

Youth-2-Pray: When my friends face Anorexia

Anorexia is a serious and potentially life threatening disorder. The exact cause is unknown, but it is believed that a number of factors including emotional, physical and behavioural issues contribute to this disorder.

When we think about how to pray for them, we do not want to preach or pretend that we are experts. This is a sensitive issue that causes much pain and distress, both for parents, friends and those suffering from anorexia. What is important is that you should love them and pray for them. The following are some thoughts you can share with your friends on how to pray and care for people suffering from anorexia. Your prayers will make a difference, because God answers prayer.

- **Dysfunctional families:** People who suffer from anorexia often live in dysfunctional families. Sometimes the relationships in a family may lead to young people falling into the anorexia trap, especially if the father and/or mother are very domineering and/or over-protective. The child may see it as a form of control and feel there is no freedom to make his/her own decisions. Another problem is also that there is sometimes a lack of open and honest communication in the family circle. Pray and ask the Lord to show the family if there is anything in the family set-up that can cause anorexia. Pray that there will not be denial and that the parents will not take offence, but that they will be willing to work on it and if necessary, go for counselling.
- **False sense of control:** Sometimes young people may feel that they are not acknowledged for who they are and what they are capable of, and their talents are not recognised either. There is often a strong urge to control. They want to gain a measure of 'control' of their lives, even if it is just showing that they are capable of doing something on their own, like deciding on their own eating patterns. Pray that young people will see the folly of thinking like this and that they will be willing to surrender their lives to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to set them free so that they can experience total liberty and acceptance.
- **Surrender:** Pray that they will understand that God is in control of everything and that they can relax. When God is in control, there is no rejection, there is no need to perform or earn acceptance. We are free to be ourselves.
- **Identity crisis:** Anorexia sufferers often struggle with an identity crisis and have a totally wrong perception of their worth and especially their own bodies. Some of them hate their bodies for different reasons and feel they can rectify it by radically changing their eating habits. Pray that they will find their identity in Christ and be able to see themselves as God sees them. Ask that they will understand that God loves them unconditionally, that He made them and is proud of them.
- **Rejection issues:** Some of them fear rejection and feel that if they can lose weight, they will be more acceptable to other people. Pray that they will experience the love and acceptance of friends and family and also the acceptance of God. Ask that they will understand that God values them and believes in them because He made them and has good plans for them (**Jeremiah 29:11-14**).
- **Respected as a person:** All people have at least two basic needs: to feel loved (versus rejection) and that they are valued, can contribute something, which means they need to feel needed. Ask the Lord to show young people through the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, that they are loved, that they are important and that they are needed. Ask that others will help those suffering from anorexia by treating them with respect, and in a way that will make them feel needed and loved.
- **Distorted view of self:** Anorexia sufferers are often afraid of social interaction, have low self-esteem, and therefore feel uncomfortable to eat in front of other people. They are also often perfectionists and hyper-tidy. Eventually they withdraw, and the true picture of who they really are becomes distorted. They begin to feel that people reject them and that this is the reason why they feel so uncomfortable. A combination of all these things leads to a distorted view of themselves. Pray for all lies and deception about whom they are in Christ to be exposed and that they will be set free. Lies and ignorance bind us, but the truth sets us free.

- **Courage to face the truth:** Ask the Lord to work willingness in the hearts of anorexia sufferers to admit to their problem and to go for help.
- **Distorted view of happiness:** They are mostly in denial about the fact that they are underweight. They feel that happiness is undeserved and there is a striving for perfection. Pray that they will see that God created them to have life and to have it abundantly (**John 10:10**).
- **Cover with prayer:** When you pray for them, remember to resist in Jesus' Name the spirit of death, deception and destruction (**James 4:7**).
- **Embraced by friends and family:** Most importantly, accept them as human beings. Do not be angry with them and do not judge them. Pray that their family and friends will also treat them like this.
- **Remain standing:** Pray with hope, with faith. Read the Word and pray God's promises of hope and life over them as often as the Holy Spirit reminds you.