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Eating Disorders Policy

What is an eating disorder?

A girl has an eating disorder if she eats in such a way that she puts her physical and/or mental health at risk.

Eating disorders in young people are not about issues with food, but are a mechanism for coping with emotional distress.

Although eating disorders affect both men and women, the school recognises that as a community of young woman, eating disorders are an issue which the school must address.

Any girls who are stressed, unhappy or lacking in confidence may be at risk of developing an eating disorder. Triggers may include stress due to exams, problems at home or school. In some cases an eating disorder may be triggered in a vulnerable personality by a period of illness which is accompanied by a period of not eating.

It is important for the school to act on any suspicions as soon as possible. Often by the time others recognise that there is an issue, patterns of behaviours are well established.

Manifestations

These may include:

- Severe weight loss
- Binge eating large amounts of food
- Vomiting or purging
- Excessive exercising
- Emotional or irritable behaviour or depression
- Secretive and ritual behaviour
- Erratic or cessation of menstrual periods
- Lethargy and difficulty sleeping
- Loss of self – confidence
- Unbalanced / trendy eating habits
- Food avoidance
- Social withdrawal
- Constantly cold
- Changes in skin or hair condition
- Concentration problems
- Mood swings
- Black and white thinking
- Avoidance of eating in public
- Calorie counting

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- Irritable
- Feeling out of control and lonely
- Self – hatred
- Negative self image
- Anxiety
- Pre-occupied with food
- Wearing baggy clothes
- Downy hair on face arms
- Distorted body image
- Encourage eating in others

The two most common eating disorders are:

Anorexia Nervosa (Low food intake)

Bulimia Nervosa (Binge eating followed by vomiting – weight may be normal and static)

Policy Statement

The school recognised some of its people will, from time to time, experience eating disorders as defined above. It will seek to support the pupil as far as possible, to recover and establish healthy eating patterns.

Aim

To seek to address eating disorders by giving a girl experiencing such difficulties access to the maximum support possible.

Objectives

1. To help the girl maintain healthy eating habits while they are away from the home environment and making their own decisions about what they will eat.
2. To identify those who have a problem and help them as well as support their friends.
3. To work in partnership with parents to ensure a girl's whole well being is being addressed.
4. To teach them about healthy eating in the PSE programme, cookery activities and biology lessons which will be supported and encouraged by the Health Centre Staff.
5. To give the girls the confidence to confide in an adult if they themselves, or a friend, have a problem.
6. To consider each girls an individual and take into account her age, culture and personal circumstances.

Strategies for achieving the aim and objectives:

1. Health Centre staff will monitor all girls' heights and weights once a year and follow up any girls they are concerned about more regularly.

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2. Have an up to date policy for members of staff to follow should they be made aware of, to suspect a problem.
3. Make sure all girls and their parents are aware of the Healthy Eating Policy through the PSE programme and parent workshops.
4. PSE, Home Economics, Biology and Health Centre staff to liaise at least yearly, and keep up to date on relevant teaching material relating to healthy eating and eating disorders.

Procedure:

1. If a member of staff has been told of or suspects a problem, she must report it immediately to the girl's Housemistress and/or the Health Centre and also inform the Head of concerns. If a girl goes direct to the Health Centre with the problem and asks for it to be treated confidentially then the medical Code of Professional Conduct has to be observed.
2. The girls will be weighed and assessed by the health Centre staff, to ascertain if there has been a weight loss or if a girl has any problems she wishes to discuss. Appropriate follow up appointments will be agreed with the girl.
3. The Housemistress and Lead Nurse will discuss together (keeping within nurses confidentiality guidelines) any other issues that may be relevant and an action plan agreed which should ideally involve contact with parents. The Housemistress and Lead Nurse in order to monitor the girl and ensure all is being done to help and support her.
4. The schools doctor's opinion will be sought if necessary.
5. Parents will be put in touch with the Health Centre and /or organisations who may be able to offer them advice and support.
6. Regular updates will take place between Headmistress, Housemistress and Lead Nurse in order to monitor the girl and ensure all is being done to help and support her.
7. Appropriate monitoring of academic and extra curriculum programme. This may mean exclusion from certain activities.
8. If a disclosure has come from friends. Reassure them that they are taken seriously and that action will be taken. It may help to refer them to the Eating Disorders Association website, which has a section for friends and sufferers.

Action:

- Follow the procedures at all times
- Support the girl in any practical way that is not to the detriment of her or her peers.
- Support friends and peers of any girl with an eating disorder by the Housemistress and / or Health Centre Staff offering them the chance to talk and seek advice
- If the school doctor feels the general well being of the girl or that of her peers is compromised, she may be excluded from sport, trips off site, or school
- Ensure the member of staff who first brought the problem to light is given support, help and advice as appropriate and necessary.

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Follow Up

The policy will be reviewed annually by the DHM, representative of Housemistress from each age level and Lead Nurse. Any recommendations would be given to the Headmistress for approval. Annual statistics will be kept of numbers, age and year.

Resources:

Eating Disorders Association Website