

EXTERNALISATION FROM THE EATING DISORDER



THE VICTORIAN
CENTRE OF
EXCELLENCE IN
EATING
DISORDERS

Separating from or externalising the eating disorder from the sufferer is a helpful and powerful strategy in the treatment of the condition. The concept is derived from Narrative Therapy practices. Separation from the eating disorder helps the person understand that they are not the problem and instead the eating disorder or “ED”, as it is commonly referred to, is what needs to be challenged and changed. Separation is not a way to absolve the individual from responsibility to challenge the eating disorder. Instead, the process of externalisation removes the problem of blame and prevents the person from feeling criticised thus empowering them to make change. The message behind externalisation is, “The person is not the problem, the eating disorder is the problem”.

USEFUL QUESTIONS AND PHRASES TO CONSIDER WHEN HELPING A PERSON SEPARATE FROM THEIR EATING DISORDER INCLUDE:

When is ED most likely to take advantage of you?

What did the eating disorder say to trick you into skipping lunch?

How did you allow the eating disorder to make you do that?

EXTERNALISING QUESTIONS

It sounds like the eating disorder is taking a lot away from you

How are the eating disorders values different to your own values?

What does ED tell you about yourself?

Further Reading: “Life Without Ed” by Jenni Schaefer, is a useful book written by a person with lived experience of an eating disorder. The main focus on the book is how Jenni separated from her eating disorder and clients may find it helpful to read as they too gain distance from the illness.

<http://www.jennischaefer.com/>