

Meal Coaching in Treatment

What is meal coaching?

Meal coaching is a phrase used to describe the various ways in which staff in eating disorder treatment programs help clients to reach their goals during meals. For adolescents and young adults in treatment, meal coaching interventions are also used at home by parents and caregivers. Walden hopes to offer clients and families effective coaching during both live and virtual meals as a primary, “hands-on” treatment intervention.

As part of your orientation to our programs, it’s important for you to know how we will work to help you during meals and encourage you to talk with your Walden treatment team about any initial meal coaching preferences you may have. During program meals, staff and other clients/families will typically engage in casual conversation or will participate in a game or group activity to create a more relaxed setting. Walden’s clinicians, dieticians, and mental health counselors will utilize a range of meal coaching strategies and will help you find what works best for you.

Common meal coaching interventions

- Verbal prompts to continue working through the meal
- Reminders of individual treatment goals
- Encouragement
- DBT skills coaching
- Brief pauses or breaks from the meal as needed
- Addressing observed eating disorder behaviors
- Responding to observed behaviors with suggestions
- Motivational and commitment-focused strategies
- Collaborative problem-solving
- Help to focus on the task
- Group coaching and motivation
- Tips for taking next steps
- Individual and group incentives
- Feedback on meal content and completion status
- Guided mindfulness practice
- Reminders of program time parameters

Meal coaching strategies

It can take time to determine which style of meal coaching is most effective for you, and adaptations may occur based on your level of progress and remaining treatment objectives. Meal coaching can be both gentle and firm, and a more directive style may be needed to combat eating disorder thoughts and urges. Meal coaching can be individual and can also be used to motivate the larger group. In our adolescent and young adult treatment programs, staff will often provide assistance directly to family members and caregivers. In our virtual treatment programs, staff may utilize break-out rooms, private messaging, or open group prompting.

Walden is dedicated to improving our clients' experience and increasing the effectiveness of meal coaching. You will have opportunities to offer verbal and written feedback on your experience at meals. Please follow-up with your Walden treatment providers with any questions or preferences during meals.