

Eating Disorders Awareness in the Public School Setting

Authorization

Code of Virginia, Section 22.1-273.2, Parent Educational Information Regarding Eating Disorders. The *Code of Virginia* requires that each school board shall annually provide parent educational information regarding eating disorders for pupils in grades five through twelve.

Summary. Virginia Public Schools shall provide educational information to parents of students in grades five through twelve on an annual basis.

Overview

According to the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA, 2013):

Eating disorders are real, complex, and devastating conditions that can have serious consequences for health, productivity, and relationships. They are not a fad, phase, or lifestyle choice. Eating disorders are serious, potentially life-threatening conditions that affect a person's emotional and physical health.

Hill, Reid, Morgan & Lacy (2010) further report, "Despite relatively low prevalence from a public health perspective, eating disorders have a high mortality and morbidity that can be drastically reduced with effective treatment."

In a policy statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003), it is reported that the numbers of children with eating disorders has increased steadily since the 1950s.

The purpose of this section of the Guidelines is to provide best-practice guidance for developing local policy for distributing educational information to parents/guardians regarding eating disorders.

Recommendations

In compliance with the *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-273.2, each school board shall adopt policies to provide parent educational information on eating disorders for students in grades five (5) through twelve (12) on an annual basis.

Educational Material. Early detection and treatment of eating disorders offer the best opportunity for positive outcomes and minimal long-term consequences. Educational materials should include, at a minimum, the following science-based information:

- A description of eating disorders

- A description of how eating disorders are identified
- A statement describing why it is important to screen for eating disorders (early detection and treatment)
- A description of eating disorders screening
- Information on referral for assessment, diagnosis and treatment
- A description of potential treatment

Local policy should include the timeline for dissemination of information on an annual basis. There must be a clear delineation of such health information from other administrative documentation. Educational materials should be provided to parents/guardians using typical communication methods for the local school division. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Information included in the student handbook
- A letter home in the report card
- Information posted to the school Web site or telephone notification
- A weekly folder
- A PTA/PTO newsletter
- E-mail

Optional Screening Program

Research shows (Austin, Ziyadeh, Forman, Prokop, Keliher and Jacobs, 2008) that population screening for eating disorders in high schools may identify at-risk students who may benefit from early diagnosis and intervention. Screening for eating disorders may ensure that early cases are detected and referred for appropriate follow up. However, population screening may have possible harmful effects for the vulnerable students involved. If screening is conducted, it should be done with a validated measure that is appropriate for the target age group. Should the local school division decide to conduct eating disorders screening, the following guidance is provided.

Screening program. The tool used for screening should be evidence-based and age appropriate. Local policy should clearly indicate which grade levels are screened on an annual basis. As required by the *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-273.2, the division must provide educational information to parents/guardians of students in grades five through twelve regardless of whether or not optional screening is conducted.

Personnel and training. Training needs will be directly related to the screening tool selected. Training for school personnel should be conducted by qualified licensed practitioners. Training should be conducted before the initial screening and as needed in subsequent years. School staff most qualified to perform eating disorders screening include psychologists, social workers, counselors and school nurses. Confidentiality of student health information shall be included in

the training session. Because of the sensitive nature of eating disorder screening, volunteers should not be utilized.

Written notice of screening. School divisions conducting optional eating disorders screening shall provide written notice to parents/guardians a minimum of ten (10) business days prior to screening. The written notice shall include:

- The purpose of screening
- Information indicating when the screening will occur
- The procedure for notifying parents/guardians of students who are identified as needing follow-up for further testing/screening
- The procedure for parents/guardians to opt-out of screening for their child

Referral and Follow-Up. School divisions will determine the threshold for referral based upon the specific tool used for screening. Parents/guardians of all students who are identified as possibly “at risk” according to the screening tool will be notified by school personnel conducting the screening. Parents/guardians should be encouraged to schedule a follow-up evaluation for their children with their health care provider and/or a qualified eating disorders specialist. School divisions may request a notice of receipt from the parent, indicating the receipt of the referral and plans for follow-up care.

Documentation. Documentation of screening and referral should be maintained in a confidential manner according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Resources

Organizations

Academy for Eating Disorders (AED)

<http://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/information/help-overcome-eating-disorders/non-profits-organizations/aed>

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Eating-Disorders.aspx>

American Psychological Association (APA)

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/eating.aspx>

Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders (F.E.A.S.T.)

www.feast-ed.org

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders

<http://www.anad.org>

National Association of School Nurses (NASN)

<http://www.nasn.org/PolicyAdvocacy/PositionPapersandReports/NASNPositionStatementsFullView/tabid/462/ArticleId/39/Overweight-and-Obesity-in-Youth-in-Schools-The-Role-of-the-School-Nurse-Revised-2011>

National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)

<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/eating-disorders/index.shtml>

Educational Tools

Academy for Eating Disorders (includes videos for parents)

http://www.aedweb.org/Eating_Disorders_Information.htm

Eating Disorders Information Network Tips for School Staff

<http://myedin.org/more-on-eating-disorders/school-personnel/>

Medical Guidelines for Physicians

[E.D. Guide to Medical Management](#)

National Association of Social Workers

<http://www.helpstartshere.org/mind-and-spirit/eating-disorders>

NEDA Coach & Athletic Trainer Toolkit

<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/coach-trainer>

NEDA Educators Toolkit

<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/educator-toolkit>

NEDA Parent Toolkit

<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/parent-toolkit>

Parenting During Eating Disorder Recovery

<http://feast-ed.org/TheFacts/Parentingduringrecovery.aspx>

References

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