

[National Eating Disorders Awareness](#) Week 2018 is observed Monday February 26 through Sunday March 4, with a goal of educating and helping those living with an eating disorder, as well as friends and family members who want to help.

“There is a lot that is still not known about eating disorders, and contrary to belief, there are a lot of people that struggle with it,” said Kathy Franczak, OSF HealthCare Eating Disorder Program Counselor. “So when we have an awareness week, more people can be reached, more people can understand what an eating disorder is, then we have the ability to help more people and they can get the treatment that they need.”

If you believe a friend or family member might be suffering from an eating disorder, the following are some signs to look for:

- Change in personality
- Change in behavior towards food, weight, or body image
- An increased focus on intense behaviors or becoming obsessed with a certain way of eating
- Simple dieting that snowballs and a person finds hard to stop
- Food rituals such as cutting food into small pieces or chewing something over and over
- Food is missing, yet you never see it being consumed (may indicate binge eating)
- Unhealthy amounts of exercise, even when sick
- A person going to the bathroom immediately after eating

However approaching a person about a possible eating disorder can be an intimidating task. If you are concerned that someone might have an eating disorder, Franczak suggests speaking with them using "I" statements (I am concerned about...), without placing any blame on the person you are trying to help.

“Shame and guilt are some of those core issues that a lot of people have when they have an eating disorder,” said Franczak. “The first step, I would say, is number one: don’t ignore it. I think that people think, ‘Oh, it’s just a phase, it’ll go away.’ Trust your gut and really address that person, but do so in a very caring way, in a very compassionate way, tell them that you love and care about them, but then say, ‘I’m worried about you because, this is why.’”

Another thing to be aware of: Franczak says many people have body insecurity issues, but off-handed comments can do more damage than we think. She advises that before a person complains about their body or weight, they should stop and think what kind of impact those words can have.

“With summer coming up, with New Year’s resolutions that we just met, with Thanksgiving and Christmas, people will talk about, ‘I was bad today,’ or ‘Oh I have to go on a diet tomorrow,’ and I think that’s something that as a culture we have to be aware of the kind of language we use. It can trigger your son or daughter, it can trigger a family member, it can trigger your spouse,” said Franczak.

There are programs to help. The OSF Saint Francis Medical Center [Eating Disorders Program](#) offers outpatient counseling, an intensive outpatient program, and a partial hospitalization program. Information is available by calling 309.655.2738.

There is also a weekly support group on the OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center Campus in Peoria. The group meets on Wednesday evenings from 6:16 - 7:30 PM in the lower level of the Allied

Building (320 E Armstrong Ave., Peoria, IL 61603). There are two groups that meet – people struggling with eating disorders and those who support them. The meetings are free, and no registration is required,

Additional resources can be found through the National Eating Disorders Association [website](#).