

Tips for Responsible Media Coverage

As the largest information clearinghouse about eating disorders and related issues, the National Eating Disorders Association recognizes that the media is one of our most important allies in the effort to raise awareness about the dangers of eating disorders. For this reason, we strive to work with the media to produce accurate, insightful and informative pieces that will resonate with the public.

One challenge of explaining the causes and effects of eating disorders is the complex interplay of biological, psychological and social forces that combine to ignite the onset of an eating disorder. Eating disorders, like suicide or terrorism, are issues that must be covered in a careful and responsible way in order to inadvertently glamorize or promote copycats to experiment with these life-threatening behaviors.

Our website and fact sheets provide the most accurate and up-to-date information on eating disorders, including statistics that add relevance and importance to your stories. This page contains other basic information that should guide your approach to covering eating disorders.

Several common coverage mistakes can cause serious harm. When you cover eating disorders, please:

- **Don't focus on graphic images or descriptions of the bodies of eating disorder sufferers.** Research proves that coverage dramatizing dangerous thinness can provoke a "race to the bottom" among other sufferers, i.e., "She is thinner than I am and she's still alive. I should lose more weight."
- **Don't play the numbers game.** "She ate only 400 calories a day" or "He took as many as 10 laxatives at a time" can turn a well-intentioned article into a recipe for disaster.
- **Watch out for "anorexia chic."** Eating disorders and their sufferers shouldn't be glamorized or, worse yet, presented as people with "astounding will-power" or "incredible self-control."
- **Be careful with narratives of those who "bravely fought their illness alone."** Perhaps your subject did, but most don't. The vast majority of those who beat eating disorders do it only with the ongoing help of trained medical professionals. Consider how you would write about someone "bravely fighting" alcohol or drug addiction without proper intervention and professional care.

Tips for covering eating disorders issues with sensitivity and fairness:

- **Try to strike a balance between "serious" and "hopeless,"** and always encourage people to seek help for themselves or loved ones who are suffering. Recovery is long and often expensive, but it is achievable and there are many options available.
- **Include contact numbers, addresses, or web links** to information and treatment resources wherever possible. Otherwise you will raise fears and concerns without providing an outlet, which is a lot like leaving the FBI's phone number off a story about a dangerous criminal. (Our toll-free Information and Referral Helpline, 800-931-2237, and website, www.NationalEatingDisorders.org, provide great nationwide resources.)
- **If you need more information, ask!** The National Eating Disorders Association has the latest resources and in many cases we may be able to point you to treatment professionals or prevention volunteers in your coverage area. (We cannot, for ethical and legal reasons, provide sufferers to talk about their disease to the media.)

Thank you for your commitment to accurate, sensitive, and responsible coverage.

