

Families & Eating Disorders

Chapter 7 of 9: Relationships

Ian:

We received a lot of support from a lot of great family members but at the same time a lot of them didn't necessarily understand why a couple of decent meals wouldn't fix the issue. And they had a great deal of trouble understanding that it was a mental issue, not just a fattening up the girl issue.

Tracey:

It's been difficult with my husband's parents because they're Italian. So, of course, everything revolves around food. Everything. You know, she's not eating enough, she's losing weight, she doesn't eat pasta, she needs to eat pasta, how can she not eat pasta. In the beginning...

Veronica:

We go over there for a chat and it's like hi, how are you? Good you're over here, good have cookies, here we'll make you a hot chocolate, here have food. And I'm like, no, no, no, I'm right seriously. It's hard to get through on that level because it's always in your face. And they like to feed people. It's like no, no, you can't put things on my plate. I can't deal with it if someone else is loading up all my things. No I don't need two serves, really I'm right.

Tracey:

And she's look, they're very good now, they accept it now, just every now and again they'll still slip. They'll start loading her plate up. But it took a while ... and they were there. When she was in hospital they were all there for her. My parents are like, we don't like it we'll pretend it's not there but...

Veronica:

But my Nan came to see me every few days.

Tracey:

So they've been very good. It was just hard getting to them, please don't bring her food, please don't bring her chocolates, just let us deal with the food issue for now.

Malcolm:

You need to totally have your grandparents on side, your sisters and brothers.

Lisa:

We met people who hadn't even told the rest of their family like their sib ... We were always very open and honest with everyone and if people ever asked, you know, don't be ashamed of it and don't keep it as a big secret. The kids want to have it as a secret or the anorexic person, the eating disorder person, wants it as a secret.

Rosanne:

I think they were all shocked when she first came home but I think I tried to protect the other children as much as possible but it probably has had an impact on them.

Ian:

There was a major impact on an elder sister who ended up leaving home and moving interstate. A younger sister who really needed a lot of nurturing herself and was quite entitled to some special time with parents missed out on an enormous amount of that but we were very conscious of that and as well as looking after the middle daughter we also spent a lot of energy trying to give some priority to the other sisters as well.

Sonya:

It's occupying me so much that sometimes, it's not that I forget there are other members in the family, but it's just a matter of where do you fit it in.

Trevor:

It actually seemed really unfair because they're such good kids, you know, and it just becomes so stressful, the whole house just becomes so stressed and we all become concerned about each other because you felt like everything was going to explode because it's all become all consuming, you know.

Tracey:

It makes it difficult to be there for the other two children. They're still doing, they're at school and they're saying, I've got parent teacher interviews and you're thinking, I'm too tired, I can't do this.

Rosanne:

I think my husband and I were really conscious from the beginning, I think from what we learnt that, I mean marriages can break up with an eating disorder in the house. And I think when we realised that we were fighting over how to deal with it or not coping with it well, I think thankfully we have managed to pull ourselves up and realise that this isn't the way to deal with it.

Tracey:

There have been times where my husband and I have been at each other's throats and that I've been angry with the two other children for no reason. You get tired, you know, you don't sleep very well. You spend all day thinking, well we used to spend all day thinking oh my goodness what is she doing, is she eating, is she out running for two hours, is she harming herself? You just get really tired and worn out.

Carol:

That was one of the biggest things for me was I didn't have somewhere I could put my anger and my frustration apart from to my long suffering husband who, he ... we were lucky we were able to talk through that and he was able to understand that I wasn't always angry at him. It was other things I was angry at but he did cop it on occasion because I had nowhere else to put it.

Ashley

During the worst stages of her illness, yeah I was extremely worried. Her weight started falling below forty kilograms and my mother in particular, she was, 'cause dad was at work most of the time, mum had to deal with trying to feed Sarah and in some cases try and force feed her and Sarah would simply wouldn't open her mouth.

Rosanne:

I suppose I'm the one in the front line 'cause I'm home more. He finds it quite hard to speak with her about it which he'd like to a little bit more perhaps.

Veronica:

Dad was always, you know, I'm head of the family, I should be able to fix this, there's nothing I can't fix you know, I'm your father. And he's coming to realise that you can't fix it but he can help and he can support me and once upon a time I would never have gone to Dad with a problem because, especially if it was emotional because you just don't do that because you get nothing back. But now I'm like Dad I'm having a bad day, you know this has happened. Or sometimes just going, Dad I need a hug, and crying. And he doesn't have to do anything. He can just hug me and that's ok now and he's realising that which is really nice.

Trevor:

It certainly changes the dynamics within your family for quite a while. We went from being a family that was relatively happy, the same as normal families, to being a family that was very, very highly stressed and everyone was upset, weren't they? And we'd find we'd all end up hovering over Sarah and all trying to get her to eat and all getting involved so in the end we sort of had to change that too, didn't we?

Ashley:

Yeah.

Trevor:

Ashley was doing year eleven and, you know, he was very upset about it so in the end we had to say to the kids, look don't get involved, you don't understand but we'll look after this and you'll be alright. We had to reassure the kids a lot. You know, you'll be alright - whatever happens, you be alright. And we had to keep reinforcing that but, and we had to have them do normal things didn't you? So we made sure that you played your sport and went out with your friends. We had to keep normality there as much as we could. That was part of the process that helped a lot because it just becomes all consuming.

Lisa:

Tasha once said to me that she was in primary school still when Suzanne was sick, and she said mummy, I don't think about Tash... Sorry I don't think about Suzanne when I'm at school and I said that's really good Tash because really, you know, you should be having a fun life and you don't need to worry about her whereas I know Renee, our second daughter, worried a lot.

Ashley

A lot of times I felt happier at school than I did at home because obviously because of Sarah's illness and the impact it had on the family, so for quite a few months I felt my happiest when I was with my friends at school.

Carol:

I know that she has told one friend and that friend has been a very, a wonderful support but I think Stacey likes to forget that she's had anorexia really. Even when she had it she liked to forget. There was sort of like that denial. But I have said to her, what if one of your friends started to do what you were doing? What would you do? And she said I would talk to them. I wouldn't like anyone to have to go through what I've been through and I didn't realise how strong it was and how I never meant to get myself to where I ended up being. All she wanted to do was to be fit and healthy and not the, how she saw herself, the fattest person in her group of friends.

Rosanne:

Oh it's been so important that she's had her friends around her all the time. She's never really become socially isolated. Because when she was beginning to be able to go out and do a little bit more they were just great. They'd come and pick her up and take her out for a short time and then bring her home again. And they just got it right. They were amazing.

Veronica:

My really close friends stuck with me and they visited me in some places that people shouldn't be in, at times when you wouldn't think friends would go and they've stuck with me and we're really close.

Rosanne:

I mean they are a lovely group of girls on the whole and they were fantastic right from the beginning and I'm just so grateful to them. When she was on bed rest to start with they used to come around in their pyjamas and sit down and watch videos with her and they were very, very supportive. Because I was worried they maybe I should try and speak with them and explain what was happening and how to behave but they just did it. They got it right.