

Supporting a Loved One With an Eating Disorder During the Holidays

A guide for family & friends





The Stress of the Holidays



The holidays can be stressful for everyone, and when someone you care about is navigating an eating disorder, you might find yourself worrying about what to say, how to help, or how to not “make things worse.”

If you are reading this, it's because you care. And caring can feel **heavy, confusing, tender, and heartbreaking** at the same time.

You don't need to have the right words.
You don't need to fix anything.
Your presence is already a form of support.



Language That Supports Safety & Connection

It's completely natural to want your loved one to feel encouraged, reassured, or "okay." And sometimes, the things we say with love can land differently for someone navigating an eating disorder.

This isn't about blame; it's about creating emotional safety for both of you.

Gently Avoid

Comments about:

- Their body or weight (even compliments)
- How much or how little they are eating
- Dieting, being "good," or "earning" food
- Other people's bodies or plates

These topics can feel overwhelming, even if your intention is supportive.

Examples to avoid:

- "You look so healthy!"
- "Are you sure you want seconds?"
- "I've been so bad with food lately..."
- "I just need to work this meal off later."





Language That Supports Safety & Connection

Supportive Things to Say Instead

Try not to focus on the eating disorder. Instead, focus on being present with your loved one.

"How nice to be together!"

"I am here for you."

"I love you"

"I'm really glad you're here."

"It's all delicious!"

"How can I support you right now?"

"I am grateful for you."

You don't have to sound like a therapist. Just sound like someone who loves them and wants to stay close.

If You're Unsure...

It's okay to say:

"I love you. I don't always know the right thing to say, but I want to be here with you through this."

That's connection.

That's support.

That's enough.



Ways to Support the Meal Experience

Before the gathering:

- Check in: “Anything that would help today feel easier?”
- Let them lead. You don’t have to plan the support for them.
- Remind yourself you are not responsible for their recovery.

During:

- Keep conversation focused on shared experiences, not food.
- If someone else brings up body talk, gently redirect:
 - “Let’s keep the focus on being together today.”
 - Be a calm presence, not a monitor.

After:

- Ask, “How are you feeling now?”
- Offer comfort without analysis: maybe a walk, a quiet room, or a grounding activity.



Compassion for *You*, the Supporter



It's okay if this is hard for you too.

You may be feeling worried, confused, afraid of saying the wrong thing, tired of walking on eggshells, and sad that the holiday feels different this year

Your feelings matter.

Supporting someone with an eating disorder can bring up grief. Grief for lightness, ease, and the version of holidays you hoped for. **You don't have to hide that from yourself. You also don't have to handle it alone.**

It is okay to:

- Set boundaries
- Take breaks
- Have your own emotional support person
- Step outside for air when you need it

*Caring for
yourself helps
you stay
grounded and
present.*

The Heart of Support

You don't have to be perfect. You just have to stay connected.
Support looks like presence over performance, curiosity over judgment,
compassion over control, and understanding over fixing.

And if it feels overwhelming, remember:

You and your loved one are both learning.

You are both doing your best.

You both deserve gentleness.

Want Personalized Support?

Working 1:1 with a therapist can make this process so much easier and
safer - for the both of you,



At Silver Lining Counseling, we support:

- Loved ones navigating the challenges of caring for someone in recovery
- Individuals healing from disordered eating or chronic dieting
- Anyone wanting to feel safe opening up about food, body, and shame
- Those ready to make peace with food, at a pace that challenges without overwhelming

If you resonated with this guide, know you don't have to do this alone.

[CLICK HERE](#)

to get started and book a
free discovery call

