

Families & Eating Disorders

Chapter 5 of 9: Support

Tracey:

There's a parent support group where we live which has been fantastic. It's once a month, you go if you feel like it, if... It can get a bit overwhelming. The local Eating Disorder Foundations run support groups and the hospital where Veronica was they had support groups once a month as well.

Trevor:

We rang an eating disorder association and we went and seen a councillor there, my wife and I firstly and we discussed the behaviour. And they said to us, look, she's on a restrictive eating program - you really need to do this, this and this, which was basically see your local GP and get a referral to an eating disorder unit. And it's very important to get people who specialise in the disease, to try and do it through your GP is very hard. So we got sent to a hospital that had an eating order unit which had the team of a paediatrician, dietician, case worker and a family counsellor and they work collectively as a team.

Carol:

Well I picked up the phone and rang the local adolescent mental health service and was very fortunate the person on the other end of the phone, she was so compassionate and she took such an interest in what I had to say and what my concerns were and validated what I said and how serious it was. And then there was the wondrous internet which I then checked out everything I possibly could, learnt as much as I could about what was available, rang every support place, found out what they had to offer, what my daughter could ... what perhaps we could get out of it and I was very proactive in sourcing any information. And there's some great stuff on the internet. There's some really good parent support sites that I personally found very helpful.

Rosanne:

We were very lucky that we did find the right, the GP, the dietician and the counsellor. We did track them down. Before I went overseas to collect her I'd made some initial appointments and that was very important but it was hard and I think we were very lucky that we did manage to find those three.

Tracey:

I think you just have to find the right support team that Veronica trusts because she's the one that has the most contact with them. You have to find the team that will speak to us which is always a difficult situation. We made it pretty clear to everyone that we were going to be hands on and involved. I don't go to every appointment but I make sure I go and see all of them at least once every two months so that we are all working together on the same goal. It's taken, oh three years to actually get that, to find that group.

Trevor:

As a family you want to be able to handle things yourself and I remember with the support group I sort of thought, oh you know, and then once again it was opening up your mind to say look, we really do need help and whatever can help Sarah we'll go along. And the first session I went to I found was really beneficial. There was a paediatrician there who specialised in eating disorders and we picked up a lot of information.

Rosanne:

I think just to find other people who have been through a similar journey. It really struck me it was such a needy group of people. We were all, we talked, we talked. We had a group, a room full of strangers and we talked to each other like we'd, were old friends.

Ian:

You don't feel so isolated. You can talk to other parents that have that either with the illness in advance of your own daughter's; you can talk to people who are just new to the illness. And so there is a lot of good support in those groups and it's really great to be able to express yourself, talk about some of the issues, with another, in my case, with another bloke.

Lisa:

Last year we went to a weekend, a carer's support weekend which was the first time we had ever done that and that was, we really got a lot out of that, didn't we? We took the two big girls with us as well and that was fantastic and we probably wished there had of been more of that around the first time with Suzanne because you're with other people who had the same, and you actually learn off each other just through talking. I met another lady in my group that had two daughters so I didn't feel so alienated. You really enjoyed your group. We were all in different groups.

Malcolm:

That was, you know, you've all got the same problems and you can share information that helped here and there and just someone to talk to but the presenter was great. She also gave us a lot of help, helpful hints ... how to talk to Tasha and that was probably, and I can see that helping us even today.

Ian:

There was so much support for people in a similar position. If we described some of the crazy things that were happening in our days people just wouldn't conceptualise how much of a bizarre adjustment you had to make to your day to get to that end point.

Rosanne:

I haven't actually had any form of counselling but that's something that I do intend to organise because I think partly for my own needs I think it would be helpful to talk about it because it has been a tough, it's been a really tough six months. I mean there's no, I'm not, I don't think I'm exaggerating this, it's probably been the hardest six months I've ever gone through. So I think it would be good to speak so somebody and just sort of offload some of that.

Tracey:

I saw a psychiatrist for a while but mainly the family therapist is my main support and other than...

Veronica:

And you do ring him sometimes on your own.

Tracey:

Yeah, he's happy to see me on my own, which is fantastic. I go to support groups occasionally. Sometimes I find them just too overwhelming, I get tired. Sometimes you just get tired of hearing the word eating disorder so you just don't want to do another support group. I have a few friends who I contact but other than that, in the end I just made time for myself. I started going to gym a bit to get a bit of the frustration out and that's worked really well.

Rosanne:

I think I've leant on my friends a lot. I've got a few very good friends and I think I do use them.

Carol:

I had a couple of friends that would ring and just knew the right things to say and I was able to debrief and skim some of that tension off the top and also hear what was going on in the normal world. Like work friends that rang and just kept it really simple and talked about what was going on in their life. It was great. And they were probably the really supportive things for me. And my daughters, my other children. I mean, it's not like I had one child, so there was plenty going on in everyone else's life. In a large family there's always something going on.

Alex:

I feel like I'm a supporter for the support person because I really keep out of it because I'm not the father and I don't want to interfere in the relationship between mother and daughter so I really take a back step from all that. But I just find that sometimes the supporter needs support.

Ian:

Generally I think we're a good team and we have our moments of course but we have strategies in place to pull ourselves apart and debrief ourselves and come back together and try and sort through some issues, yeah.

Carol:

His understanding was that he had to be at every meal from beginning to the last mouthful. And he did that. I'm very fortunate he works from home and that suffered so obviously there was some economical difficulties but that's what he did. He would just come and when she was in a panic or when anorexia was being very overwhelming for all of us, he would quietly get up and do the dishes and do the back-up stuff so that I could hold her and try and find her in amongst all that horrible darkness that she was being engulfed in. And then it would be like everything would just slowly calm down.