

# Eating Anxiety



## Eating in front of others can be problematic due to:

- Social anxiety
- Body image
- Eating disorders
- Cultural or dietary restrictions
- Bullying or teasing

## You can support a young person with an eating anxiety by:

- 1** **Creating** a safe environment
- 2** **Offering** choices
- 3** **Being** patient
- 4** **Providing** reassurance
- 5** **Working** with medical professionals

Eating anxiety encompasses the stress, worry, or fear associated with eating and can appear in various forms, such as a refusal of all foods or an aversion to specific textures or flavours. This is particularly challenging for children and teenagers during school break times or lunchtime.

Often this anxiety can be intensified by either social pressures or the surrounding environment. While not a formally recognised condition, eating anxiety is a real and overwhelming experience that can stem from multiple sources including social anxiety, body image concerns, eating disorders, cultural or dietary restrictions, and bullying.

Students who feel self-conscious about eating in public, potentially feel their anxiety exacerbated by peer scrutiny when in school settings. Recognising this anxiety as a legitimate issue is crucial. It is important for parents and educators to create a supportive environment where affected students feel understood and safe. Ultimately, the goal is to build a trusting and resilient foundation, allowing children and adolescents to face their fears at their own pace, thereby reducing the anxiety associated with eating in social contexts to overcome their eating challenges.



1

## Create a safe environment

Ensure that the school provides an area where students with eating anxiety feel supported and not judged.

## Offer choices

Giving young people options when it comes to food can help them feel more in control and less anxious. This can provide an opportunity for children to feel empowered.

We can provide a variety of healthy options and let the child decide what they want to eat for themselves.



2



3

## Be patient

Children and teenagers with eating anxiety may take longer to consume their meal, so avoid rushing or pressuring them. Provide a relaxed atmosphere at home and consider packing comforting items in their school lunchbox.

## Provide reassurance

Let them know you care by providing reassurance and regular encouragement and support. Ensure you support their eating choices, and you celebrate their progress.



4



5

## Work with professionals

Working with a professional counsellor, or therapist, or dietitian can give you the strategies that you need to support your children overcome their eating challenges.