

Supporting individuals with eating disorders

About my eating disorder

My eating disorder is a serious medical condition that impacts both my mind and body:

- It fills me with anxiety, shame, negative thoughts and a constant internal struggle that feels impossible to escape
- It makes it difficult to have a healthy relationship with food, but it's not just about food—it's a deeper battle

I'm here because I need your support to fight back against this disorder; it's not something I can overcome on my own.

Remember: this is not my fault, and we are in this together. Eating disorders are illnesses, not choices.

What to do

It would be helpful if you:

- Work with my team and whānau to follow my treatment plan
- Follow the clear routines and expectations set by the treating team to help reduce my anxiety
- Report any eating disorder behaviors to the treating team so the behaviours don't gain power over me (such as hiding food, playing with food or attempting to exercise)
- Offer post-meal activities like playing cards, arts and crafts or board games, to help distract me
- Familiarise yourself with my preferences about what support works best for me
- Avoid comparing me to others e.g., "It's not that bad". Eating disorders are competitive
- Remember that eating disorders do not have a 'look' and they can present in many different ways



Communication and encouragement

It would be helpful if you:

- Are friendly, supportive, and calm
- Listen without judgement
- Accept that while some of my fears may seem irrational, they feel very real to me
- Understand that I want to recover, even if my actions or behaviours sometimes suggest otherwise
- Encourage celebration of my progress toward recovery, such as confronting a challenge or showing a desire to recover that I didn't show before

What to say

Remember that recovery is a journey, and I need your encouragement, not more advice.

Here are some things you could say:

- This discomfort is temporary; the anxiety will pass
- Talk to me, I'm here to listen
- I see how hard you're trying - keep going. Trust the process
- I'm here with you. How can I best support you right now?
- There is life outside of your eating disorder and you won't feel this way forever

Avoid discussing food, weight, or body image; instead, talk about:

- My favorite hobbies so I can share what I enjoy
- Encouraging me to think and dream about my future
- Activities that help me relax and unwind
- Creative outlets or pastimes that bring me joy
- Conversations about what I love to do in my free time
- Exploring new hobbies or interests that I might enjoy

To hear more about eating disorders, watch this video clip:



To learn more, check out this fully funded online course:



 **WHĀRAURAU**

This resource was written by Adam Whiskin & Genevieve Mora, advocates with lived experience. We acknowledge each lived experience is unique, valid and important. Use and adapt this resource to make it your own.

Mahi toi | Art by Jessica Hinerangi (Māori Mermaid)