



## Recovery Session:

### Social Eating

#### **DISCLAIMER**

*This resource is a work in progress. It was created by two students from within the Body Brave community and is not 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 [info@bodybrave.ca](mailto:info@bodybrave.ca).*

---



Image credit: @frances\_cannon on Instagram

## The Stresses of Social Eating

The fear of eating in front of others and/or in a social setting is a common experience for those living with an eating disorder or in active recovery. From navigating detailed menu information (including ingredients and calorie counts) to judgemental comments from family and friends, social eating poses a variety of external challenges.

Each individual may have different situations that they find stressful about social eating. It can help to mentally prepare for stressful situations *before* they arise. This is called the Cope Ahead method and it is often used in Dialectical Behavioural Therapy.

## The Cope Ahead Method

The Cope Ahead skill encourages us to consider how we might prepare ourselves for certain tasks or situations by thinking the scenario through to completion. The five steps below describe the Cope Ahead Method (DBT Tools, 2021).

1. Describe the situation that is likely to prompt uncomfortable emotions. Check the facts. Be specific in describing the situation. Name the emotions and actions likely to interfere with using your skills.

2. Decide what coping or problem-solving skills you want to use in the situation. Be specific. Write out in detail how you will cope with the situation and with your emotions and action urges.
3. Imagine the situation in your mind as vividly as possible. Imagine yourself in the situation now, not watching the situation.
4. Rehearse in your mind coping effectively. Rehearse in your mind exactly what you can do to cope effectively. Rehearse your actions, your thoughts, what you say, and how to say it. Rehearse coping effectively with new problems that come up. Rehearse coping effectively with your most feared catastrophe.
5. Practice relaxation after rehearsing.

Let's practice the Cope Ahead method with a simplified version. Try to envision yourself in each of the following situations. What might you find stressful? What might be helpful?

### **A Family Barbecue**

What would be stressful about this situation? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

\_\_\_\_\_ What would be helpful in this situation?

---

---

---

### **Lunch with a Friend**

What would be stressful about this situation? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

\_\_\_\_\_ What would be helpful in this situation?

---

---

---

### **A Spontaneous Birthday Celebration at Work**

What would be stressful about this situation? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ What would be helpful in this situation?

## Dealing with Comments from Others

In addition to managing your own eating disorder thoughts, many people need to train themselves to respond to unhealthy, harmful, and triggering comments they hear from friends, loved ones, and even strangers.

Although most people will be well-meaning, they are often inadvertently making things harder for you. Talking about food, weight, and dieting is extremely common in our culture, making it nearly impossible to avoid these conversations. The best way to protect yourself and your recovery is to be prepared! By creating some clever responses to common comments, you are more likely to react in ways that protect your recovery.

One of Body Brave’s team members with lived experience shared this method to protecting their recovery:

***"Something I find really helpful is having a person at an event or whatever the occasion is that is on the same page as me when it comes to wanting to avoid diet culture or just having enough of normalizing disordered eating behaviour. That way if someone does something or makes a comment I can look to that other person and together we can roll our eyes or step aside to debrief."***

- ***BB Community Member***

Let’s go through some examples. These examples are sourced and modified from the 8 Keys to Recovery From an Eating Disorder workbook (Costin & Schubert, 2011).

**Example 1:** Your friend says “I don’t want to go for ice cream anymore. I’m trying to get fit for #hotgirlsummer.”

*Healthy Self Response: (out loud)*

“Well, I’m going for #fedgirlsummer, where I can eat whatever, I want and not miss out on fun experiences!”

*Healthy Self Response: (to yourself)*

“This is not someone who will be helpful with me around food. I think I will ask someone else to go with me from now on.”

**Example 2:** A fitness trainer says “You should weigh yourself daily to keep fit.”

*Healthy Self Response: (out loud)*

“I tried that and I didn’t find that useful for me, or healthy. I want to engage in movement, but my goal isn’t related to numbers. It’s related to how I feel.”

*Healthy Self Response: (to yourself)*

“Others may be able to do this and it doesn’t hurt them, but I know for me it is not a good idea. He doesn’t know me, or about my ED history, he says that to everyone so he isn’t telling me that for any particular reason. If he says it again, I will ask him to stop suggesting it, or maybe I will just try a different trainer.”

## Dealing with Comments from Others: Practice Examples

**Example 1.** “We should go on a diet together.”

*Healthy Self Response: (out loud)*

---

---

*Healthy Self Response: (to myself)*

---

---

**Example 2.** “You look so much healthier now. You look better with a little meat on your bones.”

*Healthy Self Response: (out loud)*

---

---

*Healthy Self Response: (to myself)*

---

---

**Example 3.** “They say sugar is what’s making everyone fat. You should not eat any food with sugar in it.”

*Healthy Self Response: (out loud)*

---

---

*Healthy Self Response: (to myself)*

---

---

**Example 4.** “You don’t look like you have an eating disorder. You look great.”

*Healthy Self Response: (out loud)*

---

---

*Healthy Self Response: (to myself)*

---

---

**Example 5.** Now it’s your turn! Write a comment that someone has said to you in the past.

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

How did you originally respond to this situation?

---

---

If you could be in this situation again, how would you respond differently?

---

---

Healthy Self Response: (out loud)

---

---

Healthy Self Response: (to myself)

---

---

## **JOURNAL PROMPTS FOR SOCIAL EATING**

→ *Most people have no idea what recovery is like. Explain it to a curious friend in 5 sentences or less.*

- *What would it look like to have a stress-free social eating experience? What aspects of social eating would be enhanced?*
- *Imagine you had a magic wand that you waved and \*poof\* you were recovered. What would you order at your favourite restaurant? Describe your perfect drink, appetizer, meal, and dessert. Do not consider the nutritional content of any of the foods.*
- *Start a gratitude list- make a list of everything you might be grateful in your life and look back on it when you are going through a challenging time.*

## FURTHER LEARNING

### Podcasts

[Food Psych with Christy Harrison](#) A podcast about intuitive eating, body image, and diet culture to help challenge restrictive dieting behaviors and learn some useful body-confidence strategies along the way.

[The Body Image Podcast with Corrine Dobbas, MS, RD](#) The Body Image Podcast is a podcast about body image and the many layers that go into making peace with our bodies. Like intuitive eating, self-compassion, mental health, self-care, body and size acceptance, embodiment, rejecting diet culture, and more.

[The Recovery Warrior Show](#) A podcast dedicated to boosting the emotional intelligence and resilience of people struggling with depression, anxiety and eating disorders.

### Videos

Ted Talk: [Ending the pursuit of perfection](#)

### Reading

[Holiday Vacation and Recovery: Plan and Know Your Limits](#)

- This blog post is specifically centered around the Holiday season but there are a lot of very helpful tips that can be applied to triggering situations that may happen any time of the year

[Coping with Triggers in Eating Disorder Recovery](#)

### Inspiration

[NEDA Inspiration for Eating Disorder Recovery](#): A Pinterest board full of inspiring images and quotes to help motivate and inspire you throughout your recovery journey

## References

Costin, C. & Schubert Grabb, G. (2011). 8 Keys To Recovery From an Eating Disorder: Effective Strategies From Therapeutic Practice And Personal Experience. *WW Norton*.

Cuncic, A (2019). Social Anxiety and the Fear of Eating in Front of Others.  
<https://www.verywellmind.com/why-am-i-afraid-to-eat-in-front-of-people-3024319>

DBT Tools (2021). Cope Ahead Skill. <https://dbt.tools/index.php>