**Eating Disorder Awareness**

Children and adolescents are constantly being flooded with media’s pressure to conform to the “ideal” body type. Although most people don’t have culture’s unrealistic idea of the ideal body type, the pressure to conform along with other factors can set the stage for the development of eating disorders.  An eating disorder is defined as a psychiatric illness characterized by an all-consuming desire to be thin and intense fear of weight gain. They can have serious consequences for health, productivity, and relationships. The causes of eating disorders can be genetic as well as environmental and can be impacted by both internal (ex. depression, low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction) and external forces (ex. societal emphasis, family encouragement, need for control, friends).

Symptoms/Signs to look for:

* Weight loss/fluctuation in a short period
* Abdominal pain
* Feeling full or bloated
* Feeling faint or cold
* Dry hair, skin, dehydration, blue hands/feet
* Dieting or chaotic food intake
* Pretending to eat/throwing away food
* Excercising for long periods
* Constantly talking about food
* Frequent trips to the bathroom
* Complaints about appearance (feeling or looking fat)
* Sadness or feelings of worthlessness
* Perfectionist attitude
* Family conflict

Get your child help if you think they have an eating disorder. Once diagnosed, a combination of medical and psychological help is needed for optimal results. The prognosis is best when treated early.

Here are some things you can do at home to help prevent eating disorders:

* **Set a good example** – eat a nutritious variety of foods, exercise regularly, and demonstrate a healthy lifestyle
* **Don’t diet and encourage your child to diet**– provide nutritious food at home, teach your child to listen to what their body needs, and stress the idea of developing good healthy habits
* **Encourage exercise and play** – limit screen time, encourage movement activities
* **Support your child at their weight**
* **Encourage your child to become active in something he/she enjoys**
* **Evaluate school lunch** – make sure there are healthy options, pack a nutritious lunch

Resources:

https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/

https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/eating-disorders/index.shtml

https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Eating-Disorders