

Eating Disorder Toolbox - For the Family

A shared plan for calmer, more consistent support

Eating disorders can affect the whole household. Different relatives may respond with fear, anger, over-protection, silence or confusion. A family plan can reduce mixed messages and help everyone remember that the person is more than the illness.

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.

Family agreement

- We do not comment on anyone's weight, shape, portions or dieting.
- We do not blame one another for the eating disorder.
- We follow agreed professional guidance rather than inventing new rules in a crisis.
- We make room for normal family life as well as recovery.

Consistent responses

- Choose a few phrases everyone can use.
- Agree who leads during difficult meals or appointments.
- Avoid several people questioning the person at once.
- Keep adult disagreements away from the distressed person where possible.

Siblings and children

- Give age-appropriate explanations without frightening detail.
- Make sure siblings still receive attention and one-to-one time.
- Let them know they did not cause the illness and are not responsible for fixing it.

Family check-in

- What has been difficult this week?
- What helped?
- What do we need from the clinical team?
- What can we simplify at home?
- Who in the family needs a break or extra support?

Crisis plan

- Write down clinical contacts and out-of-hours options.
- Know the warning signs that mean urgent medical assessment is needed.
- Keep communication factual and calm during emergencies.
- After a crisis, debrief gently rather than assigning blame.

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.