



THE VICTORIAN  
CENTRE OF  
EXCELLENCE IN  
EATING  
DISORDERS

## Externalisation from the Eating Disorder

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:

- What did the eating disorder say to trick you into skipping lunch?
- How did you allow the eating disorder to make you do that?
- 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?
- When is ED most likely to take advantage of you?

Such questioning is designed to help the individual gain distance from the problem, the eating disorder, and consider what they think, feel and believe about what the eating disorder is saying.

“Life Without Ed” by Jenni Schaefer, is a useful book written by a past sufferer from 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.jennischaefers.com/>