

## Worksheet 2.6: Externalising the illness, part one: how have Edi's personality traits changed through ED?

Externalising the illness is a separation technique whereby the carers recognise that their loved one has two sides, the healthy part and the ED part. Carers often say that they feel like there are two people in one body and that they realise that they can get sucked into a dialogue with the illness.

Think about your loved one's personality traits and character strengths and weaknesses. Have any of these traits appeared, increased or reduced since they've had an eating disorder? Write down some examples of how things are for your loved one.

An example is given in the table. It is often the case that a passion for something, such as football, can turn into an obsession for repetitive exercise.

**Table 2.4** Personality trait changes since the eating disorder has emerged

Loved one	Constant	Edi
Passionate	Ambitious	Obsessive

Many of these traits can fit under more than one heading and sometimes only small changes in behaviour can seem really alarming. It is easy for carers to forget that their loved one, even with Edi, has many good traits still evident. A very unwell person can still be loving, caring, creative, clever, determined, etc. Also, the characteristics that are being masked by Edi, at the moment, are still all there. Once the ED traits are decreased/reduced, the old traits will naturally reappear and some new beneficial personality traits might also start to shine through. For example, a young person might become more challenging, in a positive way, and less of a pleaser, as they come through the recovery process. This process has been called post-traumatic growth.