

A is for Acceptance

Your participation in the process of your loved one's recovery will be facilitated and enhanced by your attention to a version of the famous "serenity prayer" associated with recovery from alcoholism. Specifically, it is important to learn what you cannot control (and are misguided in trying to control), to learn and practice what you can control, and to develop the wisdom to know/learn the difference.

This sounds simple, but it is not, at least not at first. In fact, it requires courage. We define "courage" as being committed to doing what needs to be done for your loved one and yourself, and sticking to that commitment even though you are anxious, uncertain, embarrassed, and/or angry. In fact, we feel strongly that it is important for family members to model true courage, so that their loved one may draw the strength to cope with and work with her or his own anxieties and doubts. And true courage is defined by a combination of anxiety and decisive, caring action.¹

What you cannot control. You cannot control the fact that your loved one has a serious illness. You cannot control how your loved one thinks, what your loved one says, what your loved one does. You cannot control the biological, neurological, or genetic causes for eating disorders.

What you can control. You can control how you react to a very serious illness—with compassion, understanding, patience, courage, and consistency. You can learn as much as possible about the causes and treatments for eating disorders.^{2,3,4,5,6} This will help you be better armed to be active in treatment and be an advocate for cultural change. You can learn how to distract your loved one in a healthy way when they need it. You can offer support, set limits, and maintain your own self-care. You can learn to control your reactions to eating disorders.

Support, practice, and "the wisdom to know the difference."

1 Rachman, S. J. (1978). *Fear and courage*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.

2 Herrin, M., & Matsumoto, N. (2007). *The parent's guide to eating disorders: Supporting self-esteem, healthy eating, & positive body image at home* (2nd ed.). Carlsbad, CA: Gürze.

3 Katzman & Pinhas, (2005), *Help for Eating Disorders: A Parent's Guide to Symptoms, Causes and Treatments*. Toronto: Robert Rose Incorporated.

4 Lock, J., & Le Grange, D. (2005). *Help your teen beat an eating disorder*. New York: Guilford.

5 Natenshon, A. H. (1999). *When your child has an eating disorder: A step-by-step workbook for parents and other caregivers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

6 Treasure, J. (1997). *Anorexia nervosa: A survival guide for families, friends and sufferers*. East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press.