

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My ten-year-old daughter is already worried about her weight. After reading that article in *People magazine* about anorexia I got worried. Am I over-reacting?

ANSWER: You should be concerned. She may not be anorexic, but she might be establishing a pattern of thinking and acting that could be dangerous. **Educate yourself about anorexia and know your child's personality type. Be prepared to have some heart-to-heart talks with her about her faith and self-image.** Don't underestimate the power of your relationship with your child.

We live in a society that worships the external. We try to tell our children that it is what's inside that matters, but glamour magazines, Hollywood, movies etc. all tell her that what matters is how she looks. Often, parents reinforce this message by being obsessed with fashion and fitness themselves. When we buy into this image, it is not surprising that our children will too.

Anorexia is a **"control" addiction** where the person is obsessed with mastering some aspect of her life. Often these people have personality characteristics that would be considered "perfectionistic" or "Type A". If you have ever dieted, recall the satisfaction you felt when you succeeded in resisting the temptation to eat. Multiply that feeling of satisfaction by a thousand and you can understand a little of the motivation of the anorexic. Often, food is the one area where the person feels she has control. Some points to ponder:

(I will use "she" since more than 90% of anorexics are female., and there is limited data regarding anorexia in males.)

1. About 20% of anorexics die from this disorder. The medical effects are numerous and overlapping.
2. Anorexia is best treated and cured by a professional TEAM. Including an M.D., nutritionist, psychotherapist, support group, and family. Often, in-patient treatment is advised.
3. Anorexia overflows into the theological. What does the anorexic's obsession with control say about her trust relationship with God? (She can't relinquish control to God.) How does the anorexic see life? (As something she must try to control...or at least a piece of it.) How can she feel close to a loving God? (She reasons: How can God love me? I am unlovable.) Where is her "treasure"? (The most important thing to her is the addiction.)
4. The self-image of an anorexic is distorted. She does not see herself the way others see her.
5. The anorexic cycles through periods of (1)depression, (2)ritual and expectation, (3)contentment and ecstasy, (4)remorse and repentance like any other addict. Consider the theological implications of this cycle.
6. There are two types of Anorexia Nervosa: (1) Restricting type, where the person loses weight through dieting, fasting and excessive exercise. (2) Binge-Eating/Purging, where the person uses self-induced vomiting, laxatives, diuretics or enemas.

7. The risk of anorexia increases among first degree blood relatives.

8. The median age for onset is 17.

The treatment and cure of Anorexia Nervosa is a difficult and lengthy journey. The anorexic needs the prayers and deep involvement of her family and friends as well as a team of professionals. Talk openly and knowledgeably about this disorder with your young daughters. Addictions are traps and some people are far more susceptible than others.

Jack Lipski, M.A.

SOTHCS Counselor

(Permission to copy granted for personal use only.)