

Early Warning Signs for Parents and Educators

As a parent, noticing subtle changes in your child's eating habits, such as smaller portions, occasionally skipping meals, or refusing snacks they once loved, can be concerning. It is vital to understand that in a child with an eating disorder, **any weight loss is considered serious, and all food refusal must be taken seriously and treated immediately**. Do not delay, as the likelihood of spontaneous reversal is low, while the chances of worsening symptoms are high, often leading to inevitable disruptions in school attendance.

Key Indicators for Parents to Observe:

The following patterns and symptoms warrant immediate attention:

- **Changes in Weight:** Pay close attention to any noticeable change in weight, whether a significant loss (more than 10 lbs) or a smaller one (less than 10 lbs).
- **Eating Behaviors:** Look for behaviors like skipping meals, limiting food intake, avoiding specific foods, developing strict food rules, or a general lack of interest in food or eating. Manifestations can also include food refusal, hiding school lunches, or an increase in arguments at home about eating.
- **Body Image:** Observe if your child expresses unhappiness with their body's appearance or perceives themselves as larger than others indicate.
- **Physical Symptoms:** Be alert for symptoms such as dizziness or fainting, feeling persistently cold, constant exhaustion, thinning or falling hair, missed or irregular menstrual periods (if applicable), a racing heart or dizziness upon standing, and swelling in the hands, feet, or face.
- **Emotional and Mental State:** Notice if your child exhibits a need for perfection, frequently feels stressed or overwhelmed, experiences sadness or a down mood for most days, worries excessively, or has rapid or prolonged mood changes. Social withdrawal can also be a sign.

It is worth noting that struggles might begin subtly during times of reduced structure, such as summer, and may only become clearly manifest as school resumes. Wishing that school will normalize everything can unfortunately lead to critical delays in seeking help.

Steps for Early Intervention and Assessment:

1. **Act Promptly and Decisively:** At Kartini Clinic we emphasize the importance of acting early, swiftly, and decisively to mitigate potential disruptions to your child's school year. Do not be misled by an apparent improvement in mood, as this can be a deceptive aspect of the eating disorder itself.
2. **Utilize an Eating Disorder Screening Tool:** To help assess if your child might benefit from treatment services, consider using an eating disorder screening tool. Kartini Clinic offers [a free and confidential online questionnaire](#) for this purpose.

3. **Seek Professional Help Immediately:** If you have concerns, **contact us for help.** You can reach us by phone at 971-319-6800 or via email at help@kartinclinic.com. We practice evidence-based, family-centered eating disorder treatment, utilizing a multi-disciplinary medical and psychiatric approach that prioritizes early intervention for children.

We practice in the knowledge that parents don't cause eating disorders and children don't choose to have them!