

# Helping Your Peer Re-Adjust After Eating Disorder Treatment

You might feel anxious about a peer returning to school after being treated for an eating disorder. This is a normal feeling. Over the years we asked previous patients what they would want their peers to know and do when they return to school. Some of these tips may seem like common sense, but it is important to realize that people with eating disorders have heightened sensitivity around food, weight and exercise. Although she worked on these issues in treatment, no one who leaves a treatment program is “completely recovered” because *recovery is a process*. Both patience and understanding are important feelings you can share with your peer.

Avoid	Why?	Instead Try...
“You look great.” “You look healthy.” “Now that you gained/lost weight you look much healthier.” “You’re eating a lot better now.”	Comments about weight loss may be taken as a compliment; comments about weight gain may be seen as criticism. Focusing on how or what she is eating may make her angry and think that’s all you care about.	“I missed you while you were gone.” “Let me catch you up on some things that happened while you were gone.” “When I used to hug you my heart would break. I’m happy to see you stronger.”
Giving special attention to your peer. Walking on egg shells around your peer.	She wants to feel as “normal” as possible when she comes back.	“If you want to talk about your experience while you were gone, I’m here for you.”
“You are so much pushier now.”	There will be times when your classmate asks you not to talk about food, exercise or weight around her; this doesn’t mean you have to avoid these topics all the time, but sometimes it may be hurtful for her recovery.	“I love talking with you about (a band, TV show, etc.). You seem much more alive and interested in lots of things now.”
“I hate my body.” “I just ate a huge meal. I need to go exercise it off.” “I used to be a size 6 now I am a size 8. I’m a cow.”	Sometimes people unintentionally encourage behaviors that lead to eating disorders by things they say or do, it’s important to watch your own behaviors.	“I’m not feeling great about my body today. Actually now that I think about it I feel angry about breaking up with my boyfriend and I’m taking it out on my body rather than talking about it.”

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