

# Fathers Helping Daughters with Eating Disorders

Fathers often struggle with understanding their daughter's eating disorder and how they can be helpful throughout her efforts to recover. Fathers need to accept how important they are in the lives of their daughters and not assume that they are less important than mothers. This includes interactions at home or showing up for appointments. Adolescence may be when girls need their dads the most. Girls need to witness and understand through their fathers, that women can be valued for more than their physical beauty. Daughters need to be re-assured that their growing 'voices' are acceptable, and that the father-daughter relationship will continue to be important even through the challenges of adolescence. It is important to remember that these issues are related to normal development, but are often heightened in girls with eating disorders.

## Tips for Dads

1. Evaluate your own messages to your daughter about weight, dieting, beauty and body image. Explore what you value most in women and how these values may or may not be communicated to your daughter. How you relate and speak to/about your daughters' mother demonstrates these values.
2. Let her know **out loud** that you love her no matter what she weighs.
3. Be a good role model around food and exercise. Live a non-dieting life; don't obsess about exercise.
4. Talk to her about the very real pressures she faces everyday to live up to a thin ideal, lose weight or to be attractive to please others.
5. Help her to discover or even rediscover what she values most in life that has nothing to do with food, shape or weight.
6. Appreciate that your role is to support your daughter in her efforts to address the problems she faces. For men, resisting the urge to 'fix' the problem can be a real challenge. Instead, focus on listening to your daughter, creating a supportive home environment, and living your own life in ways that support her recovery.
7. Show respect for her growing maturity by showing her that she can have opinions that differ from yours without it 'costing' her your affection, respect or company. This will teach her that she doesn't have to give herself up in order to please you and will foster her self-esteem.
8. Give your daughter(s) the same opportunities and encouragement you give your sons.
9. If you are a family that has separated or divorced, continue to be a presence in your daughters' life.
10. Communicate to your daughter that you are trying to appreciate the complexity of the problem she is facing, and that you know there is more to her recovery than just eating.

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