

Eating Disorder Toolbox - For a Partner

Loving someone without becoming their therapist

A partner can be an important source of steadiness, but you cannot recover on somebody else's behalf. This toolbox offers language, boundaries and practical support that can help you stay connected without letting the eating disorder take over the whole relationship.

USE THIS TOOLBOX WHEN...	REMEMBER
Meals feel difficult • thoughts are louder • home feels tense • you need words for what is happening	Small, repeated acts of safety matter. Recovery and support can be imperfect and still be meaningful.

Ask, don't assume

- “Would company help, or would quiet help?”
- “Do you want listening, distraction or practical help?”
- “What does support after meals look like today?”

Keep connection bigger than food

- Make time for ordinary conversation.
- Plan low-pressure activities that are not centred on eating or appearance.
- Notice qualities, humour, values and interests rather than body changes.

Boundaries are support too

- You can refuse to participate in repeated reassurance or checking rituals.
- You can say when you need rest or outside support.
- You are a partner, not a substitute for medical or specialist care.

When intimacy/body image is difficult

- Ask permission before body-focused compliments or touch.
- Do not personalise withdrawal automatically.
- Talk about comfort, consent and emotional safety away from crisis moments.

Escalate concerns

- If there is fainting, chest pain, severe dehydration, confusion, rapid deterioration, self-harm/suicide risk or another immediate danger, seek urgent help.
- If you are unsure how serious something is, medical advice is appropriate.

Important: Eating disorders can become medically serious at any body size. Seek professional assessment if you are worried. In an immediate medical emergency or if someone is at immediate risk of harm, use emergency services.

Created for the Space to Breathe Therapy Support Hub.