

To whom this may concern:

My name is _____ and I am _____.

I am writing to ask you to exempt my child from _____. _____ has a history of an eating disorder/disordered eating. At this time, it would not be conducive to _____ recovery to complete these assignments. I am very aware that _____ will need to complete an assignment, and we are asking for the opportunity for an alternative assignment or class work that does not jeopardize their recovery.

As you consider this topic for the other students, we hope you will consider the messages these assignments are sending. While school assignments do not cause eating disorders, they can be a trigger for vulnerable students. Messages involving “good” and “bad” foods can create an environment where children may become fearful of food, and feel shame and confusion about the food their families feed them. It is also important to remember that nutrition and health needs can be very individual. We suggest that school lessons not include messages about weight loss and weight maintenance being positive or weight gain being negative. Children are supposed to be gaining weight - it is a sign of health and development. When school nutrition lessons convey the message, whether blatant or implied, that weight gain is bad, we teach our children that their growing bodies are bad.

Dieting is a risk factor in the development of an eating disorder. How we talk about food and bodies in school can have an impact on how our children view their bodies and how they approach food throughout their lifetime.

Eating disorders have the second highest mortality rate of any mental illness, with one person dying every 52-minutes.¹ **At some hospitals, medical admissions for eating disorders for adolescents have doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic.**² In addition to that frightening statistic, this is also the reality our children live in:

- 81% of ten year olds are afraid of being fat.³
- 35% of 5 year old girls are already on a diet.⁴
- Awareness of dieting as strategies for weight loss emerges as young as 3-years-old, and significantly increases from 3- to 5-years-old.⁵

I would like to make you aware of several resources that may be helpful in bringing information about inclusivity to our school.

The National Alliance for Eating Disorders (The Alliance) is the leading national eating disorder nonprofit organization providing education, referrals and support for all eating disorders. Sunny Side Up Nutrition is a free resource and podcast for parents and educators about developmentally appropriate nutrition education, family feeding and raising children to be competent eaters.

The Alliance and Sunny Side Up Nutrition would be wonderful allies in building a body positive culture and curriculum for our school that would support students' physical and mental growth. Both organizations are also available to present training to your staff and faculty, as well as referral and support services.

I look forward to the school year and I'd love the opportunity to speak to you more about this. Thank you!

Warmly,

1 Deloitte Access Economics. The Social and Economic Cost of Eating Disorders in the United States of America: A Report for the Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders and the Academy for Eating Disorders. June 2020. Available at: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped/report-economic-costs-of-eating-disorders/>.

2 Otto AK, Jary JM, Sturza J, et al. Medical Admissions Among Adolescents With Eating Disorders During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Pediatrics*. 2021;148(4):e2021052201. doi:10.1542/peds.2021-052201

3 Collins, M.E. Body figure perceptions and preferences among pre-adolescent children. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 1991 March; 10(2):199-208.

4 Damiano SR, et al. Dietary restraint of 5-year-old girls: Associations with internalization of the thin ideal and maternal, media, and peer influences: 5-YEAR-OLD GIRLS' DIETARY RESTRAINT. *Int J Eat Disord*. 2015;48(8):1166-1169. doi:10.1002/eat.22432

5 Rodgers RF, et al. "Stop eating lollies and do lots of sports": a prospective qualitative study of the development of children's awareness of dietary restraint and exercise to lose weight. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act*. 2015;12(1):155. doi:10.1186/s12966-015-0318-x

Resources



National Alliance for Eating Disorders

www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com

www.findEDHelp.com



www.sunnysideupnutrition.com

www.sunnysideupnutrition.com/podcast