



Eating disorders and my sibling

Siblings have unique relationships with each other and when one of your siblings becomes ill with an eating disorder, it can be quite a confusing time. You may experience a range of feelings and thoughts, but remember that you are not alone.

There are ways in which you can help your sibling during this difficult time and this fact sheet aims to help you cope and help you support your sibling.

Common emotions and feelings

You may feel a range of different emotions at different times. Common feelings may include:

Grief & Sadness

- ✔ Feeling you have lost your “old” sibling and your relationship with them
- ✔ Feeling you have lost your former family life
- ✔ Sadness at seeing your sibling and family in such distress
- ✔ Not understanding why this has happened

Anger

- ✔ Feeling like your sibling is taking priority
- ✔ Feeling that your sibling is the cause of pain and hurt in the family - “It’s her fault that Mum’s so stressed at the moment”
- ✔ At the disruption of family routines and home environment

Neglect and Isolation

- ✔ So much time and energy is devoted to the needs of your ill sibling

- ✔ People often talk to you about your sick sibling and not about your everyday life or how you’re coping with it all.

Stress

- ✔ Not wanting to talk about feelings with your parents in case of further burden.

Top 10 tips for siblings of someone with an eating disorder

1. Accept that your sibling’s illness is not your fault.
2. Educate yourself – learn about the type of eating disorder your sibling has, particularly the behavioural changes that they might experience. It is better to know the facts of the illness and have a good understanding of what the coming weeks and months may be like.
3. Know that your sibling is very distressed and confused and even though they might not say or show it, they have not stopped caring about you.
4. Realise that it is the eating disorder that makes your sibling grumpy, moody, angry and hurtful. The eating disorder can override rational behaviour and change your sibling’s behaviour.
5. Talk to your friends, parents, and relatives about your feelings and your fears. Attending support groups for relatives of a person with an eating disorder and/ or calling the EDV Helpline may also be useful.
6. Try to continue normal sibling activities that you shared before your sibling became ill.
7. Respect that it may be difficult for your sibling to talk about what they’re going through, but let them know that there is no time limit on your support and you’d be happy to listen and be there when they feel ready.
8. Enjoy time away from the home environment, to recharge and do “normal” activities. It is also important to try and not to let your sibling’s illness dominate your thoughts for a few hours. As hard as this is, reassure yourself that your sibling will be OK while you’re spending some time to yourself and that it’s OK to do this - don’t feel guilty about it!
9. Consider seeking professional help for yourself to talk about what you may be feeling and experiencing. You may like to talk to a school welfare worker, a psychologist or counsellor. By talking to someone you may think about things in a different way and be empowered with skills to better deal with situations. Often by talking to someone your feelings and emotions can be validated as normal and OK.

10. As eating disorders can affect all members of the family in different ways it's important to talk about what's going on - whether you choose to talk about it as a family or look at getting some outside help.

Where do I go for more information and support?

Eating Disorders Victoria (EDV) has a range of services including the Hub that can offer you support, information and referrals (ph.1300 550 236 or email edv@eatingdisorders.org.au). We also run support groups and have listings of other support groups across Melbourne and Victoria on our website at: www.eatingdisorders.org.au.

