



**Transformation
Partners**
in Health and Care

Disordered eating in children and young people – guidance and management approach

Communications toolkit

February 2023



Improving understanding of disordered eating among young people

1. Introduction

Transformation Partners and Health and Care (formerly known as Healthy London Partnership) and a group of clinicians and experts by experience, have launched a set of guiding principles on how to best support and meet the needs of young people presenting with disordered eating.

A key aim of this work is to raise awareness and understanding that **not all young people presenting with disordered or restricted eating necessarily have an eating disorder**. It is important for those referring and assessing young people to look holistically at what is driving and maintaining the eating behaviour, and not just focus on eating.

2. What is disordered eating?

We understand that there is some confusion around the term **disordered eating** which has been used in several contexts. For the purposes of our work, we refer to disordered eating as:

Eating behaviours of all types, including restricted eating and acute food refusal, which when properly assessed do not constitute a primary eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder or ARFID. This group of young people may often have other mental health difficulties or psychosocial challenges for example emotional dysregulation, where disordered eating behaviours may be one of the ways used to modulate distressing emotional states.

In cases of disordered eating, it can often be a symptom relating to either their neurodevelopmental needs, or in the case of dysregulation, part of alternating patterns of disordered eating behaviours, self-harm, and other impulsive behaviours used as a means of managing distress.

It is important for those referring and assessing young people to consider other possibilities in a comprehensive and holistic way including an assessment of mental health covering history of other disorders, young person's developmental history, family history and social context.

Eating disorder-focused treatment and inpatient admission, can be ineffective and may lead to worsening clinical picture.

Refer to the [full guidance document](#) on disordered eating for our recommended guiding principles, definition and patterns of behaviour, effective approaches, suggested training, and more.

3. Key messages

- If you spot changes in a young person's eating patterns, **do not automatically assume that this is a sign of an eating disorder**.



- Eating disturbances of all sorts, including restricted eating may be features of a range of patterns of difficulties. The important thing is that you have recognised a change in the young person's behaviour.
- **Parents/carers** can help by providing as much information as you can, as soon as possible, with your child's GP or school, including; details of their feeding/eating history, any change in mood or habits, family history and social context, rather than just focusing solely on eating.
- **Teachers and youth group leaders** may also notice changes in a young person's eating behaviour and general demeanour. If you are concerned, share these observations with a young person's parents/carers or your organisation's mental health lead. Make sure you provide as much information as possible around the changes you have seen rather than just focusing solely on eating.
- **Key message for GPs and primary care professionals:**
 - If a patient or their parents/carers are concerned about changes in their eating, **do not automatically assume this is an eating disorder**. Eating disturbances of all sorts, including restricted eating may be features of a range of patterns of difficulties. TPHC have developed resources to support GPs, including [guidelines for spotting signs of eating disorders](#), the Disordered Eating [guiding principles](#) and [definition and patterns of behaviour](#).
 - It is important when making an assessment or referral to **consider the wider context in a comprehensive and holistic way** including an assessment of mental health covering history of other disorders, young person's developmental history, eating history, family history and social context.
 - Reassure the patient that **their concerns are being taken seriously**, also explaining that changes in eating can be caused by several factors. This can help to manage their expectations if they are not diagnosed with a primary eating disorder.

4. Help share the guidance and learning

By raising the profile of disordered eating, we can improve awareness and understanding. Considering all aspects of a young person's behaviour and not just focusing on changes in their eating, will help with assessment and care planning. We hope that this will mean that young people will receive appropriate support, diagnosis and treatment pathways to meet their needs.

Find further information below and resources to help you share this guidance widely.

Newsletter or website copy

Short:



New guidance on children and young people with disordered eating

Transformation Partners and Health and Care (TPHC), formerly known as Healthy London Partnership, has launched new guidance to raise awareness of disordered eating, and to improve care pathways to better meet the needs of young people with this presentation.

Not all young people who are restricting their eating have an eating disorder. Eating disturbances of all sorts, including restricted eating or acute food refusal, may be features of a range of patterns of difficulties.

Visit the TPHC website to find the [full guidance document](#) on disordered eating for our recommended guiding principles, definition and patterns of behaviour, effective approaches, suggested training, and more.

Long:

New guidance on children and young people with disordered eating

Transformation Partners and Health and Care (TPHC), formerly known as Healthy London Partnership, has launched new guidance to raise awareness of disordered eating, and to improve care pathways to better meet the needs of young people with this presentation.

Disordered eating refers to eating behaviours of all types, including restricted eating and acute food refusal, which when properly assessed do not constitute a primary eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder or ARFID. This group of young people may often have other mental health difficulties or psychosocial challenges for example emotional dysregulation, where disordered eating behaviours may be one of the ways used to modulate distressing emotional states.

Not all young people who are restricting their eating have an eating disorder. Eating disturbances of all sorts, including restricted eating or acute food refusal, may be features of a range of patterns of difficulties.

A key aim of this work is to raise awareness and understanding that not all young people presenting with disordered eating necessarily have an eating disorder.

It is important for those referring and assessing young people to consider what is driving and maintaining the eating behaviour. In cases of disordered eating, it can often be a symptom relating to either their neurodevelopmental needs, or in the case of dysregulation, part of alternating patterns of disordered eating behaviours, self-harm, and other impulsive behaviours used as a means of managing distress.



It is important for those referring and assessing young people to not automatically assume an eating disorder when disordered eating is observed, but to consider other possibilities in a comprehensive and holistic formulation.


Parents/carers can help by providing as much information as you can, as soon as possible, with your child's GP or school including details of their feeding/eating history, any change in mood or habits, family history and social context, rather than just focusing solely on eating.

Teachers and **youth group leaders** may also notice changes in a young person's eating behaviour and general demeanour. If you are concerned, share these observations with a young person's parents/carers, or your organisation's mental health lead. Make sure you provide as much information as possible around the changes you have seen rather than just focusing solely on eating.

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Social media messaging and assets

To download images below, right-click and select 'open hyperlink' to save the high-resolution files.

<p>Twitter</p> <p>Alt text:</p> <p>A background image shows a mother looking concerned, facing her daughter. A text box reads: 'Changes in a young person's eating patterns should be taken seriously, but don't assume it is always a sign of an eating disorder. Speak to your GP if you're concerned'.</p> 	<p>If you spot changes in a young person's eating patterns, don't automatically assume it's an eating disorder. Changes in eating can be caused by many factors and can be helped with the right support.</p> <p>See @_TPHC's guidance to learn about #disordereating: http://bit.ly/3x87Yx6</p>
<p>Instagram post</p> <p>Alt text: A background image shows a mother looking concerned, facing</p>	<p>If you spot changes or restrictions in a young person's eating patterns, try not to automatically assume this is a sign of an eating disorder.</p>



her daughter. A text box reads: 'Changes in a young person's eating patterns should be taken seriously, but don't assume it is always a sign of an eating disorder. Speak to your GP if you are concerned'.



Speak to a GP if you are concerned and share as much information as you can – have you noticed any other changes in their behaviour or habits?

Taking a holistic approach to understanding what is driving the eating issues can help us support young people to receive the right advice and care.

Visit @TransformationPartners profile and follow the link in their bio to find new guidance and resources on disordered eating.

#disorderedeating #CYPmentalhealth

Facebook

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Speak to a GP if you are concerned and share as much information as you can – have you noticed any other changes in their behaviour or habits?

Taking a holistic approach to understanding what is driving the eating issues can help us support young people to receive the right advice and care.

Visit the @tphc22 website to find new guidance on disordered eating:

www.transformationpartnersinhealthandcare.nhs.uk/disorderedeating-guidance

#disorderedeating #CYPmentalhealth

LinkedIn:

Alt text: A background image shows a mother looking concerned, facing her daughter. A text box reads: 'Changes in a young person's eating patterns should be taken seriously, but don't assume it is always a sign of an eating disorder. Speak to your GP if you are concerned'.

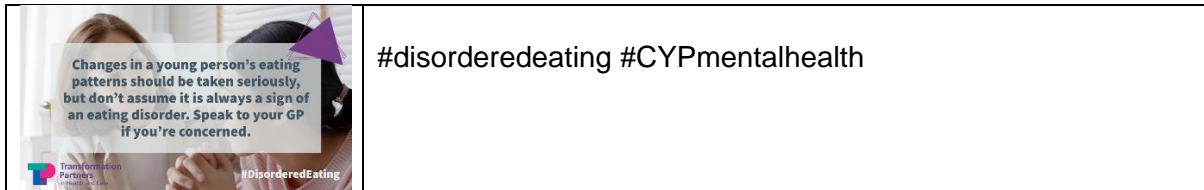
Not all young people who are restricting their eating have an eating disorder. There can be many factors and drivers behind eating disturbances or issues.

By improving our understanding of disordered eating, young people can be better supported to receive the right support, referral, assessment, and treatment for their condition, as appropriate.

Visit the @TP-HC website to find the full guidance document and resources on disordered eating:

www.transformationpartnersinhealthandcare.nhs.uk/disorderedeating-guidance





5. More information and resources for parents/carers, teachers, etc

- [Bite-sized elements of guidance on disordered eating and management approach](#)
- Guidelines for recognising early signs of eating disorders:
 - [Guidelines for voluntary and community sector professionals](#)
 - [Guidelines for education professionals](#)
- [Disordered eating blog series](#)
- [Disordered eating webinar](#): improving referrals and supporting young people

6. More information and resources for GPs

- [Guidance on disordered eating and management approach](#)
- [Guidelines for primary care professionals on recognising early signs of eating disorders](#)
- [Disordered eating blog series](#)
- [Disordered eating webinar](#): improving referrals and supporting young people, and effective approaches and joint working