

Reassurance Seeking

Reassurance seeking is a pattern of behaviour common to lots of psychological problems including eating and body image issues, anxiety and phobias. This diagram specifically refers to body image however the principles equally apply to other areas where eating disorder sufferers seek reassurance, such as portion size, rituals and perfectionism.

Sometimes reassurance seeking can be helpful and can relieve anxiety and distress. However more often than not reassurance seeking actually increases distress and results in an insatiable desire for more reassurance. Offering reassurance merely provides a band aid solution, relieving anxiety in the moment but growing it in the longer term.

The solution? Stop offering reassurance.

Tips for stopping: a management plan

Firstly, try to help your loved one understand the role that reassurance seeking plays in maintaining anxiety.

Secondly, let them know that you will no longer be offering reassurance when they ask for it. It is important that they understand why. It is also important to engage everybody who offers reassurance in this plan to ensure reassurance is not sought from other parties.

Thirdly, follow through on the plan **CONSISTANTLY**. Suggestions of things you could say when reassurance is sought:

“This is not a helpful discussion so I am not going to respond. Lets focus on X instead”

“You already know the answer to that question. I

am not going to answer it”

“If [worst case scenario- based on what they are seeking reassurance for] is true, how could you cope with it?”

“It sounds like you are feeling anxious at the moment. How could you deal with it in more helpful way?”

“What do you think?”

“Its more important we keep focused on the future and what you want to achieve in life”

“Theres so much more to you than food and weight. Lets talk about people and the world rather than getting stuck into these unhelpful things”

Fourthly, reinforce the positives. This includes providing positive feedback regarding their capacity to manage their anxiety, praising non reassurance seeking behavior and ignoring anxious behavior.

