

The Western CT Coalition Drug Free Schools Committee consists of social workers, counselors and school-based health staff in the 43 towns of western CT. The committee assesses school-based needs related to substance use and mental health and provides education and awareness through publications and programs for students, families, and school staff. To learn more, visit [our website](#).



THE EDUCATOR

A publication of the Drug Free Schools Committee

Eating Disorders

Fall 2023

Throughout life, we may experience moments of concern about our body shape and weight. When these thoughts cause dangerous dieting, purging after eating, or excessive overeating, it may be due to an eating disorder. **Eating disorders** negatively impact our health, our emotions, and our ability to function in important areas of life. The good news is that they are very treatable, and help is available (Mayo Clinic, 2023).

Understanding Different Types of Eating Disorders

(CAMHS, 2020)

ANOREXIA NERVOSA	BULIMIA NERVOSA	BINGE EATING
Is when someone tries to keep their weight as low as possible by not eating enough food, exercising too much, or both.	Where someone is caught in an unhealthy eating cycle of binge eating then purging to compensate for their overeating, for instance by vomiting or taking laxatives.	Where someone eats excessively in a short period of time in an out-of-control way and feels compelled to do so on a regular basis.

What the Data is Telling Us

- Eating disorders affect at least 9% of the population worldwide.
 - Eating disorders are among the deadliest mental illnesses, second only to opioid overdose.
 - 10,200 deaths each year are the direct result of an eating disorder—that’s one death every 52 minutes.
 - About 26% of people with eating disorders attempt suicide.
- (ANAD, 2023)
- Region 5 2022 school survey data from one school district showed significantly higher rates of depression and eating disorders in students who identified as Bisexual; Mostly/Only Gay/Lesbian when compared to Only Straight/Heterosexual classmates.
 - In another Region 5 school survey, 34% of 10th graders and 20% of 9th graders reported engaging in bulimic or anorexic behavior in 2023.

Signs and Symptoms: (Mayo Clinic, 2023)

Emotional:

- Preoccupation with weight, food, calories, carbohydrates, fat grams, and dieting.
- Refusal to eat certain foods, progressing to restrictions against whole categories of food.
- Appears uncomfortable eating around others.
- Skipping meals or taking small portions of food at regular meals.
- Frequent dieting.
- Extreme concern with body size and shape.
- Frequent checking in the mirror for perceived flaws in appearance.

Physical:

- Stomach cramps, other non-specific gastrointestinal complaints (constipation, acid reflux, etc.).
- Abnormal laboratory findings (anemia, low thyroid and hormone levels, low potassium, low white and red blood cell counts).
- Dizziness, especially upon standing.
- Cuts and calluses across the top of finger joints (a result of inducing vomiting).
- Dental problems, such as enamel erosion, cavities, and tooth sensitivity.
- Swelling around area of salivary glands.

Positive Body Image

- It is important to remember that every body is different. We all have different genetic and cultural traits. Even if everyone started eating the same things and did the same amount of exercise for a whole year, we would not all look the same at the end of the year. This is because each person's genetic inheritance influences their bone structure, body size, shape, and weight differently.
- Avoid comparing your body to your friends and people you see in the media, remember that we are all naturally different.



Tips:

- Treat your body well by eating good foods, getting rest, and exercising.
- Resist the pressure to judge yourself and others based on weight, shape, or size.
(#bodyacceptanceweek, NEDA)

Tips for Parents and Caregivers:

([Psychology Today](#))

- Before beginning the conversation, it can be helpful to research the condition thoroughly, as well as read accounts from those in recovery. This way parents can better **understand and empathize with their child's experience**.
- Approach the topic by gently expressing that you are concerned for them. Be direct and specific about what you have observed. Then ask questions about their perception and experience, and listen attentively. Be open to **exploring any topic that emerges**, from being bullied at school to feeling intense anxiety.
- Addressing an eating disorder and seeking treatment will likely require many conversations. In these talks, parents should be specific about the next step, such as finding a therapist or being evaluated by an eating disorder specialist.



NEDA, the National Eating Disorders Association provides a free online **Eating Disorders Screening Tool**. This short screening, appropriate for ages 13 and up, can help determine if it's time to seek professional help.

They provide other helpful resources including:

- A Database to Help You Find Treatment
- Free & Low Cost Support

Visit their website [here](#)



The New Milford Youth Agency Podcast series recently devoted an episode to this topic, featuring Lauren Brown, Registered Dietician and Nutritionist.

Use this link to listen:

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/705081/8796133>