

Parent/Carer Disordered Eating Toolkit

A resource for parents & carers to help support their child or young person to understand and manage disordered eating.

STEP (Swindon)

The Base
Lyndhurst Crescent
Swindon
SN3 2RW

Phone: 01793 209180

Email:

stepswindon1@outlook.com



What is disordered eating?

Disordered eating is when an individual has a difficult or unusual relationship with food and eating. This may be as a result of generalised anxiety or because of a medical condition that affects either appetite or the mechanics of eating. Sometimes an individual with disordered eating may have something called an eating disorder but disordered eating can relate to atypical patterns of eating that don't meet the criteria for an eating disorder.

Beat UK says "Eating disorders are mental illnesses. They aren't the same as changing your diet – they can take over someone's life and the lives of those around them. While unhealthy eating behaviour is involved, they aren't all about food. We don't know for sure why people develop eating disorders, but for some people they are about feeling in control or coping with something else. People with eating disorders are often secretive about their eating and may feel guilty and ashamed. All eating disorders are very serious, and everyone who has one deserves care and support. The good news is that recovery is possible".

About this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help parents and carers of young people who may be experiencing disordered eating or have been diagnosed with an eating disorder. It is in no way a replacement for medical support and guidance and parents / carers should always contact a health professional if they have concerns about a young person and their relationship with food.

Eating disorders. Know the first signs?



Lips

Are they obsessive about food?



Flips

Is their behaviour changing?



Hips

Do they have distorted beliefs about their body size?



Kips

Are they often tired or struggling to concentrate?



Nips

Do they disappear to the toilet after meals?



Skips

Have they started exercising excessively?

If you're worried someone you care about is showing any signs of an eating disorder – even if they're not on our list – act quickly and get in touch. We can give you the answers and support you need to help them on the road to recovery as soon as possible.

Don't delay. Visit beateatingdisorders.org.uk/tips

Different types of eating disorders

(The following information is taken from the Beat eating disorder website. Beat are the UK charity for help and support with eating disorders in the UK).

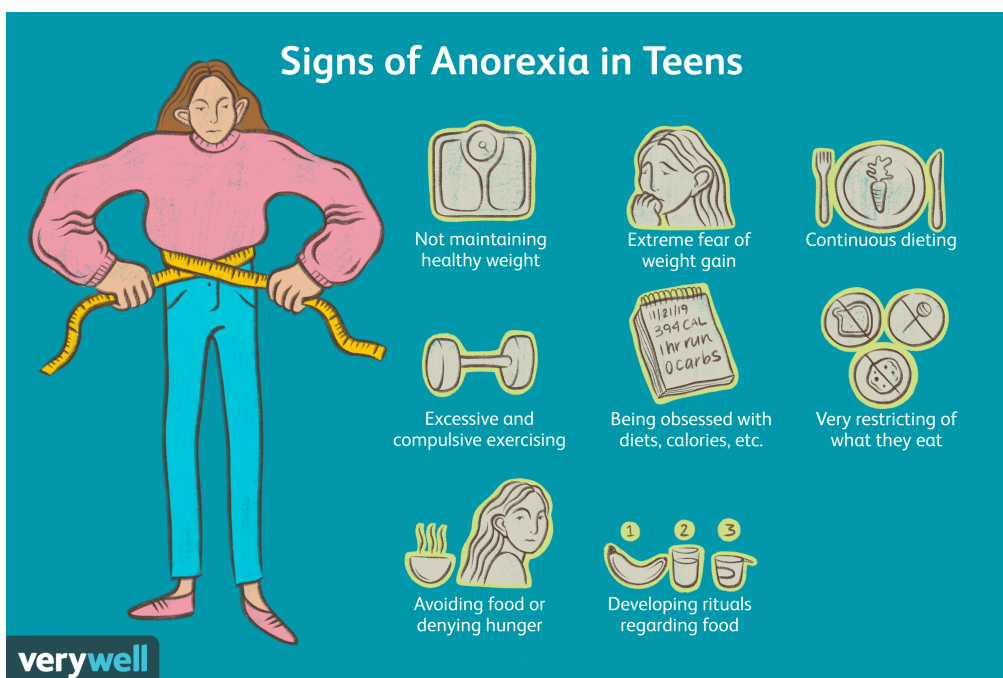
WHAT IS ANOREXIA?

People with anorexia may restrict (eating very little food) or binge (eating lots of food all at once and feeling that this is out of control) and then exercise or make themselves sick to try and get rid of the food they have eaten. Someone with anorexia is likely to be a lower weight than expected for their age and height.

Signs may include:

- Worry about gaining weight.
- Not seeing their body the way you do.
- Being secretive about their eating.
- Doing lots of extra exercise.
- Feeling dizzy or faint.
- Wearing baggy clothes to hide their body shape.
- Feeling cold.
- Isolating themselves from others.

Learn more at beateatingdisorders.org.uk/anorexia



WHAT IS ARFID?

ARFID stands for Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder, where someone avoids certain foods or limits how much they eat. This can be for a number of reasons, for example, they might be sensitive to certain tastes or textures, have had a bad experience with food, or not be interested in eating due to other reasons. These behaviours might impact someone's social, personal, or work life. Unlike other eating disorders, it is not related to worries about weight or shape.

Signs may include:

- Eating a range of foods, but less than is needed to stay healthy.
- Taking a long time over mealtimes.
- Trying to avoid social events where there might be food.
- Feeling anxious at mealtimes, for example, people might chew very carefully or take small sips and bites.
- People may not be getting the nutrients their body needs, and so may develop deficiencies.

Learn more at beateatingdisorders.org.uk/ARFID

ARFID
AVOIDANT RESTRICTIVE FOOD INTAKE DISORDER
POSSIBLE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

IS NOT JUST 'FUSSY' EATING

OFTEN CO-OCCURS WITH ANXIETY AND/OR AUTISM

NOT LINKED WITH BODY IMAGE OR DESIRE TO LOSE WEIGHT

FATIGUE AND/OR EXCESS ENERGY

DISINTEREST IN FOOD

CAN BE LINKED TO SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES

MAY HAVE A SELECT FEW 'SAFE' FOODS

FEARS CHOKING, FEELING FULL OR DIGESTIVE PAIN

EXPRESSES ANXIETY RELATING TO EATING

AVOIDS SITUATIONS WHERE THERE'LL BE FOOD OR EXPECTATION TO EAT

WEIGHT LOSS CAN BE SIGNIFICANT

DESIGNED BY SUNSHINE SUPPORT
Using information from our team and research.
www.sunshine-support.org

The infographic features a central illustration of a young boy with his hands over his mouth, surrounded by various vegetables like carrots, pumpkins, tomatoes, and bell peppers. The background is purple with a pattern of light purple circles.

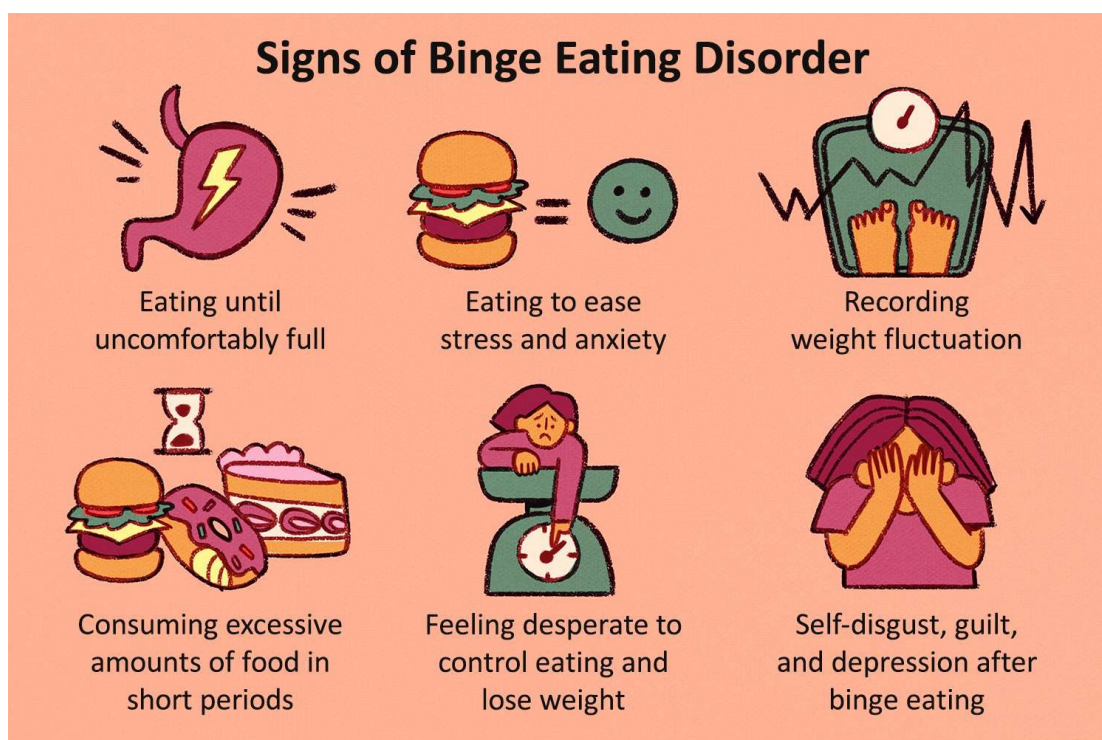
WHAT IS BINGE EATING DISORDER?

People with binge eating disorder may 'binge' on a regular basis. Bingeing isn't just eating a bit more than usual, it involves eating large amounts of food, or what someone feels is a large amount. People may eat faster than they usually do, or until they are uncomfortably full. People feel out of control when bingeing, and often say that it is difficult to stop. Binges might be planned in advance or happen in the moment, and usually happen in secret. Someone might feel "better" while bingeing, but afterwards they'll feel guilty and anxious about what has just happened. Their way to cope with this may be to plan their next binge.

Signs may include:

- Eating in secret.
- Hiding food packaging.
- Gaining weight.
- Spending lots of money on food.
- Self-conscious about eating in front of others.
- Loss of confidence and low self-esteem.
- Isolating themselves from others.

Learn more at beateatingdisorders.org.uk/bed



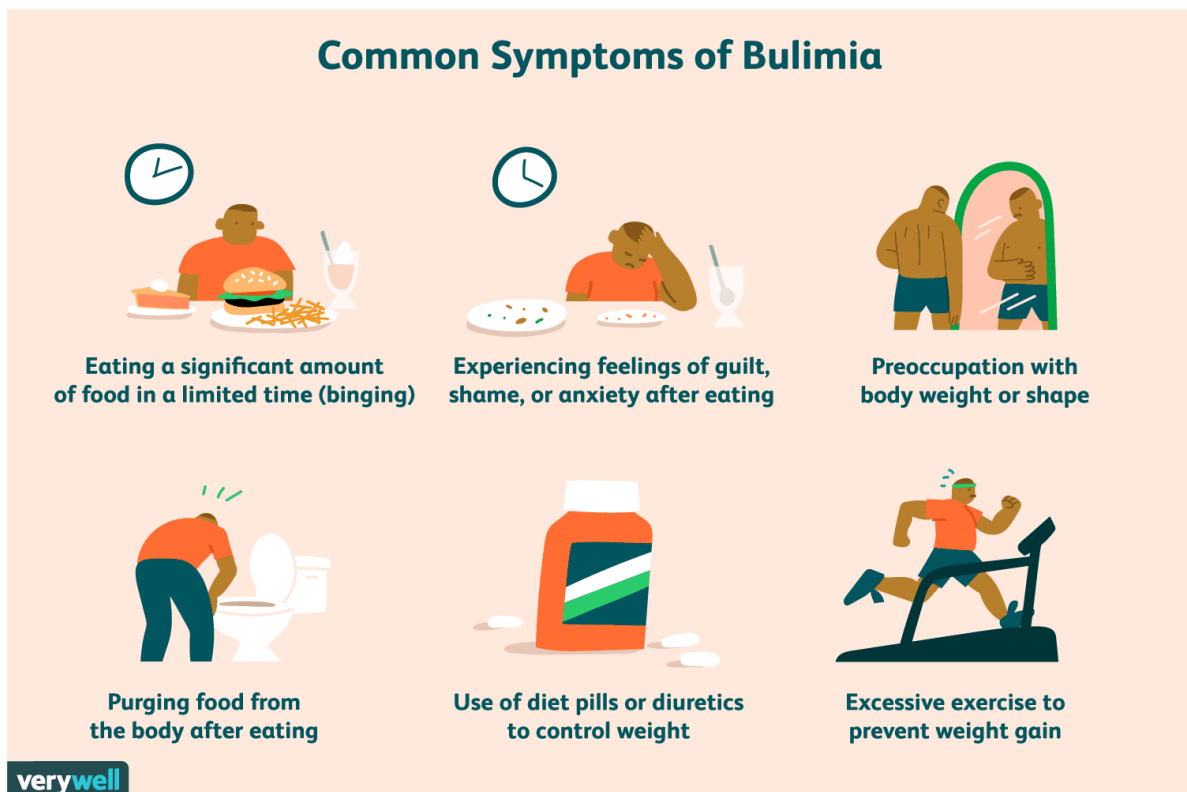
WHAT IS BULIMIA?

People with bulimia may binge (eating lots of food at once and feeling that this out of control) and then purge. This is when they make themselves sick, exercise excessively, or take laxatives because they feel guilty about what they've eaten, worry about their bingeing, or because their stomach is so painful. Often someone with bulimia will stay a "normal" weight, which can make it hard to spot.

Signs may include:

- Secrecy around food.
- Exercising lots more than usual.
- Going to the toilet after meals.
- Isolating themselves from others.
- Poor skin.
- Scars on fingers, knuckles, or backs of hands, and bad breath from being sick.
- Feeling bad about their body image.
- Possible changes in weight

Learn more at [beateatingdisorders.org.uk/bulimia](https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/bulimia)

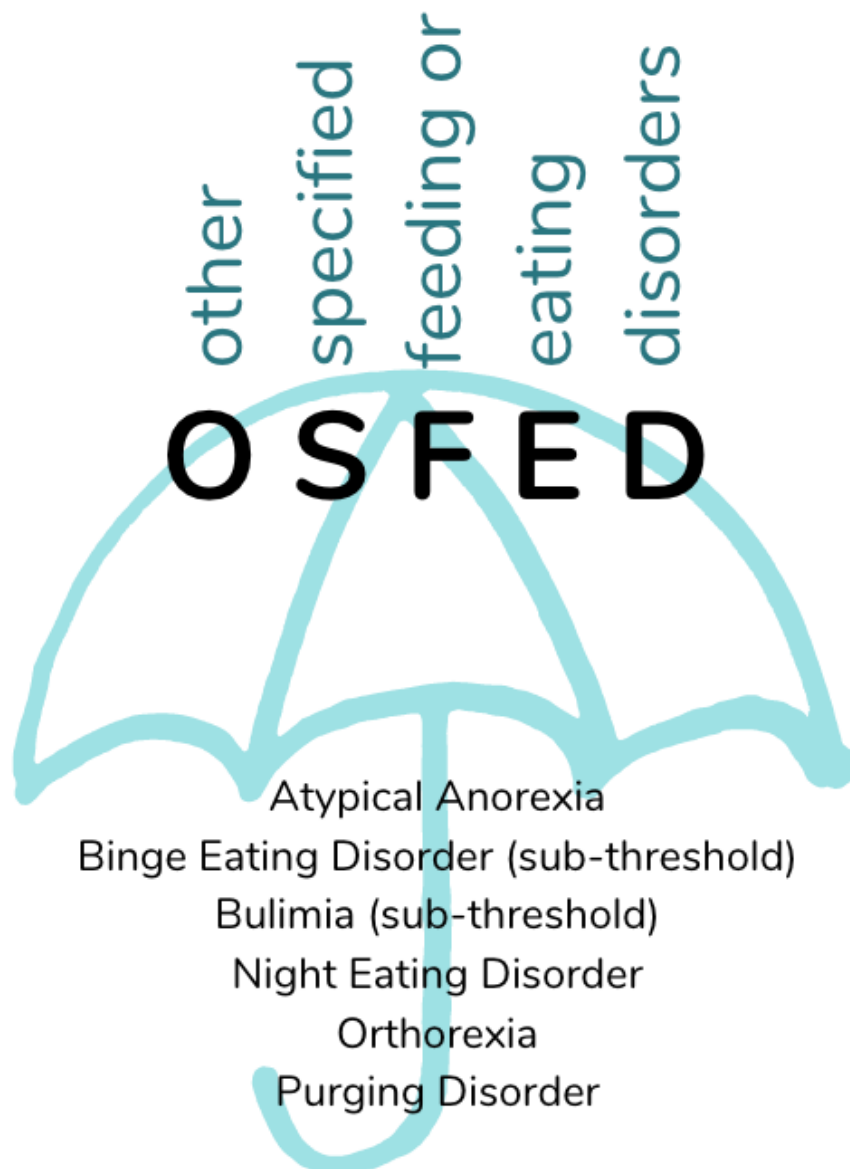


WHAT IS OSFED?

OSFED stands for Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorder. If someone is diagnosed with OSFED it means that their symptoms don't quite fit with what doctors expect of anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder, though it is just as serious. OSFED is an umbrella term, and so people may also be diagnosed with a subtype of the condition.

Signs can include any of those mentioned previously.

Learn more at beateatingdisorders.org.uk/osfed



Getting help

If you suspect your young person is struggling with their relationship with food,

- **Speak to them.** Make sure the conversation takes place where and when they feel safe and comfortable. Avoid making them feel trapped and unable to escape if they begin to feel overwhelmed. Start the conversation from a place of concern; make sure that the young person is aware that you are not judging them or criticising their behaviours.
- **Explain calmly what you have seen and how this makes you worried about them.** Make sure they have time to respond, do not rush a response and give them time to process what you have said.
- **Let them respond and speak freely without interruption.** Do not prompt them or try to speak for them. Once they are done speaking, reassure them that you love them and are there to support and help them. It's ok to admit that you don't know all the answers but tell them you can work together to figure things out and find someone who can help.

Be aware that your young person may not be willing to talk about things at first. They may become defensive or even angry to begin with and this is ok. They may be scared to admit they are struggling or fearful that you (and others) will try to change or stop behaviours that they feel are necessary due to their disordered feelings about food and / or their appearance.

They may feel that they will have to relinquish some control they feel they have over their eating and this can be frightening. Your young person may also deny that there is an issue at all. They may believe there is no problem with the ways they are behaving and thinking, and may feel insulted by what you have said. They may also deny the problem as a way of continuing in the way they have been doing, and use it as a way to stop you from talking about things or 'interfering'. These are normal responses and, although they may be upsetting for you, it is important not to force the issue as this may break down communication between you altogether.

- **Give them time to process the information** you have given them and revisit the subject with them again at a later time (maybe the next day), making sure you choose your time and location as before. Make it clear to your young person that you are available to them and they can speak to you at any time. They may approach you once they have calmed down and had a chance to think about what has been said. It may be useful to give the young person tools to research disordered eating themselves. Caution should be used when using the internet to research this as there is a lot of misinformation and pro-eating disorder content online.
- **Signpost your young person to the Beat eating disorder website** as this is a recognised and trusted source of support and information.

Seeing a GP - the first step to getting help

If your young person agrees they have an issue, or would like to explore this further, then the first thing to do is to make an appointment for them to see their doctor. You should attend this with them (unless they specifically say they do not want you to).

The doctor may carry out a physical exam such as measuring weight and height, taking blood pressure / oxygen levels and listening to their chest.

It is important to tell the doctor all your concerns and make sure they have all the information about what you are worried about. It may be helpful to make some notes beforehand to take to the appointment. Your GP must listen to your concerns and take them seriously regardless of whether your young person is underweight or not, or voices anything themselves.

You can seek out a second opinion from another GP if you feel it is needed. Make sure you advocate for your young person and that they are listened to and understood.

Your GP should make a referral to an appropriate service to help your young person. This may be CAMHS or BeU Swindon (or another service within the NHS).

They should also provide you with information about steps you can take to help at home.

If your young person refuses to see their GP, you can make an appointment to see them on their behalf to get help and advice for yourself and your family until they are ready to access support directly.

Resource Section

Included in this toolkit are some resources that you can work through with your young person if they feel happy and comfortable in doing so.

Depending on what stage of their journey they are in, they may want to try to complete them or they may not be ready to and that's ok.

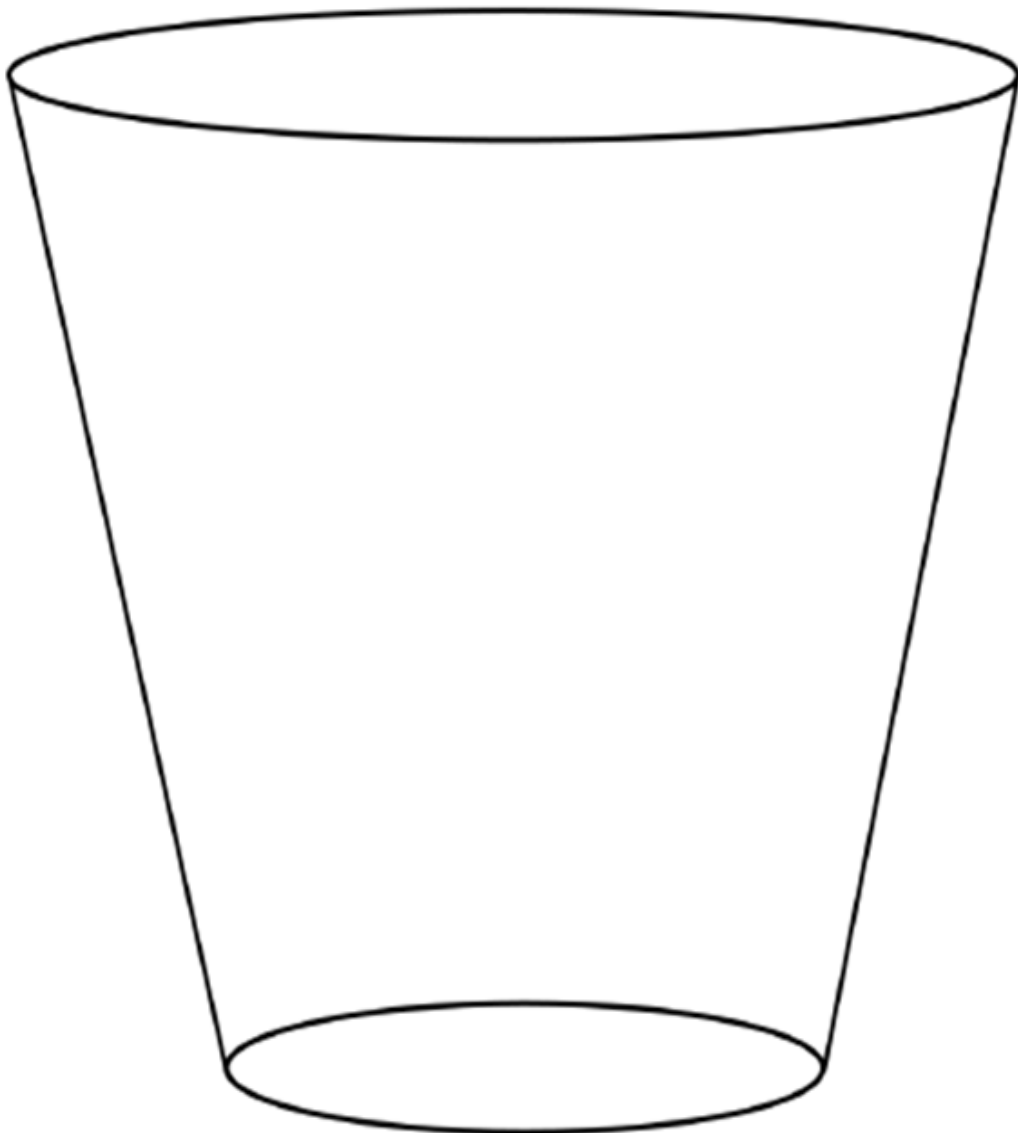
You can try one or all of them, and revisit them at any time to try them again.

Use this sheet to help your child identify their feelings and emotions.

MY CUP-O-FEELINGS

Color inside this cup to show how much of each emotion you're feeling right now!
Use the blank spaces to pick other colors and feelings that you'd like.

YELLOW = HAPPY **RED = ANGRY** **PINK = HOPEFUL** **PURPLE = SCARED**
ORANGE = NERVOUS **GREEN = EXCITED** **BLUE = SAD** **BROWN = SURPRISED**



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Body Love Exercise

1. Create a nice atmosphere in your bedroom with candles, music etc

2. Decorate a mirror with positive messages

3. Take off as many clothes as you want and sit/stand in front of your mirror

4. Allow yourself to be with your body. Notice any judgments or negative thoughts that come up.

Breathe

5. Allow these thoughts to leave as you kindly and gently combat them with self-loving responses

6. Say something positive or accepting about your body that you actually believe in that moment. It can be as simple as "this is my stomach and that's okay"

7. Now go and engage in an act of self-care such as have a bath

How did you feel after doing this?

Understanding Guilt

List which distractions you will use to manage guilt until it dies down.

Make a pledge to yourself not to compensate to get rid of guilt.

Brain learns that weight gain is safe and fear / guilt decreases over time.

DON'T engage in action to prevent weight gain.

Engage in action to prevent weight gain.

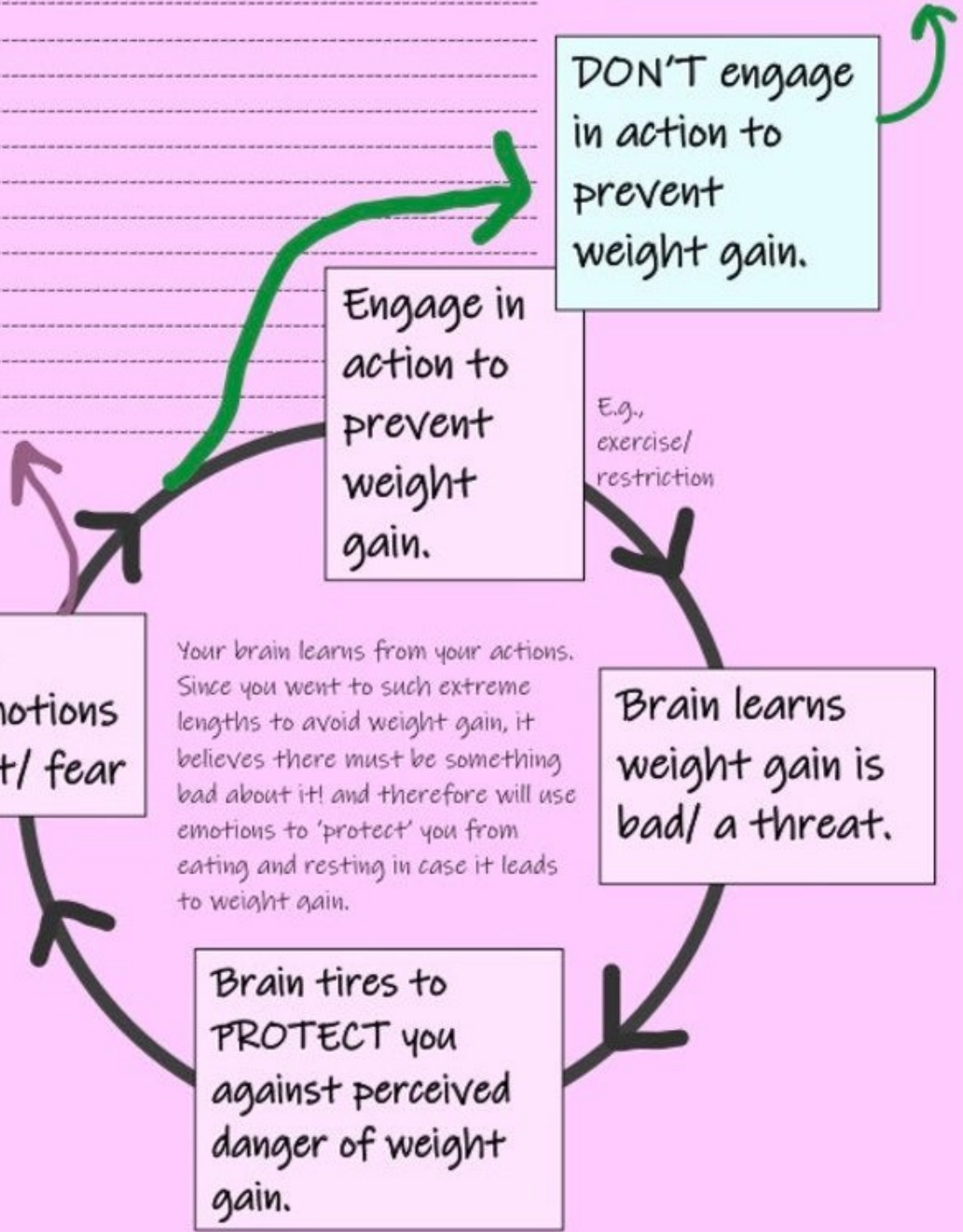
E.g., exercise/restriction

Brain sends negative emotions such as guilt/ fear

Your brain learns from your actions. Since you went to such extreme lengths to avoid weight gain, it believes there must be something bad about it! and therefore will use emotions to 'protect' you from eating and resting in case it leads to weight gain.

Brain learns weight gain is bad/ a threat.

Brain tires to **PROTECT** you against perceived danger of weight gain.



Fear Food Challenge:

Fear foods can be a major barrier to recovery. However, facing and overcoming fear foods is an important step towards recovery. This worksheet is designed to help you develop strategies to challenge them.

1. Choose a food that you frequently avoid.

Food: _____

2. What makes this food difficult for you to eat?

(e.g., fear of weight gain, negative feelings, past experiences)

3. Plan when/how you might eat this food.

When: _____

Where: _____

What do you need: _____

Practice self-compassion and remind yourself that it's okay to feel anxious or uncomfortable. You're not alone in this challenge, and it's normal to have fears and doubts.

4. Note your level of discomfort/distress on a scale of 0-10 prior to, during, and after:

Before:  /10

During:  /10

After:  /10

5. What did you learn from this challenge? Has your view on this food changed?

Negative Self-Talk & Eating Habits

How we talk to ourselves about food can deeply impact our relationship with eating and overall well-being. This worksheet offers a transformative approach by providing alternative phrases to replace negative self-talk about food.

Use the examples below to learn how to be more compassionate towards your body; you can also add in more affirmations for other food-related self-talk that you wish to change.

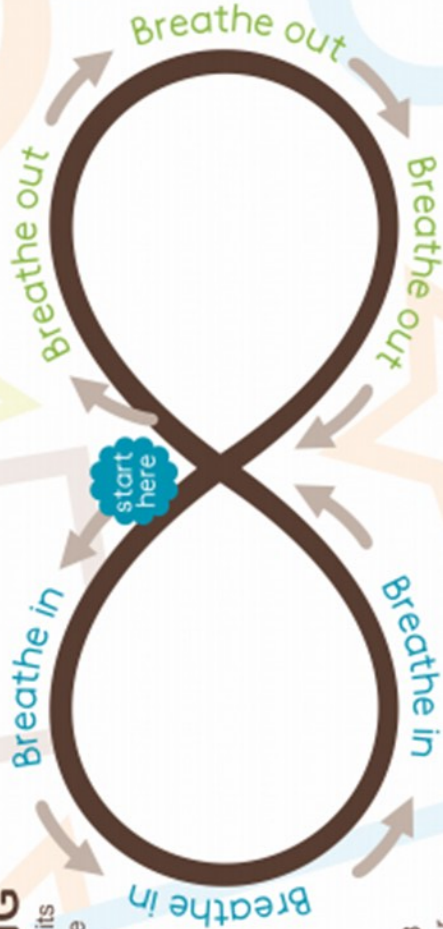
INSTEAD OF SAYING	SAY THIS
I have no self-control around food.	I am learning to listen to my body's hunger cues.
I need to exercise more to burn off these calories.	Movement is a way to care for my body, not punish it.
I'm a failure for giving in to my cravings.	Cravings are a normal part of being human.
I'm too fat to deserve love and respect.	My value as a person is not based on my appearance.
I shouldn't eat carbs; they make me gain weight.	Carbs are an important source of energy for my body.
I'm disgusting for eating this dessert.	I am allowed to enjoy treats without feeling guilty.
I need to skip meals to make up for eating too much yesterday.	My body knows how to balance my food intake over time.

Through cultivating self-kindness and understanding, you can navigate food conversations with greater empathy and positivity, fostering a healthier mindset towards eating habits.

Trust Mental Health offers nutrition counseling services designed to provide you with the compassionate care and personalized strategies you need to navigate emotional eating behaviors and cultivate a healthier relationship with food.

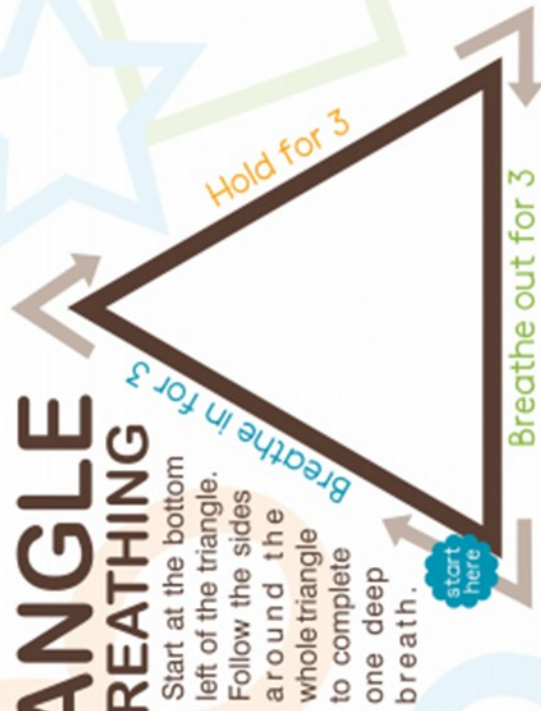
LAZY 8 BREATHING

Start with an 8 on its side. Starting in the middle, go up to the left and trace the left part of the 8 with your finger while you breathe in. When you get to the middle of the 8 again, breathe out while you trace the right part of the 8 with your finger.



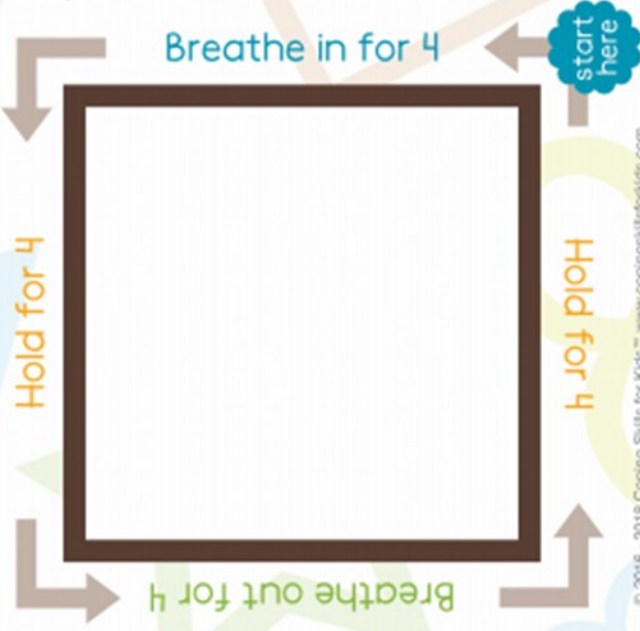
TRIANGLE BREATHING

Start at the bottom left of the triangle. Follow the sides around the whole triangle to complete one deep breath.



SQUARE BREATHING

Start at the bottom right of the square, and follow the arrows around the whole square to complete one deep breath.



STAR BREATHING

Start at any "Breathe in" side, hold your breath at the point, then breathe out. Keep going until you've gone around the whole star.







SO AMAZING!

YOU MATTER!

ROCK

ANYTHING!

UNIQUE

FABULOUS

BE YOURSELF

LOOK AT YOU!

BEAUTIFUL

PROUD

LOVE

BE

Sources of Support

Online Support—The following organisations can provide advice and guidance for children and young people and many offer advice and for parents/carers.

Beat eating disorders - the UK charity for eating disorders: <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>

Young Minds - <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/my-feelings/eating-problems/>

NHS England - <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/cyp/eating-disorders/>

Nott Alone - <https://nottalone.org.uk/yp/eating-disorders/?a=yp>

Childline - <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/eating-problems/>

BUPA - <https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/children-eating-difficulties>

Friends of STEP Facebook Page - Here you can find useful resources covering a variety of topics
<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfStep/>

Support in Swindon

BeU Swindon - FREE Early Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Support Service: <https://beuswindon.co.uk/>

On Trak Swindon - On Trak is a counselling service for young people aged 14- 19 living in the borough of Swindon who, at the time of referral, are experiencing mental health problems that are likely to respond positively to 'talk-based' therapies. Referrals need to be made by a professional who works with the young person.

IPSUM - Music and art therapy for young people: <https://www.ipsum.care/>