

A negative body image can lead to eating disorders

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KIDS SPEAK OUT
School News

These days perceived definitions of normal can begin to create havoc especially when it comes to body image. Those most influenced are adolescents. For girls, the need to be as skinny as possible is an image widely portrayed while boys are encouraged to have more muscle. As many young people cannot fit these so-called ideals, the result is sometimes devastating.

Self-esteem diminishes, a negative body image arises and eventually unhealthy habits develop. Some teens try fad diets or a heavy workout routine for a while, but eventually realize that they aren't changing. But the serious issues arise when the need for a so-called perfect body prevents that person from participating in everyday life — when that happens, eating disorders often surface.

The occurrence of eating disorders has been on the rise in the past two decades. More people are developing eating disorders as a result of a poor self-image. Sometimes most of these individuals do not even recognize they have a problem, so these disorders go unnoticed for years. The estimated duration of an eating disorder is eight years. A lot of damage to one's

health can be done in eight years. Eating disorders are much more serious than dieting. They are mental disorders that cause an individual to act much differently than they usually do in order to achieve a certain body. Eating disorders change people — the person you loved and knew begins to act differently. They may be extremely conscious about what they eat, how many calories they take in, and how much they have exercised that day, to the point that it prevents them from leading a normal life. The most difficult part is seeing a person hurt themselves while they think they're doing the right thing. Many times a person with an eating disorder is very defensive when confronted and if they are somehow prevented from achieving their goal, their anger only multiplies. All you want to do is help, but all it seems to do is cause more problems. Eating disorders can't be easily fixed; in fact, many people never totally rid themselves of it.

They require professional help because eating disorders literally change how a person thinks about food, exercise and their body. If you think someone you know may have an eating disorder, get informed about this illness before making assumptions. Knowing how it affects individuals and the signs is an important part in helping someone affected. If you have an eating disorder, I urge you to get help. You don't have to go through this alone, and you can overcome it. But before

you can recover, you need to acknowledge the disorder and want help. If you are a teacher or student interested in participating in an upcoming Kids Speak Out - School News column featured in the Beaver, please e-mail Tom Dykes at eller-green58@gmail.com.

Editor's Note: Halton Healthcare Services offers an Outpatient Eating Disorders Program. For more information, e-mail eatingdo@haltonhealthcare.on.ca or visit www.haltonhealthcare.com.



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