

School Setting: Talking to the Student



In the school setting, if there are concerns that a student is engaging in disordered eating behaviours, a member of the welfare/pastoral care team may be best placed to raise concerns with the student and encourage them to take the next steps towards getting help.

There is no right or wrong way to talk to someone with an eating disorder. Different approaches will work for different people. It's okay if you don't have all the answers. The important thing is to let the student know that you care and that you are willing to listen and be there for them.

General Tips

- Be prepared - consider what you are going to say, how they may react and how you can respond
- Choose the right time and place – somewhere quiet and private where you are unlikely to be overheard or distracted by other students and staff
- Be as open and non-judgmental as you can
- Talk to them as a whole person – communicate that you care for their wellbeing and want to be there for them

Consider the Language you Use

Issue	Don't Say	Instead Say
Labelling a person by their illness. This can lead to the person feeling alienated or stigmatised.	"I think you are anorexic"	"I am concerned that you are struggling to concentrate, and I was wondering how you were doing?"
Language that places a value judgement on appearance. This increases risk in people who are vulnerable.	"You are way too skinny"	"I am concerned that you seem to be lacking in energy and are struggling to complete work at the same level"
Language that presents an eating disorder as glamorous or a desired outcome.	"I understand wanting to be thin, but this is out of control"	Simple language, without value judgements. "I understand that it can be hard at times to know when and how much to eat or to worry about how we look but I'm worried that what you are doing is affecting you negatively".