

BODY IMAGE DISTRESS TIPS FOR FAMILIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH EATING DISORDERS



Validate, Not Reassure

Reassuring your young person that they are beautiful/attractive is a temporary fix and an ineffective long-term solution. It will be more helpful to validate the difficulty of the body image distress thoughts.



Stay on the Shore

Develop the skills to remain calm in the face of your child's distress while they ride the wave of anxiety. It is likely the 'feeling' part of their brain has taken over and the 'rational' part of the brain is temporarily offline.



Distract, Tolerate, Soothe

Help your child to manage their distress with distractions, distress tolerance skills, engaging one or more of their five senses, and helping to problem solve the feelings that arise when body image distress is high.



Refeeding and Weight Gain is Crucial

Malnutrition has a negative impact on the brain and intensifies poor body image and fear of weight gain. Paradoxically, weight gain and improved nutrition help to restore cognitive functioning and may reduce the distress around body shape and size.



Use Body Acceptance Talk

It is important to reflect on our own use of negative body talk and overvaluation of shape and size. We can change our own language and thoughts and model body acceptance and weight neutrality, while focusing on health in recovery.



Minimise Triggers

When body image distress is very severe and interfering with refeeding and recovery, it may be useful to modify the environment or social situations to minimise triggers e.g. cover mirrors, buy clothing online.



Monitor Social Media Usage

Social media usage is shown to increase body image dissatisfaction and contribute to appearance-related shame and anxiety. If your young person's social media usage is interfering with their recovery, consider temporarily restricting access and/or teaching your young person about media literacy.