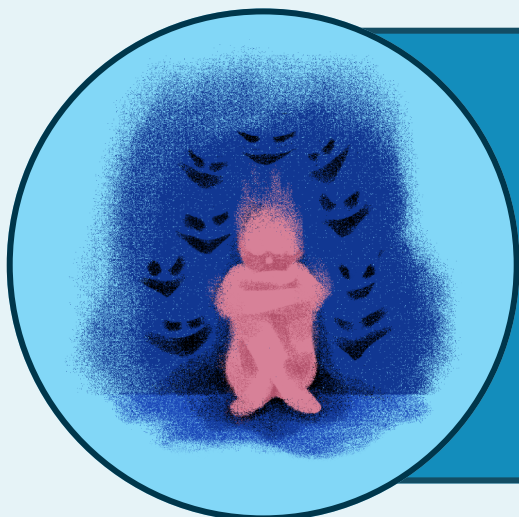


8

Things _____ Someone with an Eating Disorder Might Wish You Knew

Eating disorders are often misunderstood, and many of the experiences that come with them are not always visible from the outside. If someone you care about is struggling, it can be hard to know what they're going through or how to help.

This resource shares some of the things individuals with eating disorders often wish others understood, with the goal of building empathy and supporting more compassionate conversations.

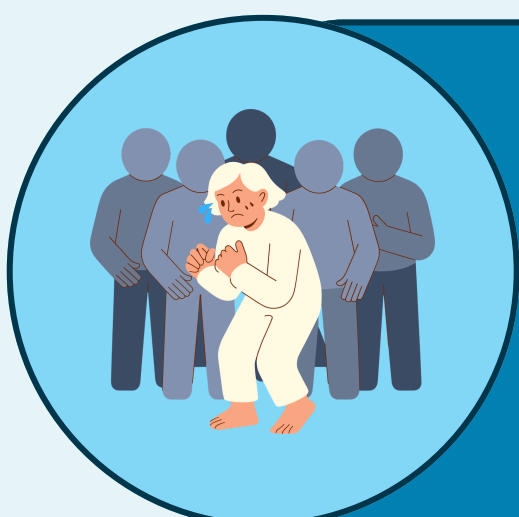
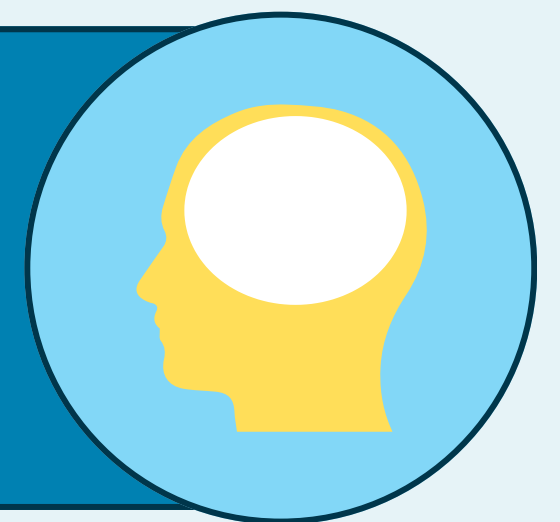


It's not about food—it's about coping

My eating disorder isn't really about weight, food, or vanity. It's about control, numbness, safety, soothing distress, or survival during overwhelming emotional pain.

I'm not choosing this, even when it looks like I am

What may look like "willpower" or "stubbornness" is often fear, compulsion, or habit wired deep into my nervous system. Please don't assume I could stop if I just tried harder.

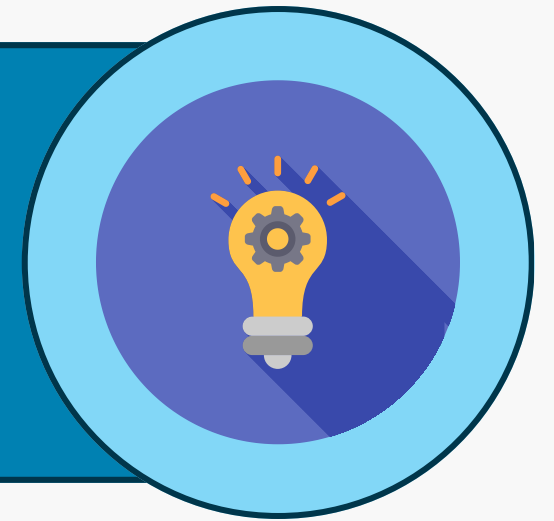


Compliments about my body—even "good" ones—can hurt

Comments like "you look healthy," "you've lost weight," or "you look better" may reinforce the disorder or worsen fear around change. The safest compliments focus on who I am, not how I look.

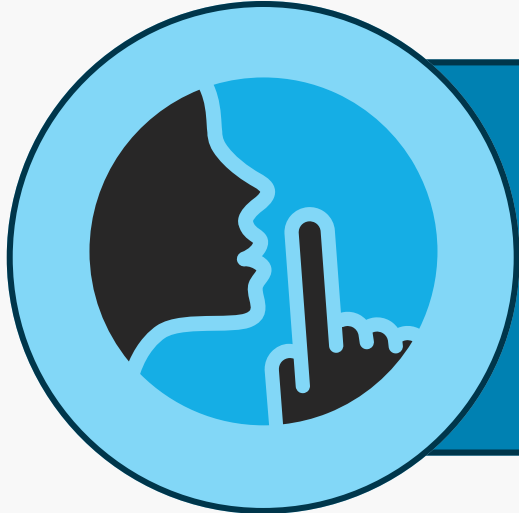
My behaviors may contradict what I say I want

I might say I want recovery but still engage in symptoms. That contradiction isn't manipulation—it's ambivalence, fear, and grief about letting the disorder go.



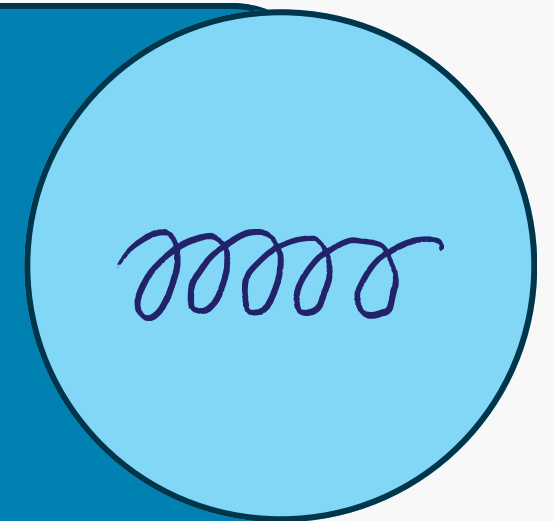
Shame makes secrecy worse

Judgment, frustration, or ultimatums often push me to hide behaviors more carefully. Compassion makes honesty possible.



Recovery is not linear

Setbacks don't mean Eating disorders look different across bodies, genders, cultures, and diagnoses. I don't need to be "sick enough" to deserve support. I'm failing, lying, or not trying. Progress often looks messy, uneven, and slow from the outside.



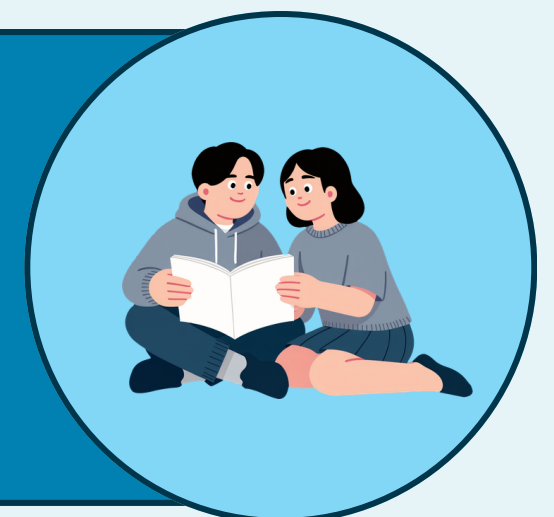
Please don't compare my experience to others'

Judgment, frustration, or ultimatums often push me to hide behaviors more carefully. Compassion makes honesty possible.



Sitting with me matters more than fixing me

I don't always need solutions or encouragement. Sometimes I just need someone who can tolerate my distress without trying to erase it. Asking "What feels supportive right now?" shows respect and builds trust.



Find more at www.sheenasplace.org/resources



SHEENA'S PLACE
Support for eating disorders