

Counselling for Children and Young People with Eating Disorders

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"The [apparent increase in eating disorders among children and young people](#) is deeply concerning," says Karen Cromarty, BACP's Lead Advisor for Children and Young People, speaking during Eating Disorders Awareness Week.

Karen continues, "Increasing social and academic demands can result in unrealistic expectations being placed on children and young people that can have a dramatic effect on their mental wellbeing. Counselling has been shown to be an effective early intervention for children and young people and it is important that this support is readily accessible to those in need of it."

What impact can an eating disorder have on a child or young person and their family? What feelings lie behind these damaging behaviours and how can counselling help?

To answer these questions we consulted Heather Beattie, a BACP member who specialises in treating young people with eating disorders.

Heather says, "Having worked as a specialist eating disorders psychotherapist for 25 years, I have provided therapy for children and young people with early onset anorexia and bulimia. Children, adolescents and young people are extremely vulnerable to eating disorders and I regularly witness the great trauma and distress this can trigger not only for the child or the young person, but also for their family.

"Often a child with an eating disorder wants to be significantly thinner. But this desire to 'disappear' often hides feelings of utter worthlessness, anxiety, severe depression and even suicidal thoughts. However, all this gets mixed up and focused in their battle with food.

"It is in these times of great distress where counselling with the eating disordered child can be very helpful. It is necessary to work with the deep anxiety and pain as well as trying to improve their behaviours. There is so much more at the core of an eating disorder than only food and weight behaviours. Unless there is the opportunity to work with the underlying issues then recovery is likely to be incomplete.

"Work with the family is also essential. An eating disorder has the potential to impact the whole family unit and to trigger an emotional struggle with the nutritional aspects of eating and weight gain. The parents need to be empowered to help their child manage their eating disorder with renewed understanding and insight. Parents are a key part to the recovery process and need a lot of support.

"Skilled and experienced eating disorders counselling, whether individual or family psychotherapy, is profoundly significant to the process of recovery and will enable a child to make the depth of recovery that is vitally important."

BACP's public website itsgoodtotalk.org.uk contains a wealth of information for anyone considering therapy including information sheets, videos, links to recent research, and a 'find a therapist' directory which helps you to find a private therapist in your local area.

Find out more about Eating Disorders Awareness Week, including links to resources and advice, on the [Beat](#) website.

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