

ALMOST ANOREXIC

Is My (or My Loved One's) Relationship with Food a Problem?

Jennifer J. Thomas, PhD, Harvard Medical School, and Jenni Schaefer

Table 14.

Do's and Don'ts of Supporting a Loved One Who Has Almost Anorexia

Don't	Do
1. Blame yourself for your loved one's eating problem	1. Educate yourself about eating disorders; appreciate that the symptoms are not a product of willfulness
2. Simply ignore the eating problem and hope it goes away on its own	2. Express your concern and ask your loved one how you can be helpful
3. Be hostile, critical, or bullying; this will only give your loved one opportunities to practice arguments for not changing	3. Be warm, firm, and direct; ask your loved one if he or she has his or her own reasons for wanting to change
4. Collude with the eating disorder (such as preparing "diet" meals or taking over responsibilities for your loved one, which will only reinforce the illness)	4. Encourage your loved one to seek professional help if needed, and attend sessions if invited by your loved one's clinician
5. Try to talk your loved one out of eating disorder beliefs by using logic, or beat yourself up for not completely understanding his or her struggle	5. Let your loved one know that you believe that he or she feels fat or is worried about having eaten too much, but that you yourself do not agree
6. Provide constant reassurance around food and weight (for example, "Yes, it's okay to eat that much," "No, you aren't fat"); this is a battle you cannot win	6. Gently let your loved one know that it is unhelpful to get into arguments about weight or shape; then try changing the subject instead
7. Forget about your own self-care; you need to care for yourself in order to retain the calmness and compassion necessary to care for your loved one	7. Get support for yourself, including professional help, if necessary; model healthy eating and self-esteem by avoiding unhealthy dieting and fat talk