

Worksheet 6.3: Siblings and peers

See *SBC*, Chapter 10, pp. 143–8.

Siblings whose brother or sister develops a serious illness can step forward and take a very positive caring role, walking alongside Edi at her pace and communicating in a non-judgemental, often light-hearted and compassionate way. Siblings can also be very matter-of-fact when noticing the effects of the illness in a way that parents might struggle with.

On the other hand, siblings often report feeling angry, confused, upset, left out, guilty and resentful when an eating disorder comes to visit, especially if they are not being included in any of the family discussions about their sibling's illness and care programme. This can need careful management in an age-appropriate way. Education about eating disorders will help them to understand and develop more empathy. Older siblings might decide to keep away for a while, but younger siblings will have no choice but to face up to the issues if they are living in the same family setting. A family forum can help to ensure that everyone within the family unit has a chance to have a say, and to help ensure everyone is singing from the same song-sheet.

Imagine you are one of Edi's siblings. How might they be feeling? Write your thoughts here or on the flipchart.

In pairs or as a group create a menu of options of things you could do to help siblings to process some of these emotions and to reclaim a more normal sibling relationship with Edi and also reclaim some of their own normality. Write these ideas down here or on the flipchart in a different colour.

Siblings are an important part of the herd of elephants and their relationship with Edi will be important throughout the duration of the illness and long after Edi has recovered. Siblings can benefit from attending the skills workshops if they are mature enough and keen to do so.

Key messages:

- Siblings will really appreciate some dedicated time with Mum and/or Dad away from the eating disorder.
- Siblings may need to know they are not to blame.
- Siblings might want to help while also knowing they are not expected to help all the time.
- Siblings need space to let off steam and know it is OK to be angry, scared, tired, resentful, etc.
- Siblings can be really amazing at helping Edi to try out new things.
- Siblings can be great at distractions around mealtimes (games, chat around reality TV, social media etc.).
- Siblings can role model that life goes on outside ED (cinema, shopping, walk, trip to the trampoline park, meeting in a cafe, concerts etc.).
- Siblings communicate in a different way and this can at times be really helpful especially with peer type issues.
- For families that have access to Family Based Therapy – The Maudsley Approach, siblings are encouraged to support by making sure they are engaging Edi in activities that siblings would typically engage in, such as watching a movie online, posting family news on Facebook, etc. It is not the sibling's task to make any effort to help with the tasks of re-feeding as this is the parents' key task.
- Siblings might benefit from some one-to-one counselling and/or family therapy and/or where to go with worries and fears.
- Some common questions siblings might have:
 - Who should I talk to about the effect the illness is having on me and my family?
 - What should I do when my sibling is upset?
 - What should I do when my parents are upset?
 - What if I see my sibling doing something dangerous?
 - Is it OK not to be OK?
 - Is it OK to have a break?