



*Healing
Together*

Supporting a Loved One with an Eating Disorder



Eating disorder recovery is a journey best traveled together. In educating yourself, you are taking an important step in showing your support.

-Dr. Stu Koman,

Founder and CEO, Walden Behavioral Care

Supporting Your Loved One

We understand that supporting someone with an eating disorder can be challenging. You are probably feeling a range of emotions, such as worried, frustrated, overwhelmed, and helpless, just to name a few. Know that you are not alone in these feelings; eating disorders can take a serious toll on even the strongest of relationships.

As a loved one, you are an important member of the team that will support the road to recovery. We worked together with our patients to create this guide that we hope will help you on this journey. Keep in mind that all healing journeys are unique, and what works for one person may not work for another.

The following is honest feedback from our patients who've "been there" describing how they'd like to be supported in their recovery. Together, healing can happen.

how to help

love me unconditionally

“

It sounds obvious but I need to know that your love isn't dependent on my progress and that you'll love me no matter where I am on my recovery journey.

communicate

“

At some point, I will be able to share with and talk to you. Please don't stop asking me how I am doing.

get support

“

I get that loving me can sometimes feel really hard. I hate knowing that I'm hurting the people I care about most. I want my family and friends to know that it's important for them to get professional support, too.

be aware

“

The world has a lot of thoughts around food, weight, diet, and appearance. I would ask those who love me to look inward to see how their own thoughts about these things could negatively impact me and my recovery.

validate my experience



I was upset during a meal and my spouse said, 'I can see that you're having a hard time. I'm sure this is incredibly difficult for you. Is there anything I can do to help?' I know it seems simple but, in that moment I felt heard.

listen



Sometimes I just feel like venting. I don't always need you to give advice or find a solution. Just listening can sometimes be enough.

invite (and re-invite) me



I'm sorry that I sometimes say no when you ask me to hang out, but please keep asking! My eating disorder can make it hard for me to be around others but I miss you and hearing from you is a reminder I am not alone.

leave the treatment to the experts



I know you are trying to help, but please remember that I have a full treatment team at Walden. Please help me to trust and believe in my therapists, doctors and nutritionists as they guide me on my healing journey.

know that I didn't choose this



It hurts me when people assume that I chose to develop an eating disorder. In reality, eating disorders are caused by a combination of things far beyond my control.

helpful phrases

“I’m really proud of all the hard work you’re doing.”

This is really challenging stuff so instead of diminishing my accomplishments, please be my cheerleader and help me stay motivated.

“It’s really great to see you.”

Comments about my appearance, my weight, or what I’m eating can be really difficult for me. Please avoid using phrases like, “You look great!” “You look healthy!” or “You look better!”

“I’m here for you.”

Eating disorders can be super isolating. Knowing that people care, and that they want to help, makes me feel less alone.

ases

“How can I help you?”

I don't want you to feel like you have to walk on eggshells around me. Sometimes it's easiest if you just ask me what I need directly.

“You're a wonderful...
[mom, teacher, friend,
brother, painter, listener.]”

Being reminded that I am more than my eating disorder has been huge for me. I remember that I have depth and that I am worthy.

“This must be really...
[hard, frustrating, scary,
overwhelming] for you.”

Even if you don't understand what I'm going through, you can see that I am struggling. Validating my feelings and noticing the hard work that I'm doing is hugely helpful.



Thank you for helping us to better understand and communicate with our daughter. We are so grateful for all of your support and guidance.

-Mia and Liam,
Parents of Walden Alum

About Us

Walden Behavioral Care's mission is to offer specialized eating disorder support at all levels of care for individuals of all ages and genders. Since 2003, we have helped more than 22,000 individuals and their families progress in their healing journeys using an evidence-based, personalized approach to care. Visit waldeneatingdisorders.com for more information.

Locations



Massachusetts •



Connecticut •



Georgia