

## RECOVERY SESSION:

# HOW TO TELL SOMEONE YOU HAVE AN EATING DISORDER



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## DISCLAIMER

This resource is a living document and is open to change. It was created by students from within the Body Brave community and may not be fully representative of the spectrum of experience. If you have any suggestions to improve this resource or lived experiences that you don't see represented here, please email us at [info@bodybrave.ca](mailto:info@bodybrave.ca).

## WHY SHOULD I TELL SOMEONE ABOUT MY EATING DISORDER?

Opening up about something personal about yourself is never an easy thing to do. Having difficult conversations can feel uncomfortable and stressful. Whoever you decide to open up to about your eating disorder, be as honest as you can and let them know how you are feeling going into this conversation with them. If you are feeling sad, anxious, nervous, lonely, etc. it is acceptable and okay to admit those feelings. We are not meant to go through struggles alone, when we open up to someone about something that has been weighing on our heart we may feel relief from the stress of keeping a secret, speaking out about mental health helps to normalize the conversation and find comfort in not having to be okay all the time.



## MAPPING OUT THE CONVERSATION

Having this kind of tough conversation will probably not happen in a spur of the moment decision (though it might, and that's great too!). For some, the more mental preparation they can do for a conversation like telling someone about their eating disorder the better. These are some guiding questions for you to consider when thinking about how you might approach this conversation.

### *Who Should I Talk To?*

Who you want to talk to (especially if you haven't talked to anyone about your disordered eating before) is totally up to you! It might be a parent, a doctor, a friend, a partner, a therapist, etc, etc etc! You may want to consider who you are most comfortable with, who you trust, and who you most want to know and support you.

Consider:

- Who do I feel most comfortable confiding in?
- Is there someone in my life that I have shared these feelings with before, or they have shared feelings with me?
- Is there someone that I trust to respond in a supportive way, or do I have additional support if they respond poorly?
- Do I know anyone who could help me and make this process easier for me?

You may also consider the practicality of telling some people in your lives. For example: you may want/need to tell your parents or caregivers about your eating disorder because you will be going away for treatment, or need to use family benefits to help with financial coverage of treatment. If the folks you **NEED** to tell are different than the people you **WANT** to tell, consider first telling those you want to talk to about it. If you are more comfortable with a friend and you know they will support you talk to them first. That way you get some practice in talking about it out loud, and you will have someone to help support you in case the conversations you **NEED** to have don't go as well.

**\*\*If you are experiencing a medical emergency (causing self-injury, fainting/collapsing, irregular/very low heartbeat, disoriented/experiencing delusions, chest pains, trouble breathing) please seek emergency medical support and let those caring for you know that it may be caused by disordered eating.**

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### *How Much Do I Tell Them?*

Again, this is a lot based on comfort level, but it's also important to be honest and not minimize your eating disorder. Eating disorders, no matter your weight/behaviours, can pose a significant medical risk. So while you may not have to share every detail, you also should be honest about the way that disordered eating is impacting your life, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

If it helps, write out some of these thoughts first to help prepare. Think about:

- The thoughts and feelings affecting your eating.
- The way that disordered behaviours affect other parts of your life (relationships, focus, sleep, etc.)
- How long the eating difficulties have been going on.
- What the person you're talking to could do to support you in getting appropriate help.

### *How Do I Start the Conversation?*

How you choose to start the conversation will depend on a lot of factors: your relationship with the person, what kinds of similar conversations you've had with them before, how much they know about your mental health experiences, etc. Below are some suggestions of how you might approach the conversation and what you might say, but think about what feels the most natural and appropriate to you (and practice out loud too if that helps!)

It can be helpful to ask first if the person has the capacity to talk about mental health at this time, this can help to make sure that they are in a headspace to really listen and help mitigate potential negative reactions.

Conversation Openers:

- Hey! Do you have the capacity to talk about some more serious mental health type stuff?
- Are you in the right space for me to talk a bit about something I've been struggling with?
- Would you be okay to chat with me about my mental health right now?
- I'd like to find a time to talk about some mental health struggles I'm having recently.
- I really want to talk to someone about some stuff I've been struggling with, would you be willing to listen/talk through some mental health stuff with me?
- Hey, can I have a few minutes to talk to you there's something I have been worried about"
- Hey, I have had a lot on my mind lately, and could use some support do you have some time to talk?"

## ***Saying the Hard Words***

Okay so opening the conversation is hard, but then getting the actual words out can be equally hard, or harder. As we've said, it's up to you how much you share with someone: you may choose to use the words 'eating disorder' or you may not. Do what feels best while still not minimizing your experience.

You might say:

- I've been struggling with my eating for \_\_\_\_\_. And I think I may have an eating disorder.
- For the past \_\_\_\_\_, I've been struggling with a lot with my eating habits and I realize it's been causing \_\_\_\_\_.
- I've been doing some research and attending workshops on eating disorders and disordered eating, and I think it's something that I've been struggling with.
- I am really worried about how I have been eating, I'm thinking about it all the time and I am worried I might have an eating disorder"
- I've been enagaging in \_\_\_\_\_ behaviours and I don't think I can get through this alone. I need help.

## ***What Else To Add***

Before you start the conversation, figure out a game plan as best you can about what you'd like the outcome to be. Reflect on what you want out of the conversation. Do you want the person to just hear you and listen? Do you want the person to help you find other kinds of treatment or support?

Knowing the answer to those questions will help prepare you for knowing what other information you might want to share, such as:

- If you've been receiving any treatment/support and want that person's support as you navigate that process.
- If you want to stop the disordered behaviours but aren't sure where to start and want their help.
- If you've been struggling for a long time and just wanted to tell someone.
- If you don't want advice or input, just someone to listen,
- If you are thinking of telling a parent or professional and want that person's support.
- If you aren't sure what you want/need.

## **PREPARING YOURSELF**

### **RECOGNIZE YOUR BRAVERY**

Living with an eating disorder often means to live with a secret. Keeping this secret to yourself can feel extremely isolating, and thinking about reaching out for help may seem daunting. You may feel scared, alone, and anxious as to how someone may react. Will this person support me or react with judgement?. Know that we can't control how someone reacts, and how they choose to react is not your fault or a reflection of what you have shared with them. You have acknowledged you deserve and want something different for yourself. Check in with yourself and consider how you are feeling. Give yourself time to reflect, write down what support would be most beneficial to you, listen to your gut instincts, there is no right or wrong way to tell someone. Know you are worth their time and compassion and that you are doing what you feel is best for you.

### **PLAN YOUR APPROACH**

Pick a day/time that works best for you, if it helps write down what you want to say, or write a letter to the person if face to face is too overwhelming. Understand you can not know how the other person will react. If it is a family member or friend they may be shocked, surprised, worried, and may be unsure of what an eating disorder is. Whoever you choose to tell, know that if the conversation doesn't turn out how you hoped, you can return to the conversation as many times as needed. Hold onto the feeling of wanting to change and knowing you deserve that.

### **PREPARE FOR REACTIONS**

Unfortunately today, stigma still continues to exist around the topic of mental illness. Most people will be supportive and understanding, others may not know how to react and may be confused and ignorant. How someone may react is not a reflection on you as a person (you are pretty awesome and brave) for sharing such personal information with someone you trust.

Preparing for something when you don't know the outcome can be a little intimidating. It's possible that the reason behind a negative reaction is due to lack of awareness and understanding. You may need to give them some space and allow them to think and learn about what has been said. However, it is not your job to teach other people about your illness, but if they want to offer more support you can encourage them to learn more about it and help break the stigma.

Remember, it is up to you who you share your story with, and how much you want to share. If you find you are needing more support and are in crisis, Kids Help Phone has a crisis hotline and licensed therapists for you to call or text.

## HOW TO TELL SOMEONE YOU HAVE AN EATING DISORDER



***How do you support a friend when they are going through something difficult?  
What words or phrases make you feel like you are being heard?***

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

<https://www.instagram.com/sravyaa/>

## ***Affirmations***

The more I know myself, the higher my expectations, and the less alone I feel.

I explore what interests me without worrying what other people think.

I'm learning my place in the universe and growing into it.

I forge ahead towards my goals without waiting for permission or approval.

I walk through life with confidence and courage, doing the next right thing.

I make a positive difference in other people's lives.

Those who know me trust my competence, integrity, and commitment to excellence.

I leave self-doubt behind and take bold steps forward

I release the negative self-talk holding me back, I am ready for excellence.

I let go of negative thoughts and am now free to discover and share my true self.

I am ready to change my life for the better, with confidence, gratitude, and grace.

## **FURTHER LEARNING**

### **TED Talks/ Youtube Videos**

[Removing the Stigma of Talking about Eating Disorders | TedTalk with Gabrielle Bernstein](#)

[In a World that is Wrong About Us | TedTalk with Vaugh Darst](#)

[Eating Disorders - Talking About Mental Health | Mind, the mental health charity](#)

[5 Ways to Talk about Depression with Your Parents | Psych2Go](#)

### **Reading**

[I Need to Talk to Someone | mindyourmind](#)

[Talk to a Doctor | mindyourmind](#)

[Talk to a Counsellor | mindyourmind](#)

[Talk to a Therapist | mindyourmind](#)

[How can I talk to a parent/caregiver about something? | KidsHelpPhone](#)

[Need to have a tough conversation with someone? Here's how. | KidsHelpPhone](#)

[8 tips for difficult conversations with friends | KidsHelpPhone](#)

[Tips for talking about mental health \(even when it's hard\) | KidsHelpPhone](#)

[Time to Talk: Talking to Your Parents | Mental Health America](#)

[Taking Control of Your Mental Health: Tips for Talking with Your Health Care Provider | National Institute of Mental Health](#)