



Self-care when caring for someone with an eating disorder

Seeking help for eating disorders can often be a long and winding road. In efforts to find the “right” treatment, feelings of frustration and helplessness are common both for the person who is unwell and the person who is caring for them. Carers often struggle with a range of emotions including anger, distress, guilt, fear, confusion and helplessness. They may also feel that their loved one’s eating disorder has taken over their life, and that they no longer have time for themselves. While these feelings are completely normal, carers need to remember to take time out for themselves to restore energy. Moreover, carers often neglect to find support for themselves, which would assist them in managing their own emotions. It is important to balance the health of the person you are caring for with your own wellness and health. Looking after yourself will also make you better able to support a loved one.

What is self-care?

Self-care is the ability to take care of one’s basic needs. Seeking help as a carer is a vitally important step to take when we begin to feel swamped in the emotions that are a normal part of the recovery process. This includes emotional needs such as managing anxiety, anger and sadness. It involves attending to your own needs even when other people’s actions or demands make this difficult to do. Caring for someone with an eating disorder can interfere with our ability to take care of ourselves.

What can I do to take care of myself?

It is important to take time out from thinking about your loved one’s illness and struggles and not to feel guilty for doing so. Some helpful self-care strategies can be found below::

- Prioritise and schedule “time-outs/ small breaks” to give yourself time for relaxation and to help you stay calm.
- Engage in activities that you enjoy and that may distract you from the eating disorder, for example seeing a friend, reading a book, watching a movie, listening to music, singing, going for a walk/run, gardening, or exercising.
- Pamper yourself.
- Ensure that you are eating nutritious meals.
- Cuddle with a pet or take your dog for a walk.
- Try to get out of the house and away from the eating disorder.
- Sit and enjoy the sunshine with a herbal tea or a good book.
- Practice breathing exercises or relaxation techniques. This may help if you are having trouble sleeping.
- Take a nap or rest to recharge.
- See a therapist for your own mental health and to develop strategies on how to deal with your loved one and cope with your own emotions.
- Talk to someone you trust about what you are going through. Seek the

support of friends and family when you need to vent your feelings.

- Ask other family members to step in and spend time with your loved one, outside of meal times. This will provide you with some guilt-free time out and your loved one with a fresh face.

Focus on the positives

While caring for someone with an eating disorder can be extremely difficult and stressful, it’s important for you and your loved one that you stay positive. You can do this through emphasising the parts about your loved one that you appreciate, and engaging in activities that they enjoy and are good at.

A great and simple way to do this can be to start a Daily Gratitude Journal. This is a process of simply adding a little time into your routine either morning or night, to write down the things in your life that you are grateful for. It is amazing to see that on Day 1 it can be hard to think of many, but as the days progress we get better at thinking of the positives and the list grows. This can be a nice activity to do with a loved one, as you can keep each other accountable for doing it and encourage each other to think of new things that you are grateful for. Perhaps make a commitment for 10 days and see for yourself!

Educate yourself

Equipping yourself with education and information about eating disorders can empower you to better understand and care for your loved one. There is a

great deal of information and resources available. See the EDV website for factsheets, reading lists and up-to-date literature that may be of interest to you.

Acceptance

Feeling lost in the recovery process is a common experience for many people. This feeling of groundlessness or feeling of lacking control is warranted, for even at the best of times we never know what is around the corner. We are very good at developing lifestyles that prevent us from feeling a lack of control. Instead of avoiding this, if we are able to 'lean into this feeling' we can develop our ability to accept our current circumstances. This then puts us in the best position to move forward with what we do know, rather than focussing on what we don't.

Who can support me?

Friends and family can provide moral and emotional support, as well as practical assistance. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Professional assistance from a counsellor or psychologist can help you manage your feelings, develop helpful methods of coping, and build resilience.

Carers groups can provide an extra network of support by connecting you with individuals with similar experiences to your own.

How EDV can help

EDV Hub - Call 1300 550 236, email edv@eatingdisorders.org.au or drop in to our offices in Abbotsford.

EDV Psychology - EDV offers private psychology sessions for individuals with an eating disorder and friends and family who are supporting a loved one with an eating disorder. Call the Hub to make an

appointment or to learn more.

Family and Friends Support Groups provide an opportunity for information sharing, understanding, peer support, and to develop new helpful strategies. Contact the EDV Hub (1300 550 236) to find out when the next groups are coming up.

F.E.A.S.T – An online forum for carers of someone living with an eating disorder to share their stories and help each other.: www.feast-ed.org

Where else can I get help?

Recommended reading

A recommended reading list for carers of individuals with an Eating Disorder can be found on EDV's website: www.eatingdisorders.org.au/for-family-and-friends/

Helpful services

Eating Disorders Families Australia www.edfa.org.au

Tandem – 1800 314 325, www.tandemcarers.org.au

Carers Victoria- 1800 242 636, www.carersvictoria.org.au

Parentline- 1300 30 1300, www.parentline.com.au

Around the Dinner Table- www.aroundthedinnertable.org

SANE Australia 1800 18 SANE www.sane.org

