

# How To Help A Friend Who May Be Struggling\*

Developed for NORMAL by Carolyn Costin, Robyn Husa, Laura Lees  
Karen Sossin & Dawn Smith-Theodore

- Find a time to talk when both of you are calm – not at or during meals or during exercise.
- The individual who has the best rapport (friend, coach, parent, etc.) should set a time to talk. Set aside a time for a private, respectful meeting with the person to discuss your concerns openly and honestly in a caring, supportive way. Make sure you will be away from other distractions.
- Remember that the person isn't engaging in an eating disorder (or other behavior) on purpose – these are serious biological illnesses that are not a matter of “will.”
- In a respectful tone, indicate specific observations that led to the concern, being sure to give them time to respond.
- Share with the person what behaviors you have actually seen them doing, such as: “I have seen you withdrawing and isolating from friends, do you want to talk?” “I have seen you avoiding food and I'm concerned.” “It seems like you have been really upset lately. Do you want to talk about it?” “I have seen you working out a lot lately. It's like you can't stop. I'm concerned about you.”
- Let the person know that you care, are there to listen and will go with them to talk to someone who can help.
- Express your continued support. Remind them that you care and that you want them to be healthy and happy.
- Focus on health, not weight, food, or moral issues during the conversation. Listen carefully and empathetically.
- Regardless of whether the person responds with denial or hostility, acknowledge that seeking outside help is beneficial and is never a sign of weakness.
- For specific information about helping an athlete, please visit [www.ThinkEatPlay.org](http://www.ThinkEatPlay.org)

\*adapted from NEDA *Get the Conversation Started...* and from K. Beals *Disordered Eating Among Athletes*

## How To Say It – Sample Phrases That Help

- Choose “I” statements over “You” statements to avoid placing the athlete on the defensive, For example, “I’ve noticed that you’ve been fatigued lately”, and “I’m concerned about you.” Is preferable to “You need to eat and everything will be fine.”
- “I have seen you withdrawing and isolating from friends, do you want to talk?”
- “I have seen you avoiding food / skipping meals and I’m concerned.”
- “It seems like you have been really upset lately. Do you want to talk about it?”
- “I have seen you working out a lot lately. It’s like you can’t stop. I’m concerned about you.”
- “I’ve noticed that you’ve been fatigued lately”
- “The light in your eyes doesn’t seem to be there as much anymore and I am really concerned. Are you okay? Do you want to talk?”
- “I am concerned that you might not be able to stop and I want you to know that I’m here to listen and help.

## Things to Avoid

- Avoid conflicts or a battle of the wills with your friend. If they refuse to acknowledge that there is a problem, restate your feelings and the reasons for them and leave yourself open and available as a supportive listener.
- Avoid placing shame, blame, or guilt on your friend regarding their actions or attitudes. Do not use accusatory “you” statements like, “You just need to eat.” Or, “You are acting irresponsibly.” Instead, use “I” statements. For example: “I’m concerned about you because you refuse to eat breakfast or lunch.” Or, “It makes me afraid to hear you vomiting.”
- Avoid giving simple solutions. For example, “If you’d just stop, then everything would be fine!”

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