



Teenhelp

menu

Well-Being - Eating disorders & self harm



A girl in my class hardly eats anything, is always exercising and thinks she is fat even though she is only a size 8. I think she has an eating disorder but I'm not sure. What exactly is an eating disorder?



Check out Bodywhys

It's possible that this young girl may have an eating disorder and yes, if left untreated, this can have lifelong consequences. People with eating disorders can be very resistant when it comes to talking about it, so you may have to be firm but sensitive in your approach to this girl. If possible, try talking to her. If not, ask advice from a teacher you trust or the school guidance counsellor. There are three main types of eating disorders:

- **Anorexia nervosa**
When a person starves themselves to the point when their organs might stop working and, if untreated, they might die.
- **Bulimia**
This is harder to spot because while the person eats too much at one go, they then make themselves vomit and their weight stays the same. They might have enough calories to keep them going but they don't have enough vitamins in their diet. Of course all this bingeing (eating too much) and vomiting causes problems in the digestive tract, and the acid can damage the mouth and teeth.
- **Binge eating**
This happens when someone eats excessively and can become obese, which in turn can cause diabetes and heart problems.

There are a number of signs you could pick up at school that could suggest someone has an eating disorder. It doesn't mean that they have, but that they might have:

- They seem obsessed with food and weight, calorie counting and/or their appearance.
- A significant noticeable drop or increase in weight.
- Persistently going to the toilet during or after eating.
- They do lots of exercise to the extent that they may even feel faint.
- They are reluctant to eat with others.
- They seem depressed, anxious or sad.

Fortunately there is specialised counselling available to treat eating disorders. A representative from the school or the family's GP will be able to put the family in touch with these services. This girl may not be too happy with you now, but in the future she will thank you for looking out for her. Check out Bodywhys (www.bodywhys.ie) for further information.



My sister seems to have cuts on her wrists lately. When I asked her about it she said she it was an accident but not to tell anyone. I'm really worried about her, could she be cutting herself?



It does sound worrying and yes she may be self harming. Self harming is a way to relieve extreme stress. There are no typical people who self harm. Read through the following list of signs and symptoms and if any of these apply to your sister, tell your parents or a trusted adult. It doesn't mean that your sister is definitely self harming, but she might be.

- Having cuts and bruises that can't be explained.
- Covering arms and legs at all times, even in hot weather.
- Having medical equipment/sharp objects hidden in drawers.
- Being withdrawn from family, friends or social activities.
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits.
- Drop in school grades.

If some or all of these signs apply to your sister, think about possible reasons she may have started to self harm:

- Has she been bullied?
- Is she having exam, relationship or other problems?
- Did anyone ever harm her, physically, sexually or emotionally?
- Does anyone else in the family self harm or have any mental health problems?

Stay calm. Tell your sister that you can't keep this a secret even if she says she is very embarrassed about it or annoyed at you. Talk to your parents or another adult that you trust. Your family doctor will be a good source of advice and help.