

Helping a Loved One with an Eating Disorder?

Caring for a loved one with an eating disorder can be overwhelming, confusing, and difficult. No matter how well you know your loved one, an eating disorder can make them present as though they are a different person. This booklet aims to equip you and those around you with a wide variety of resources to deal with both the disorder, and the personal, emotional, and relational struggles that often sit alongside this.



Welcome to your carers pack:

Here at Derbyshire Eating Disorders we have put together some resources for you as you support your loved one on their journey through their Eating Disorder.

As you will see there are many resources available. This booklet has been put together to support you and your needs by putting all of the information into one handy guide. Being a source of strength practically and mentally for someone else can feel overwhelming at times.

It is really important to look after yourself, in this role and this can feel like a hard task when you are feeling sad, stressed, or worried about the situation you are involved in.

It's always a positive first step to give yourself some time and it is helpful to role model this for the person that is struggling. So, sit back and browse the following pages and see what support is available to you.

“Caring for a loved one with an eating disorder, diagnosed or not, can be overwhelming. It is common for families to feel that their new ‘carer’ role is impacting their own mental and physical health which is why First Steps ED feel our carers support pathway is an important offer within our services “

First Steps



Contents Page:

Part 1: Groups (in person and online)

Part 2: Literature: Books, Podcasts, Blogs, Vlogs:

Part 3: Your Wellbeing One-One Support for you

Part 4: Physical health risks for your loved one and how you can recognise when they need medical support

Part 5: Tangible tips. Practical tips on how to respond when your loved one is struggling

Part 6: Carers Resources—Looking after yourself so that you are strong enough to support your loved one.



What Local Groups are Available? **PART 1**

There are several groups available both in person and online that may offer support and guidance to you as a carer.

- First Steps Skills for Carer's Group:

First Steps are a Derby based Eating Disorder Charity that offer counselling, befriending and support to patients with eating disorders. They are commissioned by our service to deliver carers support.

This is an online course for anyone supporting a loved one with an eating disorder. It runs on a Wednesday evening once a week for 4 weeks. Focusing on developing skills and strategies to help you help them.

- First Steps Family and Carers Drop-In Session:

Saturday morning online course that runs once a month. Offers advice and a space to have honest and open chat alongside counsellors or support workers from the First Steps team.



What Local Groups are Available?

- FREED Beaches Empowering Families Workshops

FREED Beaches are an eating disorder charity with professionals trained in therapeutic techniques and evidence based care to support adolescents and adults with a range of eating disorders (age 14+).

Despite the name, this is a workshop created for **anyone** helping a loved one with eating disorder. This workshop follows the Maudsley Method to teach you to become a 'Change Coach' for your loved one using evidence based techniques and practices. Also has a focus on self care and keeping yourself healthy in this tough time.

- Rethink Mental Illness Carer/ Family Support groups:

Rethink Mental Illness is a charity that have a range of support groups for people caring for a loved one with any form of mental illness—not eating disorder specific. Groups in your area include:

- Derby Walk and Talk group: combines peer support work with getting outdoors walking.
- CAT (Carers All Together) Group: meet one morning a week to discuss the experiences of helping a loved one with an eating disorder.

**Read more about these and other Rethink groups:
[Groups In Your Area \(rethink.org\)](https://rethink.org)**



Books, Podcasts, Blogs and Vlogs

PART 2

These are just a few of the books, publications and websites that are available to supporters of people with eating disorders.

Supported families: [https:// supportedfamilies.ie](https://supportedfamilies.ie) Sign up to their Newsletter and get the free eBook
What to do when someone is "stuck"?

Jenny Langley: <http://www.newmaudsleycarers-kent.co.uk/>
Skills for Carers course on Maudsley website: <https://newmaudsleycarers-kent.co.uk>

FEAST website in general has good resources and courses:
<https://www.feast-ed.org>

Also see: Support and resources for families affected by eating disorders

'First 30 Days- It's all for Parents!'

if you sign up via [feast-ed.org](https://www.feast-ed.org) website for this you get sent tips and practical advice every day for 30 days to help with caring for someone with an ED

Eva Musby: multiple books including, 'Anorexia and Other Eating disorders' and 'Help Your Teenage Beat an Eating Disorder': <https://anorexiafamily.com/>

Janet Treasure, 'Caring for a Loved One with an Eating Disorder'

(this could be good to read before the skills for carers group as the group is based on this book)

Dr Pamela Macdonald "How to help someone with an eating disorder – a practical handbook".

BEAT website have blogs, articles, podcasts, etc: Downloads and Resources – Beat (beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

Your Wellbeing— One to one Support

PART 3

Derbyshire/ Nottinghamshire Mental Health Services:

- **Talking Mental Health Derbyshire:**

- Interested in talking therapy?
 - Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
 - (derbyshirehealthcareft.nhs.uk)
- Individual work: Counselling
Group work: anxiety and stress management course

- **Everyturn Mental Health:**

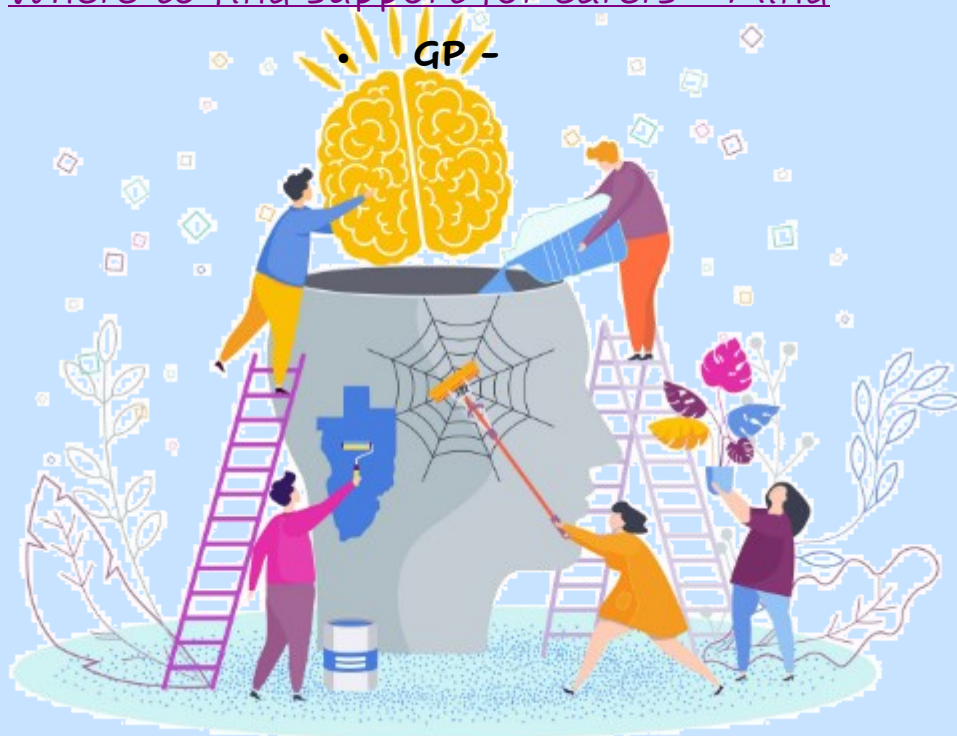
- Talking Therapies Derby and Derbyshire | Everyturn
Free talking therapies in Derby and Derbyshire
Webinars, counselling, IPT, CBT

- **Trent PTS:** Trent PTS | Psychological Therapies Service
Psychological therapies including counselling, CBT

Other Resources:

- **Mind** offer practical tips and links to support for carers.
 - Find them at:

[Where to find support for carers - Mind](#)



Physical Health Risk for Your Loved One

Low weight : This is often measured in kg or as a BMI. Here are the ranges for BMI in a adult and an idea of when the risks are higher. Very low BMI is linked to other physical risks such as cardiac and brain health.

(Note - BMI is not always the best or only way to measure risk and may not be the most reliable with athletes or people with lots of muscle).

Normal range 18.5-25

Low risk BMI over 15

Medium risk BMI 13-14.9

High risk BMI <13

Falling weight: Weight loss of 1kg per week is considered high Risk. In an underweight person it is ideal to gain between 0.5 and 1.0kg per week to restore weight and for physical health risks to Improve

Falsifying weight: Eating Disorders can influence behaviors to Falsify weight. This often feels out of control for the person.

Things to lookout for include:

- Drinking excessive amounts before being weighed
- People sometimes wear weights or hide objects on themselves

To help avoid these behaviors we encourage being weighed in one layer And to use the toilet prior to being weighed.

Muscle weakness: you may notice your loved one struggles to Manage the stairs or have reduced strength in their arms and legs.

This can be assessed using a hand grip test in some clinics.

Physical Health Risk for Your Loved One

Dizzy on standing - this is often caused by low blood pressure (BP). A systolic BP (top number) under 90 with regular dizziness is considered high risk. Low blood pressure can be caused by not drinking enough but also by reduced heart muscle mass.

Tingling of hands or feet - this can be a sign of low potassium which is often seen in people who purge (make themselves vomit) regularly. Low potassium can be very dangerous so can be easily checked in a regular blood test.

Frequent purging - this can be dangerous for the reasons highlighted above. Treatment for low potassium is to stop purging or to be prescribed potassium supplements with the dosage monitored alongside blood tests.

Suicidal ideation - eating disorders are often accompanied by depression, and other mental health difficulties and can cause suicidal behaviors. Look out for mentions of hopelessness, suicidal thoughts or self-harm as well as overdoses which may seem small but can be indicators of suicidal plans. You can contact your loved one's team to share concerns even if there is no agreement for them to be able to share information with you.

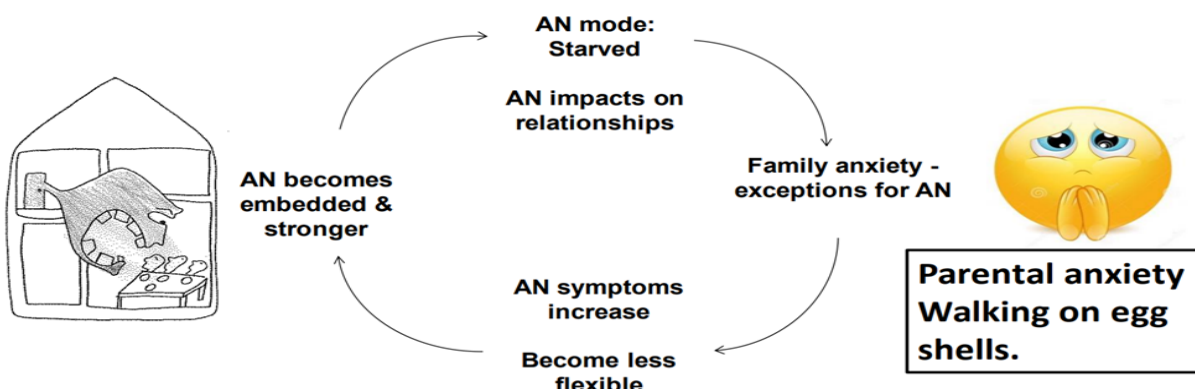
Over the page are some hints and tips for how to respond when your loved one needs support

Here are some things carers, relatives and friends can do that can help your loved when they are having a tough time:



- Be sympathetic to the person with the eating disorder, who is, after all, experiencing terrifying intrusive thoughts and should not be blamed.
- ♦ Find out what the person wants from their life and discuss how treatment can help them achieve those goals.
- ♦ Avoid arguments: Try to find common goals with your loved one
- ♦ Roll with resistance: If the person with the eating disorder won't do something you think is useful, accept it and try something else.
- ♦ Look for the positive: Notice small steps of progress. Frame them as brave steps and acknowledge the intrusive thoughts they will have most likely endured to take them.
- ♦ If the person manages to follow a diet plan and then gives it up, label it a success – after all, the plan did work for some time.
- ♦ If there is a failure, use the phrase 'set-back', 'how can we try again?', 'how can we best support you to remember that the bullying thoughts are not fair?'
- ♦ Empathise and be warm: Say how sorry you are they are having these untrue, distressing thoughts.
- ♦ Beware of enabling, some compromise is needed in the beginning but making exceptions to the eating disorder feeds into its power of your loved one.



The vicious circle of accommodating & enabling



Some helpful tips taken from MEED guidance (Medical Emergencies in Eating Disorders)

Do 	Don't 	Notes
Get your own support		Try Beat, FEAST, local support groups, or therapy
	Talk about diets, weight and shape with the person with the eating disorder	These topics are so common that they're hard to avoid, but it's very important to do so. Don't allow 'fat talk' ²³⁷
Ask to be involved in their treatment		Collaborate with the team, don't work on increasing your loved one's weight without their knowledge
Make considered changes to support your loved one to overcome the eating disorder	Make unreasonable changes in your life to accommodate the eating disorder	If you need support to refuse a request made by your loved one, ask one of the members of staff
Make helpful changes suggested by the eating disorders team	Provide laxatives, or deny that there's a problem	
Empathise and be warm	Criticise or be hostile	Sometimes it's really hard to maintain this, but it does help
Communicate: If there is no progress, inform the team of your observations and request a review	Be secretive	With the person, others in the family, health care teams, sources of support
Work to achievable short-term goals		Even just a small improvement in diet, bingeing or weight is well worth having, but it needs to be consistent
Talk about the family's strengths before the eating disorder started	Criticise other family members if they fall short of your expectations	
	Give up hope	Eating disorders can last for a long time, but most people do recover

²³⁷ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fat-talk-women_n_5331507

Carer's Resources—Looking after you

Intro: As a carer it can be easy to forget to take the time to also look after yourself. Being a carer often becomes a big part of someone's life and so making sure you have what you need can become secondary. We want to make sure you're also prioritising your own wellbeing and recognising that this also benefits other people around you, including those being cared for.

It is often said that eating disorders, are family disorders, due to the amount it affects those in the household. Therefore, it is important to take time for ourselves outside of the role of a carer.

Emotional support: When caring for others, it can bring a great sense of achievement but also create emotions such as frustration, sadness, and isolation. Being able to recognise this and realise its normal is a big step to acknowledging our own emotions and seek support. As we experience these range of emotions it is important to talk about how we are feeling.

- **Schedule time with friends and family**
- **Have a call with the GP**
- **Access local carer groups – see below for local Derbyshire groups**
- **Access national carers support**

Counselling: For information about finding the right service for you, please visit the links below for more information:

- Mind website: Talking Therapy and Counselling
- The BACP Therapist Directory - an online, searchable directory with 16,000 private therapists
- The UK Council for Psychotherapy an online directory of accredited therapists
- The NHS website has information about access to counselling

If you need some immediate support, there are service available at any time with people to talk with you:

Samaritans on 116 123 (UK-wide)

text SHOUT to 85258 (UK-wide)

Self care and Mindfulness

Practicing self-care is helpful for those who support others. Start small by dedicating 5 minutes to one of these self-care tasks and incorporating it into your week

Relaxation and mindfulness techniques: Try to find time to relax and focus on the here and now. This may help you to cope better with stressful situations. Have a go at these relaxation techniques.

Calming breathing exercises: sit in a quiet place and take deep breaths until you feel calmer.

Muscle relaxation: lie down, shut your eyes and tense then relax the muscles around your body, starting with your toes.

Guided imagery: shut your eyes and imagine being somewhere safe and restful.

Or why not practice some mindfulness? Mindfulness is a way of thinking, that helps you to focus on the present moment. This can help you to deal with negative thoughts more easily.

Groups and events

Universal Services for carers in Derbyshire This service is jointly funded by Derby and Derbyshire Integrated Care Board and Derby City Council, and delivered by Citizens Advice Mid Mercia! It is a free, confidential, and impartial service dedicated solely to the holistic support of unpaid carers in Derby City. Based in the heart of Derby city centre their goal is to support the unpaid carer community with a wide range of services designed to ensure that unpaid carers feel emotionally and physically well, empowered, knowledgeable, skilled, and supported. The website can be accessed at: www.derbycarers.co.uk

Derbyshire Carers Association (DCA) A service to support Carers who look after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental ill health or an addiction. The care they give is unpaid.

Derbyshire Carers Association deliver a comprehensive support service to Adult and Young Carers throughout Derbyshire. All services are created to support Carers with the practical, physical and emotional impact of care giving. We have formed partnerships with health, statutory and community services to complement our offer and connect Carers with professional and current support.

Staying healthy:

Sleep

Sleep hygiene is about the behaviours we do that impact our sleep and working on these activities to help promote healthy sleep routines and therefore better sleep.

As a carer, you may find sleep is disrupted by the stress and demands that come with your role, whether that's issues falling sleep, prioritising sleep or staying asleep. Here are some tips/ behaviours to practice that might help:

1. Change your daily routines: Having exposure to daylight, Avoiding caffeine in the afternoon, Avoiding blue light from phones in the evening, Exercise a few times a week
2. Create a comfortable sleep environment: Using ear plugs and Blackout blinds or eye mask
3. Sleep routine: Have set timers or a general bedtime routine to wind down and a schedule.

Why prioritise sleep?

With all the demands a carer has, sleeping may be put to the back of your to do list. Try to give yourself permission to have an early night or schedule in this time in advance even if its just an extra 30minutes one night a week. The benefits from a good night sleep can be lowering stress, strengthen immune system, more energy to take on daily tasks and more clarity.

"Don't obsess about perfecting your sleep – but good sleep is part of a healthy, happy life."

Matt Jones—Sleep Consultant at Welcome and Professor of Neuroscience at the University of Bristol, UK

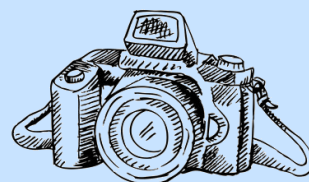
It's important to remember that we don't have control over our sleep, but putting in these tips to our routines can protect the sleep we do get.



Interests and hobbies

Keep up with interest and hobbies that we previously love or find something new. Here are some ideas to try:

Photography. Taking a photo is very easy if you have a phone. This also encourages you to pay fresh attention to what is around you visually, which we normally have no reason to notice.



Write one short story. Many of us may not have written an imaginative story since being at school. A short story can be just a couple of pages long and start with a simple question you have. Finishing a story can also be very fulfilling. Or, if you have an idea for a longer story, jot it down and see where it takes you. Writing can help develop research and analytical skills, interest in other languages, and is creative too.

Knitting, crochet or sewing. The repetitive action of knitting, crochet and sewing can be relaxing, while still being creative.

Bake a cake. Baking is not only a creative outlet, but it can also be stress-relieving and fulfilling when you get to eat the end result! Or, even better, give your freshly baked creations to close ones such as friends or family.



Start a journal. Simply writing your thoughts down on the page can be therapeutic, and it can be fun to look back on happy memories. You could include drawings, too. If you're stuck about where to start, you could find some journal prompts.

Make a scrapbook. This can be about a previous trip

Get green. Looking after plants and watching them flourish is a satisfying and relaxing hobby for many people. You don't need to have a garden, either – indoor plants have similar benefits, and being around greenery is good for your mental health.



Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a useful skill that can be used at any point throughout your day-to-day life. It allows us to improve our tolerance of difficult situations, as well as our awareness of the present moment. It helps us to be less reactive and judgemental in situations which we may otherwise find uncomfortable. Mindfulness helps to improve our emotional regulation, make wiser decisions, and develop self-awareness.

There are some common misconceptions surrounding mindfulness that it is about 'emptying the mind' and can only be done through meditation.

The goal of mindfulness is not to get rid of thoughts, as this is virtually impossible! If we feel that this is the goal, we may quickly become frustrated in the practice and may want to quit. The goal of mindfulness is to focus our attention on something in the present moment (for example, our breath), and when thoughts arise, to try and keep bringing our focus and attention back, with kindness and without judgement.



How to practice mindfulness

- 1) **Set yourself aside some time.** Mindfulness can be utilised anywhere at any time during the day. You just need to set aside some time during your day.
- 2) **Observe the present moment as it is.** The aim of mindfulness is not quieting the mind or attempting to achieve a state of eternal calm. The goal is simple: we're aiming to notice, pay attention and focus to the present moment. This can be by observing your sensory environment or thoughts or feelings, without trying to change anything. You can observe what is happening in your body right now by noticing the sensations.
- 3) **Describe what you observe, non-judgementally.** Once you have observed your sensory environment, you can describe what you have noticed by labelling it. This is done without adding any interpretations or judgements. For example, I notice a tightness in my chest and my tummy is expanding.
- 4) **Let your judgments roll by.** When we notice judgments arise during our practice, we can make a mental note of them, and let them pass.
- 5) **Return to observing the present moment as it is.** Our minds often get carried away in thought. That's why mindfulness is the practice of returning, again and again, to the present moment.
- 6) **Be kind to your wandering mind.** Don't judge yourself for whatever thoughts crop up, just practice recognising when your mind has wandered off, and gently bring it back.

You can practice mindfulness by using the 5 senses. Spend time paying attention to the sights, smells, sounds, tastes or touch senses in the present moment. You may notice things you have never before. Notice how you feel before and after you practice mindfulness.



Mindfulness Groups

Want to join a mindfulness group?

The mindfulness drop-in group, run by the Assistant Psychologists at Derbyshire Eating Disorder Service, aims to teach and practice the skills of mindfulness which can be used to cope with the demands of every-day life. The group is open and available for yourselves as carers, as well as our service users.



Group structure

The group runs for 8 weeks at a time, via MS Teams, each week focusing on a different aspect of mindfulness, and learning a new mindfulness skill. You can drop into whichever session you feel would be beneficial for you. It is a rolling group, meaning that the sessions will start again from the beginning after the 8 weeks.

Sessions:

Session 1 – Observe, Describe, Participate (introduction to the mindfulness skills)

Session 2 – Mindfulness using Sight

Session 3 – Mindfulness using Sounds

Session 4 – Mindfulness using Smell

Session 5 – Mindfulness using Touch

Session 6 – Grounding techniques

Session 7 – Breathing

Session 8 – Mindful reflection



How to Join?

Speak to a clinician at Derbyshire Eating Disorder Services

or email dhcft.eatingdisordersservices@nhs.net

Thank you for reading.

This resource was put together by members of the Derbyshire Eating Disorder Service. We are happy to discuss the contents further if you would like any further information.

We wish you all the very best and offer hope that your loved one can get better and make a full recovery.

We put this guide together as we recognise the demanding and important role you have as carers and the importance of looking after yourselves.