

Spotting an eating disorder in your college-age child

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(HealthDay)—When your child enters college, the last thing you may be worried about is an eating disorder, but one expert says there are warning signs that parents shouldn't miss.

"Parents and family members are often the first to identify when their loved one is struggling with an [eating disorder](#)," said Sydney Brodeur-Johnson, from the Veritas Collective, a health care system focused on eating [disorders](#). "Knowing the [warning signs](#)—and next steps—can make all the difference in your [college student](#)'s recovery journey."

What are some red flags that signal a possible eating disorder?

- Limiting or refusing foods: College students may limit their intake or refuse to eat in front of others. It's not uncommon for them to make excuses such as, "I already ate," or "I'm just not hungry."
- Eating past fullness: Students may also eat

unusually large amounts of food quickly. They may feel out of control, experience feelings of guilt after overeating, and visit the bathroom after meals.

- Body preoccupation: Individuals struggling with an eating disorder can become extremely focused on their physical appearance. They may make [negative comments](#) about their body or wear loose-fitting clothes.
- Changes in mood: Other signs of an eating disorder include emotional ups and downs, anxiety and irritability. Self-harm is another concerning sign. If your college student always wears long sleeves and/or bracelets, this could be hiding self-induced injuries.
- Excessive exercise: Students may exercise intensely and for long periods of time to "make up" for something they may have eaten recently.

If you observe these behaviors and your child is defensive when you bring up your concerns, your child may be dealing with an eating disorder, Brodeur-Johnson said.

"If I've learned anything over my years in [clinical practice](#), it's that parents and [family members](#) play a pivotal role in identifying eating disorder behaviors," she said in a news release from the National Eating Disorders Association. "These aren't easy conversations to have, but expressing your concerns is a critical first step."

It's important to remain calm, caring and non-judgmental while sharing your concerns, Brodeur-Johnson added.

As a general rule, the parent or family member who has the strongest and most open relationship with the college student should be the first one to

address these concerns.

"Your college student doesn't have to face their eating disorder alone—they have you," Brodeur-Johnson said. "Knowing the warning signs—and taking the right next steps now—can put your college student on the path to lasting recovery and maintain academic momentum. The support you provide your loved one struggling with an eating disorder can make a meaningful difference in their recovery—and life."

More information: Visit the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health for more on [eating disorders](#).

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