

Families & Eating Disorders

Chapter 6 of 9: Dealing with the monster

Sonya:

I have a couple of visualisations of this eating disorder. One, they've both come fairly recently. One is this science-fiction type monster that hovers on the top of each ceiling of our house and it just hovers, it's huge, and it's up there and it never leaves us so it's part of the family.

Carol:

Sometimes, especially after we'd had a session with a psychologist, they were the most awful days because she would panic and her anxiety got terribly high and we were dealing with almost panic attack sort of things. She was completely out of control and we would try and just hold her and you couldn't hold her and you couldn't talk to her because anorexia was in her head telling her what to do and that was powerful. She was able to talk about the fact that anorexia was saying terrible things to her and she felt bound to obey what anorexia was saying. And there was a tiny little part of her that could hear us too and that's what we spoke to.

Ian:

Yeah, it does seem to develop a personality of its own which is, and you're reminding yourself constantly of your memories of this girl that you knew preceding the illness. You are reminding yourself constantly that this is completely out of the character of the girl that we know so yes, it develops some very nasty personality traits which result in all sorts of bizarre behaviour.

Alex:

Sometimes, Sonya says Well I know this was her and this was the eating disorder but at times she says, I know that was the response but I don't know where it came from so we just have to deal with it in the best way possible.

Veronica:

If I'm really severely malnourished it's never background noise, it's always loud and it's always screaming. Or if I've got something really stressful, like I've got lots of appointments in a day. It can be really loud and it can be yelling. But if I'm eating alright and I'm resting enough and I'm not that stressed then it can be background noise and it's easier to fight it and argue with it and to overcome it, when it's background noise.

Tracey:

It also, we find, there are certain statements people make that set it off like 'Oh Veronica, it's really nice to see you. You're looking really well.' I know by saying that to her, the voice in her head will go berserk. It will take over.

Alex:

It's also like when people are brainwashed by a religious cult and they are just speaking and you think, that's not the person you used to know, and you need to deprogram them.

Carol:

We had a girl who would never swear at her parents, who has always been very respectful, using foul language, (at) inappropriate times, yeah just a complete different person in front of us. That was a steep learning curve.

Lisa:

For a long time you try to think you are talking to that child and you don't realise that you are actually talking to an eating disorder. That we've probably got better at that this time. And I'd feel like I was the school girl and here's Malcolm coming home and it would be like two siblings fighting, and he'd be thinking who's done what and who do I listen to and it must have been just awful for him. And it just makes everyone in the whole family feel sick a lot of the time, I would say.

Rosanne:

She can be quite hostile when she's not having a good week, and I think I just have to, I accept that it's not her that's being hostile, it's the eating disorder. And I don't find it too hard to separate what she says when it's the eating disorder that's got hold of her. I just know it's not her. It's so unlike her. I often, and this is something that I have learned, I often talk about times in the past. She loves talking about the past, when she was younger, happy times. We talk about holidays. So just trying to reconnect almost with how she used to be.

Tracey:

It used to tell her that if she ate like normal meals then I'd get cancer so ... something bad will happen to your mum and your dad if you eat so it really is a separate person. And that's not Veronica because I've known Veronica for twenty years. That's not Veronica. It's like she's inhabited by something else so that's why we separate the eating disorder. I know some people name it. We just never named it.

Veronica:

No not really.

Tracey:

We called it He or The Monster and then there was Veronica. For a long time there was only the eating disorder that came to the forefront of Veronica and her behaviour and she does act differently. She has a different look in her eye. She moves differently. She behaves differently. When Veronica's there she is back to the person we know. They are very separate.

Carol:

I don't understand her thinking while she was in the grips of anorexia. I don't think she does either really. It was just a really powerful thing that she had to obey whatever peculiar rules had been put on her.

Ian:

We had a name for this illness to try and separate it from the girl that we knew, so we often talked about this particular character. And that was important as well because we were dealing with a aspect of our daughter which was not the real her. And that also helped us too to view the illness as a separate thing and took a lot of the blame and the anger that we felt away from directing that at our daughter.

Rosanne:

One way I've coped, I suppose, by seeing the eating disorder as something separate from her. I found that very helpful. I've got a very strong image, and this may not be relevant to other people, from one of the Harry Potter movies. The Order of The Phoenix when Voldermort is trying to get into Harry Potter and it's this evil force trying to take him over and into Harry's mind comes all the happy times that he's had and his parents who loved him and his friends and times laughing. And I think that's what's going to stop her, or give her the strength to fight the eating disorder.

Tracey:

Veronica's paediatrician has a great, he always says it's like an eating disorder is an octopus and it has its tentacles in you and it takes a whole array of people to start pulling them off.

Veronica:

Because you can't do it on your own.

Tracey:

Because you can't do it on your own.