

Parenting

A Girls & Boys Town South Africa initiative

Support and advice for raising healthy, happy and successful children.

TODAY

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Weight issues: walking a thin line

Remember the cliché 'you can never be too rich or too thin'? Whoever coined that phrase couldn't have known of the dangers of eating disorders. Anorexia has the highest death rate of all mental illnesses.

What happens? We're born with the natural urge to satisfy our hunger and meet the demands of our growing bodies.

How many children would voluntarily deprive themselves of food – and sweets, chips

or chocolate? Most young children's relationship with eating is generally healthy.

'Ideal' woman?

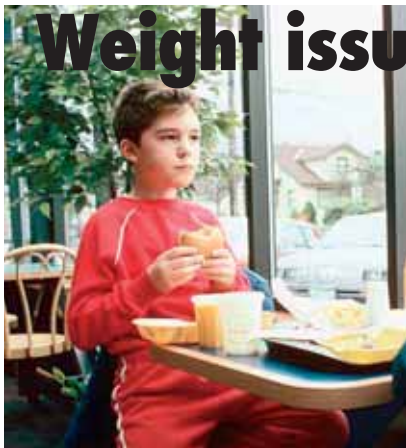
By portraying the 'ideal' woman as slim, the media have been targeted as one of the main causes of our weight-obsessed society. But the causes of eating disorders are as varied as the people who develop them.

Rather than one factor, it's a complex interaction of biological, social, cultural and

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Weight issues: walking a thin line



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psychological issues that leads to the onset of eating disorders.

According to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD) in the US, not only girls are at risk – boys are, too: 20 to 30% of younger anorexics are male.

So, how do you tell if your child's in danger of developing bulimia or anorexia?

Warning signs

Bulimia involves binge eating, usually in secret, followed by forced vomiting. However, bulimics are not necessarily thin.

Watch out for compulsive exercising, an abnormal preoccupation with food, broken blood vessels in the eyes, swollen salivary glands and the abuse of laxatives, diuretics, diet pills or drugs to induce vomiting.

The Anorexia and Bulimia Family Support Group maintains that anorexia is diagnosed after weight loss to below 25% of a

child's normal body weight. There's a refusal to maintain a healthy weight and eating is rigidly controlled. Food, body shape and weight are major fixations.

Psychologically, bulimics and anorexics are affected by mood swings, depression, low self-esteem, shame and guilt.

Early detection

Physically, both diseases can cause malnutrition, dehydration, heart, kidney and liver damage, ruptured stomach, tears of the esophagus and tooth/gum erosion.

Although this picture appears bleak, people can and do recover fully from anorexia and bulimia. While preventing their onset is obviously ideal, being alert to changes in a child's view of food, eating and appearance can result in detecting an eating disorder early enough to stop it from becoming a major health risk.

Knowing the facts and getting expert help can prevent misery and illness – and even death.

Helpful contacts

- ▶ Anorexia and Bulimia Family Support Group (011) 640 1965.
- ▶ The Mental Health Information Centre of South Africa (021) 938 9229
- ▶ ANAD website: www.anad.org



Smoked, swallowed, snorted Drug use is

Research conducted by the Medical Research Council (MRC) in the Western Cape shows that drug usage has risen dramatically. One in four youngsters is using drugs today – yet nine years ago, the figure was one youth in 20. These figures apply to the Western Cape, but drugs are everywhere.

Of all drugs, heroin is of special concern. Not only is it highly addictive, it's 'cut' or mixed with other substances – which have included arsenic and rat poison. This is hard for the user to detect since heroin is usually injected.

Schools

The use of 'tik' – also extremely addictive – has soared. Known as speed, meth or crystal, it's a white crystalline powder which is smoked after being heated



What's in your medicine cabinet? Pills and cough mixtures, over-the-counter drugs

Message from Joe

Three topics we look at in this issue are of great concern: drugs, suicide and eating disorders. They're all complex, with no 'quick fix'. While we can't protect children from everything, we can educate ourselves on issues that affect our youth. Being alert to any sign of trouble can prevent a lot of anguish down the line. Personally, I'd rather quietly verge on the point of paranoia than be oblivious to a child's problems.

As moms and dads, we're entitled to make a career out of being 'nosy' – to know where our children are, who they're with and what they're doing – day and night.

Despite what we do to earn a living, parenting is still the most important job there is.

Joe Araujo



JOE ARAUJO: Executive Director Girls & Boys Town SA

d: more good, clean fun!

Whether they're couch potatoes or computer fiends, children who spend most of their time indoors are not getting the exercise they need – and they're missing out on the best fun of all ... the kind that's spontaneous, healthy and free!

Ideas to help you tempt youngsters into action include:

Animal antics

If you don't have dogs at home that need walking, bathing or breathless games of 'catch', ask if your child wants to volunteer at a local animal shelter. Dozens of pets there are desperate for a walk, grooming and attention. Or contact the stables, to see if

they need a hand with the horses.

Washing the car may sound like hard work – but mention the hosepipe and their choice of CD in the car stereo and you have the start of an enticing proposition.

When last did your child (and you) revel in mud? No mud in sight? Make some – and make a mess!

Don't forget other simple pleasures like dancing, creating a vegetable patch from scratch, flying a kite, beach walks, jogging or walking together, painting and DIY projects. Enjoy!



Magic ... and a lot of stirring

If you think you know what your child thinks of moms, you're in for a surprise. Consider these frank responses from primary school children, when they were questioned on the subject of mothers ...

How did God make moms?

♥ He used dirt, just like for the rest of us.

♥ Magic plus some super-powers and a lot of stirring.

♥ God made my mom just the same like He made me.

He just used bigger parts.

What are moms made of?

♥ God makes mothers out of clouds and angel hair and everything nice in the world, but just one dab of mean.

♥ They had to get their start from men's bones. Then they mostly use string, I think.

Why did God make mothers?

♥ To help us get out of there when we were born.

Why did your mom marry your dad?

♥ My dad makes the best spaghetti in the world. And my mom eats a lot.

♥ She got too old to do anything else with him.

With acknowledgement to James Clarke, Stoep Talk.

sniffed, 'spiked' widespread

in a lightbulb, from which the metal threading has been removed.

According to police sources, much selling of drugs happens at school, with children as young as 10 trying them out.

Healthy example

Preventing drug use is ideal. Tips for parents include:

- Supervise teen activities and set an example in the healthy use of leisure time. Know where your children are.
- Listen to your child's problems;

work through them together. Encourage open communication about drugs and other issues.

- Help children deal with peer pressure. Meet their friends and the parents.
- Learn about the paraphernalia attached to drugs.

icine chest? Diet
ure are just two
gs prone to abuse.



General indications of drug use include:

♦ Change in friends, social activities; loss of interest in usual pursuits.

♦ Mood swings: can be grumpy one moment and happy the next.

♦ Red eyes or runny nose; change in sleeping habits – awake at night, sleepy during the day.

♦ To finance their drug habit, addicts will steal. If items start 'going missing' at home, theft is often a major warning sign.

♦ Burning of incense to disguise the smell of dagga, dagga pips (small, dry seeds), cigarette rolling papers and unsmoked cigarettes with the filter broken off are some tell-tale signs of dagga use.

Get help now

SANCA (011) 482 1070

Narcanon (011) 622 3341 (021)511 5177

Girls & Boys Town Hotline 0861 58-58-58

Increased suicide amongst youth

What makes a child as young as 10 years take his life? What problem could seem so insurmountable?

Suicide amongst children and teenagers has increased in South Africa – as much as nine percent of the deaths of youngsters is attributable to suicide.

These alarming findings were released after a 25-year study conducted by Professor Lourens Schlebusch of the Department of Behavioural Medicine at the Nelson R. Mandela School of Medicine, University of Natal.

According to Schlebusch, the greatest factors precipitating suicide in children and teenagers are academic-related problems, incest, stress, psychological disorders (especially depression) and family problems.

Risk factors

He goes further by stating that certain factors increase the risk of suicide amongst children and teenagers. These include exposure to family violence, child abuse, access to firearms and substance abuse – especially alcohol abuse.

Parents need to be aware of

signs of depression in teenagers. A period of sadness or withdrawal from friends and family shouldn't be dismissed as a 'phase'.

Sleeping too little or too much, changes in weight or appetite, anxious or sad moods and a decline in school marks are all warning signs.

If you suspect that a child may be suicidal, there are steps you can take. First, get help by contacting your doctor or a mental health professional.

Offer support by listening to the child and avoiding criticism.

Keep abreast of issues that have an influence on youth in general and stay connected to what's happening in your own children's lives.

Helpful contacts

- South African Depression and Anxiety Group (011) 783-1474 or e-mail info@anxiety.org.za
- Girls & Boys Town National Hotline: 0861 58-58-58
- LifeLine 24-hour crisis number: 0861 322 322



The traumatic loss of parents, depression, the despair of poverty, testing HIV-positive, overwhelming pressure – all can tragically lead to suicide.

Teach children to be street-wise!

Roads are one of the biggest hazards to child safety in South Africa. Drivers are the victims in only 15% of road deaths. Almost 40% of victims are pedestrians.

Children aged five to nine years of age are the most vulnerable. Our road fatality rate amongst the youth is far higher than the world rate.

Children's physical size makes them less visible to motorists. And because they are shorter, their heads and other vital organs are more likely to be badly injured in an accident. Also, young children are unable to judge speed effectively.

Ensure that children know how to cross the street safely and teach them to exercise great care when near any roads.

In cars, make sure that everyone buckles up and that young children are securely placed within a specially designed car seat.

If I had another chance ...

If I had to raise my child over again,
I'd finger-paint more and point my finger less.
I'd do less correcting and more connecting.
I'd take my eyes off my watch and watch with my eyes. I would care to know less and know to care more.
I'd take more hikes and fly more kites.
I'd stop playing serious and seriously play.
I'd run through more fields and gaze at more stars.
I'd do more hugging and less tugging.
I would be less firm and affirm more.
I'd build self-esteem first and the house later.
I'd teach less about the love of power and more about the power of love.

Author unknown.