

10 Helpful Things to Say to Someone With an Eating Disorder

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There are many sources to find online as to what can trigger someone with an eating disorder. However, you're likely left with one important question on your mind:

So what should we say to someone recovering from an eating disorder?

It's indeed quite difficult to find the right words sometimes. You don't want to trigger someone, but at the same time you want to let them know that you care and you really want to say something, but what do you say?

The answer is in some ways quite simple; reassurance and love are the two dominating factors when it comes to helping anyone with mental health issues. The constant "voice" of the eating disorder, or the disordered thoughts, need to be counteracted and rationalised. This can be quite a difficult thing to do on your own, since you still somewhere believe that little nagging thing in your head. And then someone comes along and tells you how healthy and full of life you look and for some reason it makes the nagging a little stronger. But what is it that you can say that will help?

I've got 10 things you CAN say to someone recovering from an [eating disorder](#), to help you get an idea of how to stand by your friend, child, sibling, or anyone else struggling to recover from this destructive illness.

1. "I know it's difficult, but I'm proud of you."

This is so helpful to hear. Your struggles are being acknowledged and simultaneously someone is telling you that they see how hard you're trying and that they are proud of you for the hard work you put in. Because although hanging on the sofa with a tub of ice cream seems like the perfect night in for you, for someone recovering even a small bite can be a struggle. And it helps when someone recognizes that you are trying, and it can motivate someone to keep on swimming.

2. "You're worth more than your eating disorder."

Something that's often forgotten and overlooked, is that the person suffering and the eating disorder are two separate things. Someone *has* an eating disorder, no one *is* an eating disorder. The terms "anorexic" and "bulimic" were created and have been used wrongly. Someone has [anorexia](#), they're not an anorexic. Hearing from someone that you're worth more than the hell you're going through gives that little sparkle of hope that can help someone through a hard time.

3. "It's okay to take a rest day."

Resting seems quite an obvious thing, doesn't it? But for someone in recovery, they're likely still in the mindset of having to do everything and more. And sometimes, they just need someone to tell them that it's okay to sit down and relax, that nothing will happen to them/their body if they take a day off in bed. Recovering is extremely tiring, it takes the life out of you. And it *is* okay to take a day off from school/college/work to take care of your body and mind. It's just that most of

us forget that sometimes, and being told that it's okay to take a rest can make the difference between feeling absolutely shattered or guilty, and feeling ready to take on another challenging day.

4. "I believe in you."

Now this is quite an important one. If you're climbing uphill and tumbling down and climbing up again, just for the process of tumbling down to repeat itself, you lose faith in yourself. You feel like you can't do it anymore. You feel like you can't do anything. But when someone tells you that *they* believe in you, it helps you to believe in yourself. Sometimes you need a bit of strength from others to regain your own.

5. "Let's do together!"

Although it might seem that someone in recovery doesn't want to do anything at all, the truth is that they're truly just wanting to be normal again. Bake a cake together, invite them 'round for tea. If you *do* bake a cake and you want a slice, offer them some as well. And say this beforehand. Yes, it's terrifying. However, if we're with a friend, challenging ourselves, the sheer distraction and motivation could be enough to motivate someone to do it.

Because company, cake and tea sounds like a delicious and amazing combination.

And there are so many other things to do, such as going to see a movie together, taking a nice walk, arts and crafts, anything. Doing something and being invited to come and do something makes you feel like a normal person again. Don't make a big thing out of it. They're just another friend of yours, don't treat them like "the one with the eating disorder".

6. "I'm here for you and I'm not going to leave."

We all need someone there sometimes. Everyone needs to talk to someone sometimes. And yes, we know it's getting a bit repetitive and boring. But the same fears, the same struggles come up again and again. And knowing that someone is there for us to listen, to find distraction or just to talk to about random things; it all means more than you could ever imagine.

As I've said before, and I won't stop saying it; recovery is difficult, it's tiring and stressful. You put your heart and soul in trying to eat again and it takes the life out of you. Don't mistake not showering, not brushing teeth or hair, or any other self care for laziness. They're exhausted and need a friend, not a critic. It'll get better, it just takes time. Don't judge what you haven't experienced.

There's the everlasting fear that people find the constant "whining" about food/body image will scare them off. Don't let it scare you off, stick with your friend. It's going to be worth it when the day comes that they walk up to you to ask if you fancy one of their home made cupcakes and you both delve into one.

7. "I might not understand, but if you need someone to talk to, I will help as much as I can."

We don't need you to understand. And you don't understand an eating disorder just because you dieted for a month to lose weight.

Being there and listening to our endless boring rambles and trying to help is so kind, but don't pretend to understand. And as weird as it might sound, getting advice from a neutral point of view can sometimes be more helpful than advice from an eating disorder specialist. Sometimes people see things that you yourself can't see and that are overlooked by a therapist. For example, things that are not related to an eating disorder and little talents like telling good jokes. Tell them that they're good at those little things. Talk to them. Give advice that has been helpful to you. It might not seem applicable to the situation in your eyes, but it can always be helpful.

8. "How are you?"

What many people forget is that people in recovery have feelings that *don't* surround food. Don't ask how eating is going all the time. Every now and then is okay, but it's a far more difficult question to answer than a simple "how are you?". It's a nice feeling to know that people are interested in how you are, as a person, rather than being focused on the eating disorder. Yes, they have an eating disorder and are in recovery. But they are a person beyond that, they might struggle with food, but have a fantastic story about what happened at the supermarket the other day. Talk about that, laugh and exchange stories. Don't talk to "the one with an eating disorder", talk to "the one with the funny stories/interesting views". Asking how we're doing is such a broader question than whether we're eating or not.

9. "I like your hair/bag/shoes/etc."

Everyone likes to get a compliment every now and then, but avoid saying "you look healthy/good" because this could be heard as "you look bigger" in the ears of someone in the early stages of recovery. However, giving a compliment about hair, shoes or maybe even their make-up can boost confidence and make the other feel better about themselves.

Compliments are difficult to receive due to this devil on your shoulder whispering in your ear that everyone is lying. It can be a challenge to convince someone in recovery that they look good, so the smaller the compliment the more likely it is to be accepted. Avoid compliments about someone's body, focus on other things.

10. "I love you / I care about you."

Nothing could top the words *love* and *care*. Someone in recovery might feel unstable and alone. Let them know that they're not, let them know that they're loved and cared about. Don't let anyone forget. Be an ally in this extraordinary fight against a dark corner of someone's mind. Everyone deserves a full recovery.

All in all, [recovery](#) is about finding oneself again. And with that, you need to find your way around life again. With the support of family and friends, chances of a full recovery are so much bigger than without that essential support. Eating disorders root deep inside someone. It will take time, tears and more time to recover. Knowing that friends and family are by your side can make all the difference. Reassure and find distractions together. Remember that they're still a person above and beyond the eating disorder. A fantastic person, that is.

Contributed by Hannah.

If you're in recovery or supporting someone with an eating disorder, we have [information about eating disorders and treatment](#), and a range of telephone, email and online [support services](#).

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