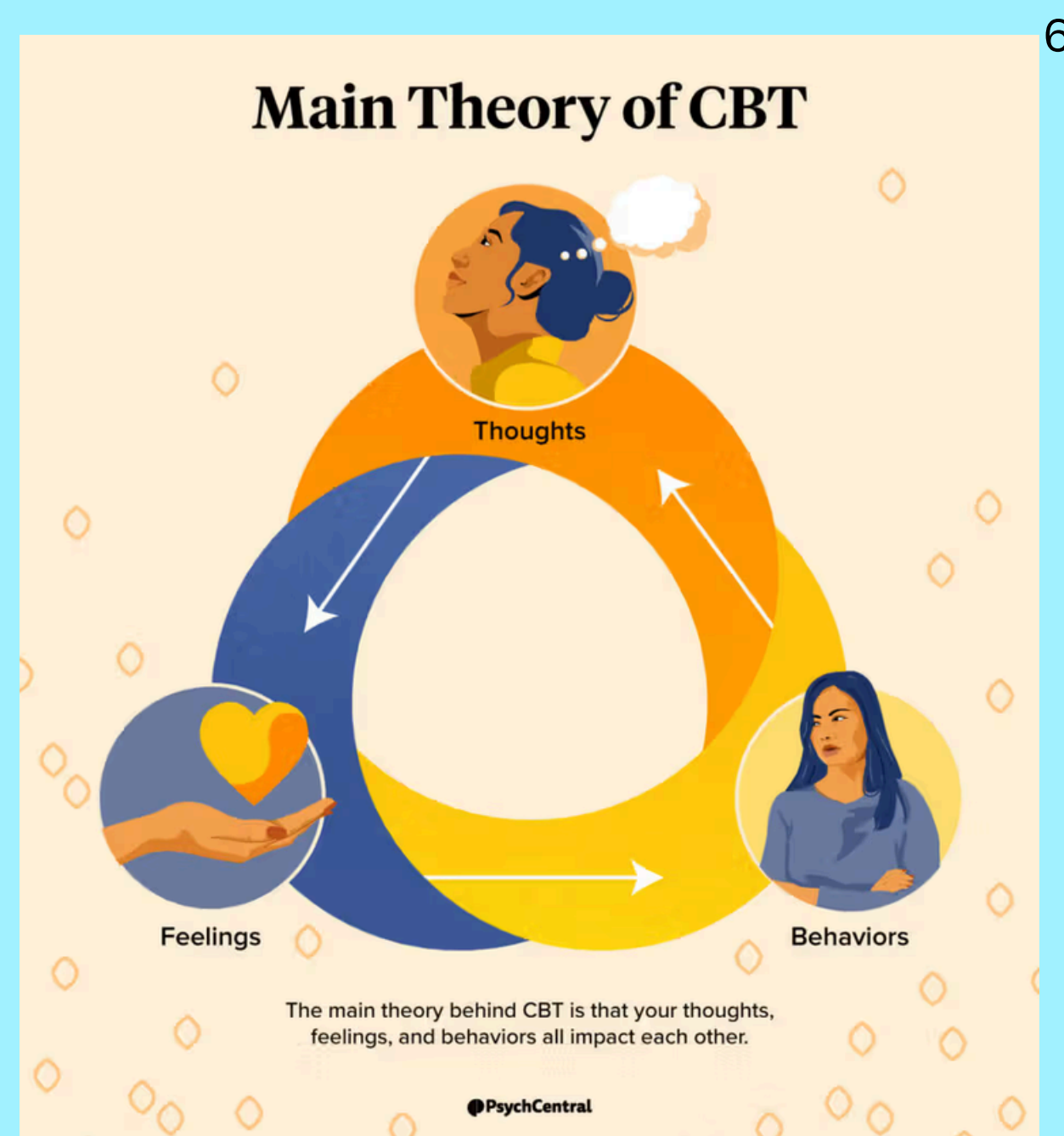


Cognitive Based Therapy(CBT)

Cognitive Based Therapy is also another option for therapy regarding eating disorders. In CBT, the main goal is to change a persons negative thoughts that lead to eating disorders into positive thoughts and emotions in order to support eating.³ In this way CBT is different from FBT as it targets the thoughts and emotions behind the eating disorders over the behavior itself. CBT is also more effective when discussing eating disorders in general while FBT is better at treating certain eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa (AN).⁴

Studies on CBT also demonstrated high rates of treatment satisfaction, therapeutic alliance, and treatment fidelity. CBT can be used for anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa but is known to be more effective at treating bulimia nervosa.⁵

It is important to understand that based on clinical research FBT is considered to be more effective for patients over CBT. Studies show that patients who participate in FBT achieved higher abstinence rates (39%) compared to CBT (20%). When looking at the same patients after six months FBT still showed to be more effective as the abstinence rate was (44%) compared to CBT (25%).³



Meal Support

Meal support is a more subjective approach towards helping with eating disorders. While therapies such as family based and cognitive based therapies have phases, steps, or an outline to follow, meal support is more based on what a person needs in order to help them with emotions and feelings. One of the most popular meal supporters is family meals. This is also considered to be one of the most effective supports for children as family members are usually the most important people in the lives of children who also have a large influence on their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.⁷

It is also important to understand that meal support can occur before, during, or after a meal. Before a meal occurs some of the many pre-meal supports can include: setting appropriate meal times, meal planning, and having options in order to ease the tension associated with meals. During a meal have topics to discuss that might ease the tension of eating, and show your support for the person. Lastly following a meal the best support is to do something the person enjoys such as reading, watching TV, walking, journaling, etc...⁸



Medications

In some cases medications can be the best option for eating disorders. Though medications are not as well studied in connection to eating disorders, there are two FDA approved medications for eating disorders, those being fluoxetine and lisdexamfetamine (LDX).⁹

Lisdexamfetamine is actually a drug made for ADHD but is shown in studies to be effective for binge eating disorders. Lisdexamfetamine works by acting on dopamine and norepinephrine systems in the brain which control rewards. Using lisdexamfetamine can help both increase the concentration of these hormones in order to create a feeling of happiness and satisfaction in order to decrease binge eating.¹⁰

Fluoxetine, which is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI), on the other hand is found to be helpful for bulimia nervosa. Some studies have found that fluoxetine can also be effective for Anorexia Nervosa. Other SSRIs have also been found to prevent relapse in anorexia nervosa but there are not enough studies to prove this. Overall medications can be effective against eating disorders though they need to be carefully monitored especially with children.¹¹



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Chapter Summaries

Introduction

This chapter helps explain the uses for the technical manual and that it is created for parents.

Chapter 1

This chapter explores eating disorders and the different types of common eating disorders.

Chapter 2

This chapter explores the signs and symptoms commonly associated with different eating disorders.

Chapter 3

This chapter explores the possible medical concerns that come along with eating disorders which can effect children later in life.

Chapter 4

This chapter explores the ways in which parents can talk to and support their kids.

Chapter 5

This chapter explores the possible treatments that can help break behaviors associated with eating disorders.

Resources

For more information about what eating disorders are, how to talk to children, how to support children, how to identify disorders, and how to seek help visit

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/get-help/>

<https://anad.org/>

<https://www.childrens.com/specialties-services/conditions/eating-disorders-in-younger-children>

If you have any concerns regarding your child's health you may also contact your child's pediatrician.