Are Eating Disorders Self-Harm?

Eating disorders are complex mental illnesses that impact at least 9% of the population worldwide. Second to opioid overdoses, they are among the deadliest mental illnesses, causing one death every 52 minutes.

Are eating disorders considered self-harm? Let's get into what you need to know

Understanding Eating Disorders

Eating disorders aren't just about weight or food. Often, they are about power, control, and compulsion. Eating disorders can emerge from themes of trauma, perfectionism, impulsivity, and neuroticism. Common eating disorders include:

Anorexia

Anorexia tends to be the most well-known disorder, and it refers to the extreme restriction of food. People with anorexia have an intense fear of gaining weight, and they eat very little due to this fear.

Bulimia

Like anorexia, people with bulimia also have an intense fear of gaining weight. However, people with bulimia engage in patterns of bingeing food, often after a period of restriction. Then, they engage in purging behaviors like vomiting, compulsive exercise, or laxative abuse to attempt to counteract the binge effect.

Binge Eating Disorder

People with binge eating disorders eat large amounts of food in a short amount of time. They perceive a loss of control during these binges. Unlike bulimia, they do not purge afterward.

How Are Eating Disorders Considered Self-Harm?

Eating disorder behaviors (extreme restriction, bingeing on large amounts of food, vomiting, misusing laxatives, compulsive exercise) are punitive and dangerous. If unchecked, they can result in severe medical and psychiatric issues.

Eating disorders tend to be more of an inadvertent method of self-harm. Often, hurting oneself isn't the primary focus—weight loss, body image, or control is. However, the person uses self-harm to attempt to satisfy that need.

If your child is engaging in self-harm, Idaho Youth Ranch can help. Learn more now.