

probably make it easier and safer for her to consider getting help. By giving her information and being supportive you are enabling her to see and consider alternatives to her present situation. The safer she feels in considering these options, the sooner she will do so. Staying in treatment settings that are not meeting her needs may further retard her healing. It sometimes takes years for someone to start dealing with an eating disorder. Family, friends and health professionals need to be as patient and supportive as possible.

- *It is important if you are trying to support a girl or woman with an eating disorder that you examine your own attitudes about body image and size, so that you do not convey any fat prejudice to the woman, or exacerbate her desire to be thin. If she raises issues around feeling fat and needing to lose weight, instead of saying something like, "Don't worry, you'll never get fat", you might suggest that she start to explore what it is she fears about being fat, and what she feels she can achieve by being thin. You might ask her if her food restriction is making her happier and helping her to achieve what she wants, or if it's creating more problems. Encourage her to think about the pressures on women in our society to be thin, and whether this is such a healthy ideal. If you feel comfortable doing so, think about the ways you personally are affected by pressures to be thin. Share these with her in a supportive manner. It will help you to understand her struggles, and she might feel less shameful or uncomfortable talking about her situation.*
- *Seeing someone you love struggling with an eating disorder might make you feel very angry, frustrated and helpless. However, it is important that you do not blame her for her struggle. Try to understand her eating disorder as a coping strategy for dealing with painful emotions or experiences. Despite the grief the eating disorder causes her and those around her, it may be hard to let it go. Be prepared to have your concerns met with denial or anger. She will need to deal with her situation at her own pace.*
- *Finally, it is important that you do not take on the role of a therapist. Do only what you feel comfortable with and capable of. It is often helpful for family members or friends to get some support for themselves if they feel the need. You need to take care of yourself while dealing with your friend/family member.*

From the National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC)

The **National Eating Disorder Information Centre** (416-340-4156 or 1-866-NEDIC-20; www.nedic.ca) has an extensive list of services including therapists, dietitians, and general practitioners across Canada who work with individuals who have food, weight and shape preoccupation and eating disorders. They also have resources for family and friends, such as support and lobby groups and family therapists.

The **Body Image Coalition of Peel** maintains the *Directory of Resources and Services for the Prevention and Treatment of Eating Disorders* for residents of the Region of Peel. It can be accessed at www.bodyimagecoalition.org.

