

A close-up, profile view of a young Black man with short, dark, curly hair. He is looking down and to the right with a thoughtful expression. He is wearing a light blue t-shirt under a white cardigan. The background is blurred, showing other people in a classroom or meeting setting.

How to help  
students who are  
struggling **with**  
**anxiety and loss**  
**of appetite**

# How to help students who are struggling with anxiety and loss of appetite

Supporting students who are struggling with both anxiety and disordered eating can be challenging, but it's essential to provide them with care, education, understanding, and appropriate information.

Here are some steps to help students in this situation:



## Open Communication:

Approach the student with care and compassion, expressing concern about their well-being. Let them know you're there to listen and support them without judgment. Create a safe and private space for them to talk about their feelings and experiences.



## Encourage Professional Help:

Suggest that the student seek professional support, such as a therapist, counsellor, or a mental health specialist who has experience with anxiety, and issues around eating. Offer to help them find local resources or counselling services available through the school or community.



## Provide information:

You could gently explain the potential side effects of under eating if the anxiety continues, and if unaddressed how this could affect both their mental and physical health. For example, skipping meals and not eating enough can cause blood sugar imbalances, which can make anxiety worse. Long periods of restrictive eating can slow down the metabolism.



## Provide education around the importance of eating regularly:

Encourage a balanced approach to nutrition and exercise. Emphasize the importance of nourishing their body and being physically active for overall well-being.

Explain why eating regularly is crucial for their health. See some examples you can use below:

**Metabolism:** Eating at regular intervals helps maintain a healthy metabolism. Skipping meals or undereating can slow down the metabolism and may lead to weight gain in the long run.

**Hormonal Balance:** Eating regularly helps regulate hormones, including those that control appetite and satiety. Irregular eating patterns can disrupt these hormonal signals, potentially leading to overeating or undereating.

**Prevent overeating:** When teenagers skip meals or go too long without eating, they may become extremely hungry and overeat when they finally do eat. Regular meals and snacks help control appetite and prevent excessive food consumption.

**Prevent disordered Eating:** Irregular eating patterns can contribute to unhealthy relationships with food and may increase the risk of developing eating disorders. Regular, balanced eating habits can help reduce this risk.

**Cognitive Function:** Proper nutrition through regular meals, supports cognitive function and helps teenagers perform well in school. Skipping meals can lead to difficulty concentrating and may lower academic performance.

**Emotional Well-Being:** Stable blood sugar levels from regular eating can help regulate mood and reduce irritability and mood swings, which are common in teenagers. It also becomes harder to regulate emotions (fear, anxiety and anger) when our brain is lacking in sufficient energy supply.



### Avoid Triggering Language:

Be mindful of the language used around food, dieting, and body image. Avoid making comments that may trigger their anxiety or eating issues. e.g. 'I haven't eaten all day', 'Are you going to eat all of that?'

### Create a safe place in the school where students feel comfortable to eat:

Some students may be concerned around others judging them about their food intake or various comments around food. It is important to create a safe place where the students feel comfortable to eat.



Suggest some quick snack ideas they can bring to school with them, for example:

