

## LETTER TO THE SUPPORTER

### WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

First, I want to say, I hear you. I understand that you are in unknown territories. Not knowing how to help your loved one can be heart wrenching, scary and frustrating. Your feelings are valid.

No matter how many times you may have been told, *it's not about you*, you are a big part of the recovery process. So don't give up.

Once you are past the initial shock of discovery, then there are things you can do to help.

I'm not sure if you've realized, but the more you push, the more it could have an adverse reaction. Be mindful that what you say and do can be a trigger.

Educate yourself so you understand the illness and can recognize the cyclical behavior it possesses. Only then, will you truly have the foundation a supporter needs.

Whether you know it or not, your loved one has likely experienced something that made them feel out of control. They may not yet understand this themselves, so coming hard and heavy with 'Why are you doing this to yourself?' may not be reciprocated with an answer.

And telling them to "just eat" will alienate you.

You could end up starting an argument, or they could retreat in silence. I'm not sure which one is worse. This will likely end with them feeling emotionally beaten and distressed. They will find themselves again, in a situation where they feel worse about

themselves and could end up bingeing to feel better and ultimately doing the very thing you wish them to stop... purging.

You may find it difficult to comprehend but your loved one finds security in their illness.

People find it hard talking about the pain they carry. Even though it may be heavy on their heart, they can hide it very well.

From experience, we always keep secrets that we think we have to hide. We are always on overdrive, so we don't have to feel the pain.

Although your loved one might initially try to push you away, they still need to know that they are not alone.

Express your eagerness to help because you love them.

Be open about what you've learned. Be compassionate and show that you are interested in understanding what they are going through.

Don't be scared to ask what you can do to help.

Start your conversations when you are out on a walk so it reduces the anxiety that will surely arise. Don't be confrontational.

Don't push. Explain that you wish to have more understanding and that you are there for them. The silent questions you have, may go unanswered for a while. Your loved one, may not feel safe enough to talk in the beginning, but over time, they may surprise you.

Periodically, ask them if they are ready to talk to a professional. But if they refuse, and are more comfortable talking to you, then help them to acknowledge any emotions that they are feeling and what may have triggered them.

Underlying issues are about emotional suffering and pain, not food. So, if your loved one can talk openly about the pain then it could be a step toward recovery.

They need to accept that they are no longer in control. They need to understand the reason their eating disorder manifested, take responsibility for where they are right now and have a plan of action for future goals.

Show positive reinforcement with every achievement. They may not show this appreciation, but it goes a long way.

Passing judgement, fault or blame is a sure way to put distance between you. So, don't make them feel guilty for a bad day, especially when you can see they are trying. This could trigger a setback.

Tell them that you are proud of all the positive changes they have made in their life along the road to recovery. Your voice will be heard.

Don't talk about weight, numbers or food. This can add to the stress. Instead, set healthy boundaries around food and mealtimes. Prepare healthy meals that are smaller portions that you can eat together. Please know that putting too much food on the plate can be daunting and overwhelming. You can almost guarantee that your loved one is counting the calories in their mind before the plate touches the table and is already being consumed with thoughts of food and plagued with planning the purge.

Give them control and allow them to put what food they want on their plate. If they don't finish the meal, it's ok. Don't give them a hard time. If they ate, smile at them, squeeze their hand and acknowledge that this was good.

Have an understanding that immediately after meals, the toilet is off

limits for a short period. This time is one of the worst for someone living with bulimia. So, play a game or go out for a short walk together to redirect the focus.

Implement fun activities that can enhance the day. Find things to make them laugh. All these small moments of fun, laughter, and love will soon grow into longer moments. This is the goal.

Bulimia is an addiction. The cyclical thoughts need to be retrained and the only way it can be done is through repetition.

Don't give up. Stay strong. I know that it seems far away right now, but recovery is obtainable.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel. Although, you may get lost in the deep depths of it. Go in and be the guide in the darkness, be the voice of encouragement, reach out your hand and support your loved one through the journey.

Remember, if there is a way into the tunnel, there must be a way out of it.