

# Re-committing to body image in a COVID-19 classroom

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**WE WILL NOT GO BACK TO NORMAL.  
NORMAL NEVER WAS. OUR PRE-CORONA  
EXISTENCE WAS NOT NORMAL OTHER THAN  
WE NORMALIZED GREED, INEQUITY, EXHAUSTION,  
DEPLETION, EXTRACTION...  
WE SHOULD NOT LONG TO RETURN, MY FRIENDS.  
WE ARE BEING GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY  
TO STITCH A NEW GARMENT.  
ONE THAT FITS ALL OF HUMANITY  
AND NATURE.**

**- SONYA RENEE  
TAYLOR**

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# Agenda

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- Setting the scene
- **How has COVID-19 impacted people with eating disorders**
  - What is an eating disorder?
  - What symptoms have been exacerbated during the pandemic?
- **What can ED prevention look like?**
  - Linking eating disorders and mental health promotion
  - Strategies to advocate for
  - Classroom tools
- **Reflect**
  - Resources

# Teachers are people, too.

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- They have lives and families whom they want to protect
- This isn't an "experiment" nor can people go back to "normal" in an equitable way
- We can't separate out the "economy" and the lives of the people supporting it

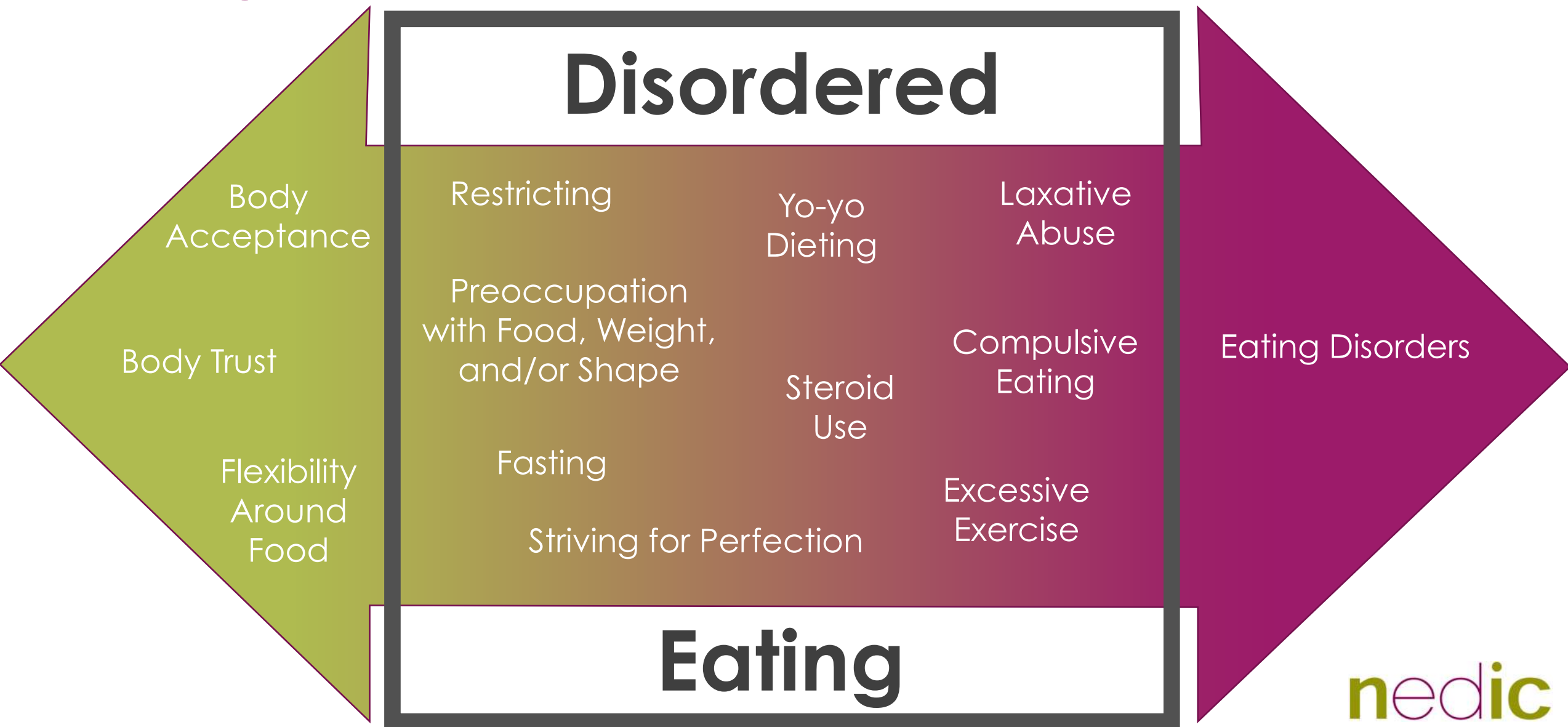
How has  
COVID-19  
impacted  
people with  
eating disorders?

# **Recognize:** What is an Eating Disorder?

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**Persistent disturbances in eating and eating-related behaviours that negatively affect one's physical health, mental health, and/or psychosocial functioning**

# Recognize: Eating & Weight Concerns Continuum



# Recognize: Learning from lived experience

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- **YouTube:** “Jay Walker – In First Person”



# Recognize: Common Behavioural Warning Signs

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- **Restricting foods from one's diet**
- Eating smaller portions at meal times
- Avoiding eating with others
- **Following strict food rules**
- Eating diet foods often
- Substance use – diet pills, laxatives, diuretics, steroids
- Talking negatively about one's weight, shape, or size
- Spending undue amounts of time on tasks to ensure they are done perfectly
- **Weight/food control determines how the person feels about themselves**

# Recognize: Common Behavioural Warning Signs

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- Frequent visits to the washroom after eating
- Eating in secret
- Frequent overeating
- **Following a strict exercise regimen**
- Exercising for prolonged periods of time
- Turning to 'health' supplements to increase bulk or decrease weight
- Fidgeting or pacing excessively
- **Withdrawing from social activities**
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling 'fat' or 'scrawny' regardless of body size



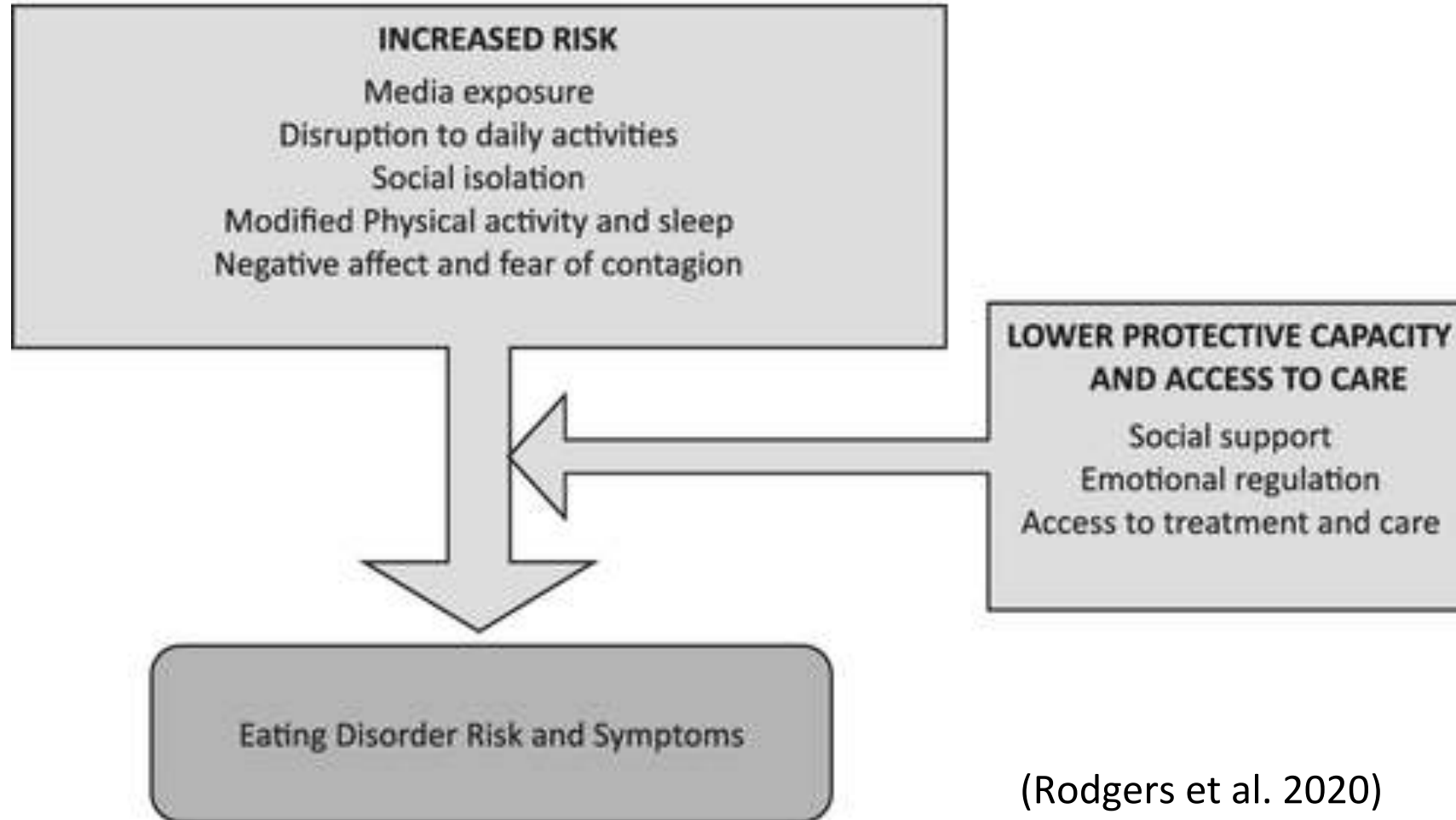
# Recognize: Common Physical Warning Signs

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- **Abnormal weight loss or gain**
- Growth in height without any weight gain
- Feeling cold constantly
- **Dizziness or fainting**
- Frequent stomach aches
- Constipation
- Loss of regular menstrual periods



# How has the pandemic affected ED risk?



(Rodgers et al. 2020)

# Media exposure

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- Youth have been inundated with harmful eating and appearance-related messaging on social media
  - Instagram & TikTok
  - “COVID-19” as a play on words alluding to the “freshman 15” (Elizabeth, 2020)
  - Home cooking and pandemic recipes
- Videoconferencing can be like “looking in the mirror” all the time
- **Recommendation:** Integrate media literacy programming into your classroom! Ensure the weight science literature is reflected in Health & Phys. Ed curriculum! Explore “hide self-view” tools when videoconferencing.

# Establishing a routine

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- In everything, the absence of clear routines – in the classroom or at mealtimes – and the blending of home and work can increase risk of eating disorder behaviours by removing structures that were supporting eating plans
- **Recommendation:** In whatever the plan is to return to teaching, sticking to a routine wherever possible is important for people (students, teachers, and parents alike!) to stay grounded.

# Emotional Eating



# Are You Engaging in Emotional Eating?

Do you...

- Eat more when you're feeling stressed?
- Eat when you're not hungry or when you're full?
- Eat to feel better (to calm and soothe yourself when you're sad, mad, bored, anxious, etc.)?
- Reward yourself with food?
- Regularly eat until you've stuffed yourself?
- Feel like food is a friend?
- Feel powerless or out of control around food?
- Use food to feel safe?
- **Recommendation:** Sometimes, stress-eating is a practical coping mechanism. Have an open conversation about other ways to manage these stressors while acknowledging what your body is telling you with kindness.



# How are *you* talking about food?

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## ***Fuel Food***

Gives us the energy  
we need to function



## ***Fun Food***

Add enjoyment to  
our lives



Another option?  
*Always* food and  
*sometimes* food!

# Fuel-Fun Foods – we don't want to create a false dichotomy!



It is important to remember that fun foods can be used as fuel, and fuel foods can be created to be fun as well!

# Food Insecurity

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- In Canada, **pre-pandemic**, 1.1 million Canadians accessed a food bank at least once a month
- Via Food Banks Canada, that number was up 20% in April 2020
- People with the highest level of food insecurity also endorsed significantly higher levels of binge eating, distress around eating, dietary restraint, self-stigmatization around weight, and worry compared to those not experiencing food insecurity (Becker et al., 2017; Becker et al. 2019)
- **What does this mean?** Hunger cues are a mess; restriction doesn't just happen because of internal reasons like wanting to lose weight. Many children have little autonomy over their food choices so be wary of 'food shaming' or passing judgments on the quantity and quality of food they might be having.
- **Recommendation:** When compiling resources, is your school or school board considering having a list of nearby food banks easily accessible?



# Physical activity and well-being

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- Fitness messages especially are often perceived as representations of one's character and willpower, and can lead to youth turning to harmful practices like dieting, excessive exercise, and substance use as they try to overcome feelings of inadequacy and try to "fit in"
  - These behaviours often enable an individual to feel in control and accepted by others. Hence, they serve a purpose that is hard to change, even if they also create problems.
- Physical activity is directly related to well-being and socio-emotional learning across teaching. We encourage all physical activities for the associated pleasure and health benefits, rather than following a specific routine of regimented exercise for the primary purpose of weight- loss or management.
- **Recommendation:** Is your H&PE curriculum ED-informed? Are you worried about how to adapt your messages? Get in touch with us!
- **Recommendation:** If H&PE is being reduced given the potential nature of remote work, think about other physical coping strategies that we can offer children.

# Other coping strategies you could suggest

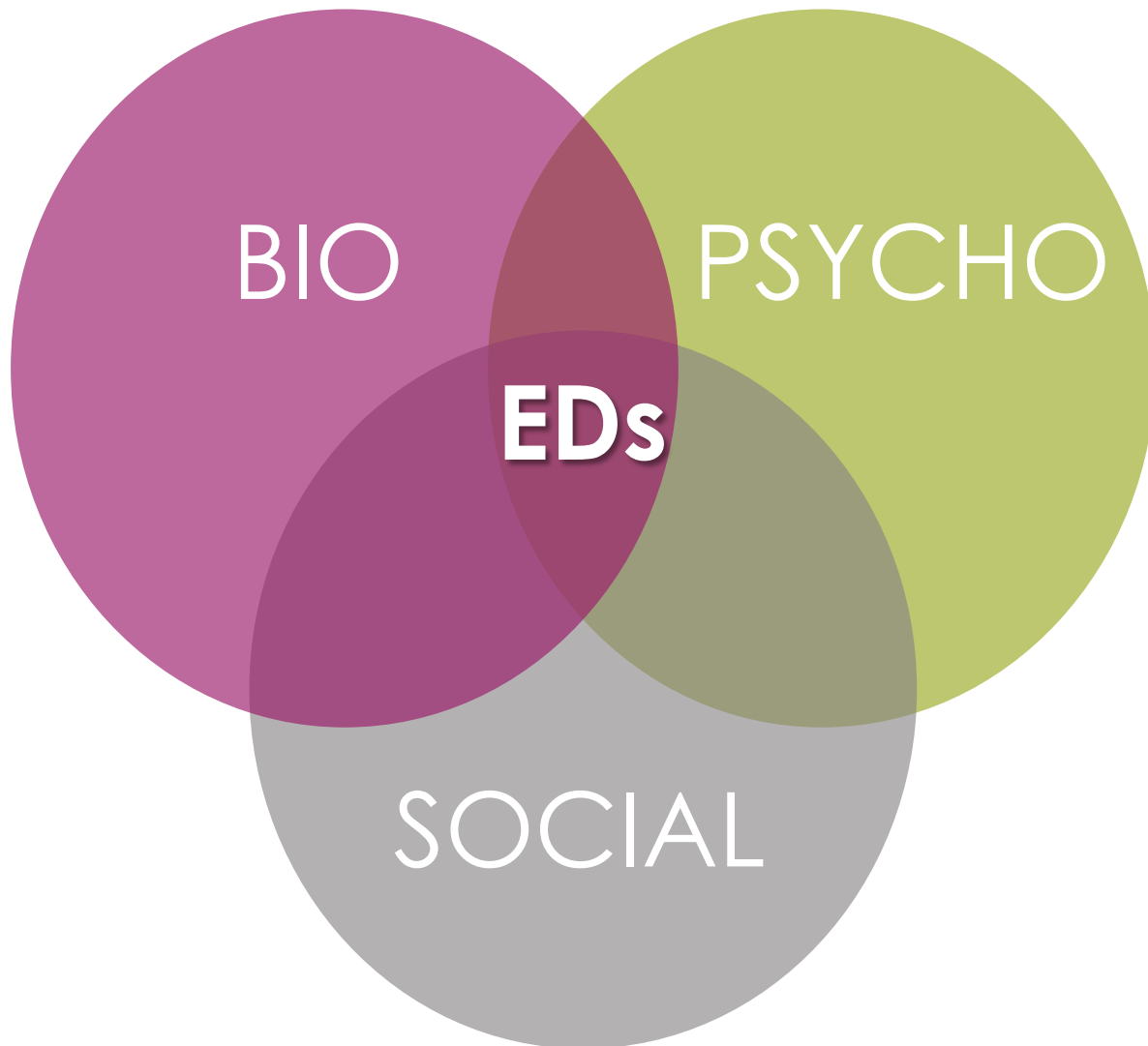
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- **Mindfulness:** Tune into your senses and be in the moment – smell the scents in the room, listen to the birds outside, look at a beautiful picture, focus on your breathing
  - <https://www.mindful.org/the-s-t-o-p-practice-for-stress/>
  - <https://www.mindful.org/connection-practice-remedy-feelings-isolation/>
  - <https://www.npr.org/2020/02/03/802347757/a-conversation-with-tara-brach-mindfulness-tools-for-big-feelings>
- **Grounding:** The 5-4-3-2-1 exercise
  - [https://advice.shinetext.com/articles/the-next-time-your-anxiety-hits-try-this-5-4-3-2-1-exercise/?utm\\_source=Shine&utm\\_medium=Blog](https://advice.shinetext.com/articles/the-next-time-your-anxiety-hits-try-this-5-4-3-2-1-exercise/?utm_source=Shine&utm_medium=Blog)
- **Breathing:** Ways to take a 'breath break'
  - [https://advice.shinetext.com/articles/3-ways-to-make-a-breath-break-part-of-your-daily-routine/?utm\\_source=Shine&utm\\_medium=Blog](https://advice.shinetext.com/articles/3-ways-to-make-a-breath-break-part-of-your-daily-routine/?utm_source=Shine&utm_medium=Blog)
- **Walk:** Move your body, get some fresh air, take in the sights and sounds of your area
- **Draw or journal:** Expressing your feelings through art or writing can get it out of your head and gives what you're feeling a concreteness to it
- **Disconnect:** When you're mindlessly scrolling, you can feel out of touch with yourself.

**What can ED  
prevention look  
like?**

# What Causes Eating Disorders?

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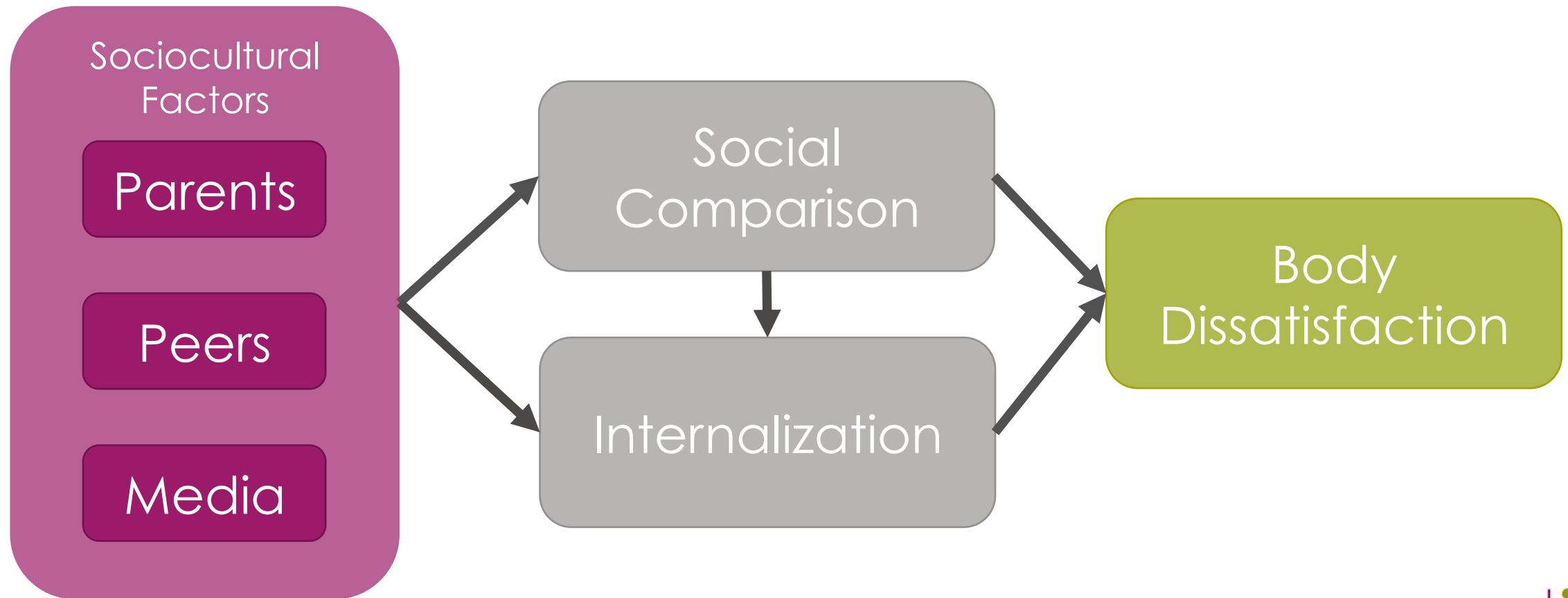


## Risk Factors

- genetic vulnerability/family history
- body dissatisfaction
- low self-esteem
- perfectionism
- predisposition to experiencing negative emotions
- dieting
- exposure to weight-based discrimination

# Where does Body Image Fit In?

- Tripartite Influence Model of Body Image and Eating Disturbance



(Keery et al., 2004; Shroff & Thompson, 2006; Thompson et al., 1999; van den Berg et al., 2002)



# Types of Prevention

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Universal	Targeted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Target: <i>all</i> students</li><li>• Aim: promote healthy development, understanding of complex issues surrounding body-based bullying, stop bullying before they begin</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Target: those who are beginning to show indications of being affected</li><li>• Aim: stop the development of a serious problem</li></ul>

# Universal: Take a whole-school approach

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- Policy
  - Include a statement in the school mission about providing a body-inclusive school environment that celebrates diversity (including size diversity!)
  - Ensure no weighing, measuring, or anthropometric assessment of students in any context
  - Provide an opportunity for all students to engage in regular physical activity in a noncompetitive, non-weight-loss focused, safe and secure environment
  - If back in-person: provide a balance of food options from all food groups in the dining hall
  - Display public material that includes a wide diversity of body shapes, sizes, and ethnicities

# Universal: Take a whole-school approach

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- Curricula
  - Integrate body image work into the curriculum every year in an age appropriate manner
    - Ex: discussions about diet and exercise included in biology
    - Body image awareness and media literacy education can be integrated into studies of English and The Arts
    - Opportunities to explore the influence of different societies and cultures on body image and healthy lifestyles may arise during History and Geography
- Engage parents
  - Make available up-to-date information about how parents can support their child to develop a positive body image and healthy relationship with food
  - Present talks and info nights for parents about ED issues

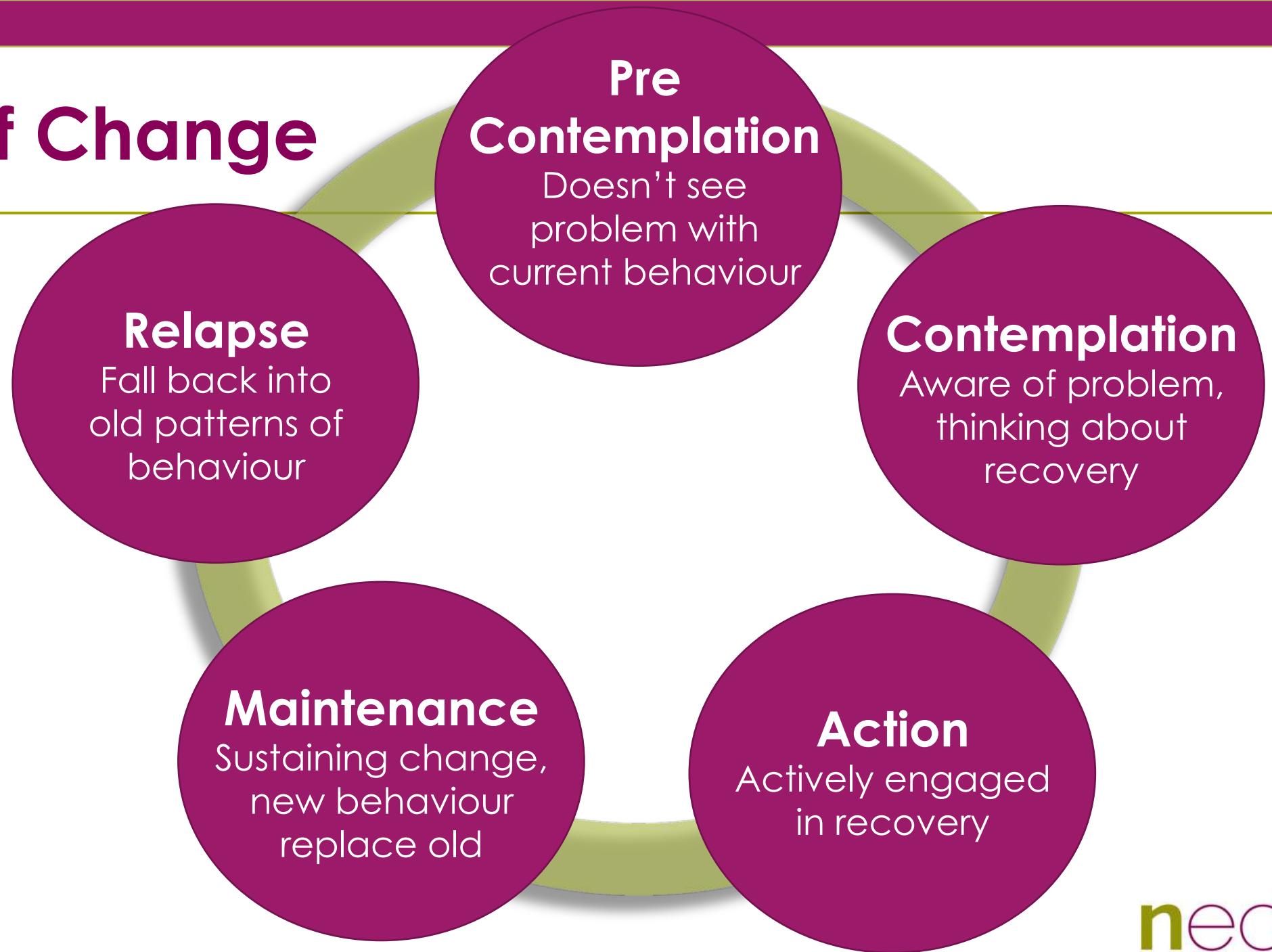
# Weight Stigma – Debunking Misinformation

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- **Myth:** A high weight is largely the result of poor self control or weak willpower
  - It's largely genetic
- **Myth:** Weight is a key driver of health outcomes
  - Metabolic syndrome is more important
  - Social Determinants of Health contribute far more to health outcomes than weight (Calagero & Tylka, 2019).
- **Myth:** People who are overweight need to go to the doctor
  - Believing that they were going to have a negative experience is a key reason why some avoid healthcare (Tylka et al., 2014)

# Stages of Change

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# Targeted: Starting the Conversation

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- Initially, focus on conveying empathy and not on changing the person or their perspective.
- Focus on building a relationship and developing trust
- Do not blame the person or their loved ones for the person's problems
- Avoid speculating about the cause.
- Be aware that you may find it tough to listen to what they have to say, especially if you do not agree with what they are saying

# Targeted: If appropriate, provide education!

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- Normalize their experience by letting them know about what you've heard today (EDs are common among many; lots of reasons for them to be feeling ashamed or afraid)
- Acknowledge their ambivalence
  - “It sounds like something about this isn't sitting right with you”
  - “It sounds like it's almost like you're battling yourself”
- Do a safety check, as we know some people need medical support if they're experiencing blackouts, dizziness, fainting, heart palpitations

# Targeted: Helping students cope with negative body talk

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- Remind them of the scientific evidence you learned in the presentation today around weight, size, and health, even if they may not be hearing that in the media or from friends/family
- Listen to what they've shared about their experiences and reinforce that this is **not** their fault
- Affirm their qualities and abilities that are **unrelated to food or physical appearance**. Remind them that they have intrinsic value
- Remind them that, when safe and possible, that they don't have to "take" the negative things being said about them
  - Consider leaving the conversation
  - Redirect the conversation if you feel uncomfortable about a topic



# Tap Into Your Community

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- Look at resources available at your school
  - Host a Lunch & Learn?
  - School social worker/psychologist
- A whole-school approach: is your institution cultivating a body-inclusive environment?
  - What would a body-inclusive school look like in your context?
  - What are some barriers to achieving this?
  - Who are the champions that you can tap to help?

# NEDIC has free workshops for educators!

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- In a one-hour session, we talk about things like:
  - The impact of weight stigma
  - Ways to teach media literacy (especially around social media) in a manner inclusive of different bodies
  - Coping with 'diet talk'
  - Ways to discuss food in the classroom
  - Curriculum adaptations
- We like to take a **whole-school approach** in K-12 school settings, meaning a conversation about school policies with admin, a workshop with students, an educational session for staff, and a parent session for those at home.
- Learn more and book us here: <https://nedic.ca/presentation-outreach/>

# Curriculum Resources

- **Beyond Images:** self-esteem and body image curriculum (Grades 4-8) [beyondimages.ca](http://beyondimages.ca)
- **Reflections of Me:** Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) Body Image curriculum  
<http://www.etfo.ca/supportingmembers/resources/pages/bodyimageproject.aspx>
- **Free Being Me:** World Association of Girl Scouts/Dove Self-Esteem Project <http://free-being-me.com/>
- **NEDIC:** [nedic.ca](http://nedic.ca)
- **\*\*Use the Decision Support Tool in collaboration with your school Social Worker and school administrator(s) to determine if resources are a good fit for your school and classroom.**



# Resources

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## **Books for parents/caregivers & professionals to foster balanced eating in youth**

### **Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family: How To Eat, How To Raise Good Eaters, How to Cook**

by Ellyn Satter

### **Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming**

by Ellyn Satter

### **How to Nourish Your Child Through an Eating Disorder: A Simple Plate-by-Plate Approach to Rebuilding a Healthy Relationship with Food**

by Casey Crosbie & Wendy Sterling

# Resources

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## **Books for parents/caregivers & professionals to help youth with EDs**

### **Helping Your Child with Extreme Picky Eating: A Step-by-Step Guide to Overcoming Selective Eating, Food Aversion & Feeding Disorders**

by Katja Rowell & Jenny McGlothlin

### **When Your Teen Has an Eating Disorder: Practical Strategies to Help Your Teen Recover from Anorexia, Bulimia & Binge Eating**

by Lauren Mulheim

### **Man Up to Eating Disorders**

by Andrew Walen

# Resources

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## Websites for parents/caregivers & professionals to foster balanced eating in youth

Ellyn Satter Institute – [www.ellynsatterinstitute.org](http://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org)

Recovery Record (app)

Rise Up & Recover (app)

## Websites for parents/caregivers of youth with EDs

Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders – [www.feast-ed.org](http://www.feast-ed.org)

Understanding Eating Disorders in Adolescence – [www.canped.ca](http://www.canped.ca)

# Resources

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## COVID-specific

Government of Canada's Food Safety Guidelines:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-safety/covid19.html>

Hospital for Sick Children's Recommendations for School Re-opening:

<https://www.sickkids.ca/PDFs/About-SickKids/81407-COVID19-Recommendations-for-School-Reopening-SickKids.pdf>

Food Banks Canada list of food banks: <https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/>

Ophea's blog on HPE:

<https://www.ophea.net/blog/responding-recovering-and-re-imagining#.Xvs8v2pKhE6>

Resource Hub from Jack.org, School Mental Health Ontario, and Kids Help Phone:

<https://jack.org/covid>

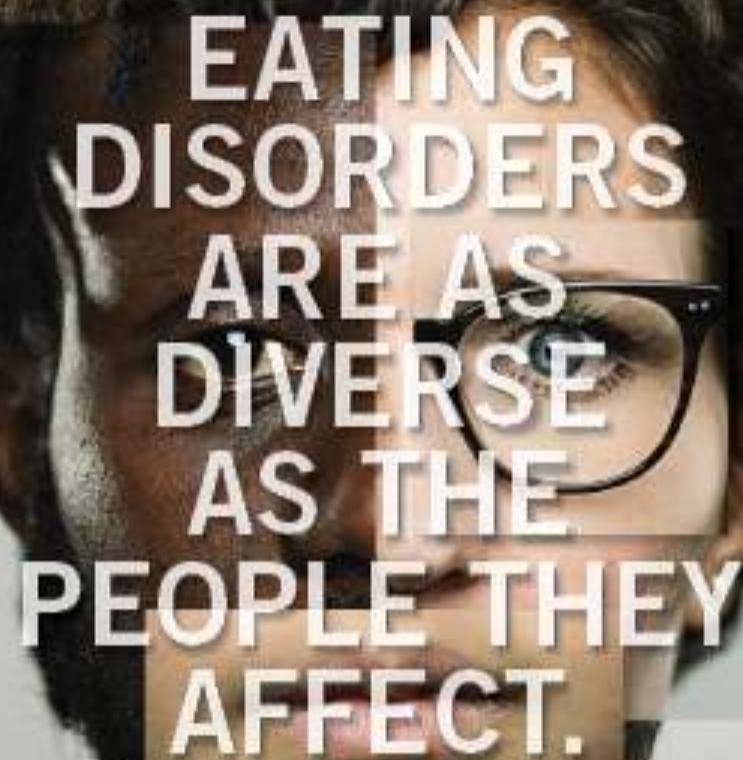
# Resources

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System navigation via NEDIC service provider directory (referrals, supervision) – [www.nedic.ca/find-a-provider](http://www.nedic.ca/find-a-provider)

NEDIC patient checklist to help with primary care providers – <https://nedic.ca/resources/?resource=8&resource=14>





EATING  
DISORDERS  
ARE AS  
DIVERSE  
AS THE  
PEOPLE THEY  
AFFECT.

**nedic**

National Eating Disorder Information Centre

[www.nedic.ca](http://www.nedic.ca)

This devastating illness strikes all types of people in different ways, often secretly – sometimes fatally. But talking saves lives.

Call 1-866-NEDIC-20 or 416-340-4156  
for support and information.

**nedic**

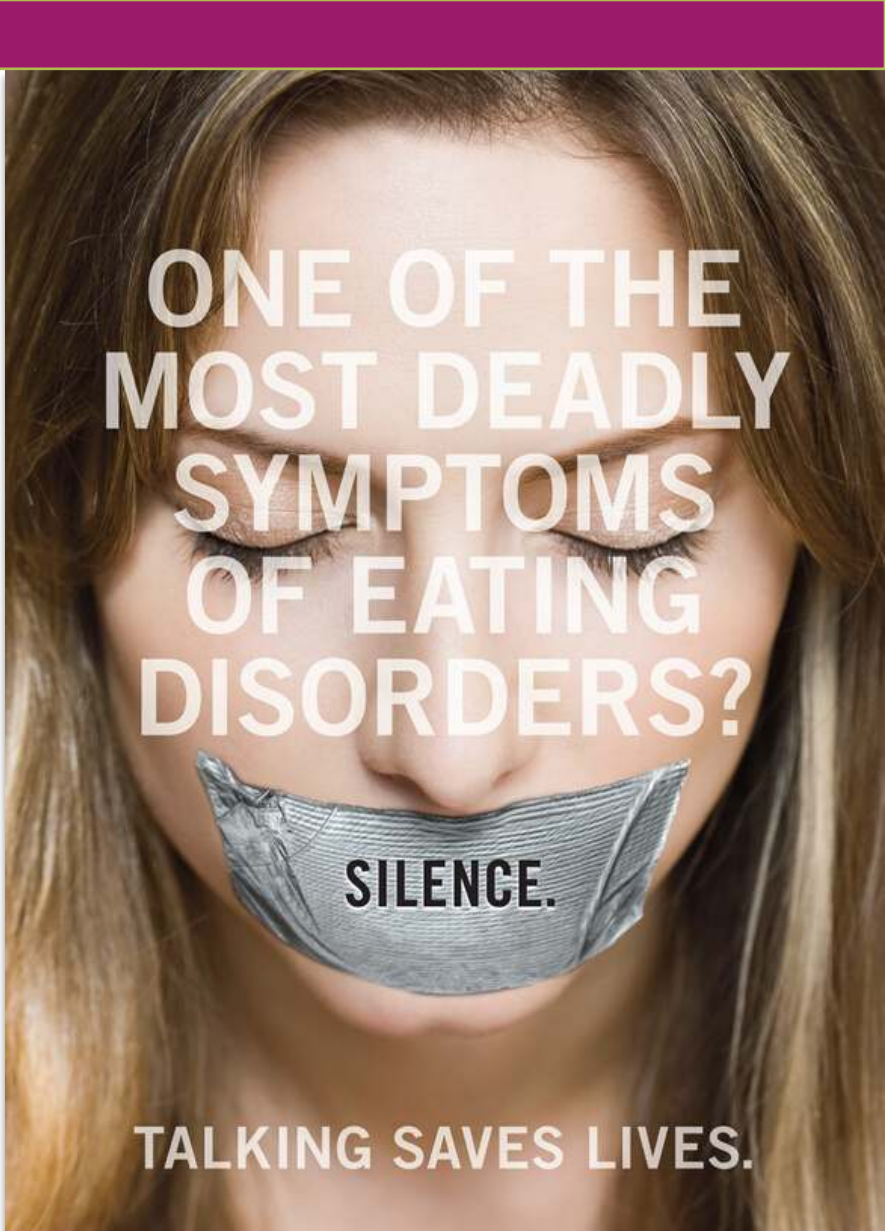
National Eating Disorder  
Information Centre

It's not our bodies  
that need changing.  
It's our attitudes.™

HELPLINE HOURS:  
9:00am to 9:00pm (M-Th)  
9:00am – 5:00pm (F)

Call anonymously:  
1-866-633-4220

Online chat:  
[www.nedic.ca](http://www.nedic.ca)



ONE OF THE  
MOST DEADLY  
SYMPTOMS  
OF EATING  
DISORDERS?

SILENCE.

TALKING SAVES LIVES.

**nedic**

National Eating Disorder Information Centre

[www.nedic.ca](http://www.nedic.ca)

If you or someone you know is struggling with an eating disorder, call  
1-866-633-4220 (416-340-4156 in Toronto)  
for support and understanding.

