

The day Charlotte stopped eating



Charlotte's story

Charlotte stopped eating the day her Dad was diagnosed with cancer. It was in February that Anthony my husband was told the news. Our life was suddenly thrown into turmoil and our lovely little family, completed devastated. Our daughter Charlotte was 11 years old at the time. Tony and I had hidden much of his illness from the children but once the diagnosis was made and his treatment began, we obviously involved them.



We gave them as much support as we could and kept a positive, hopeful outlook whilst Tony underwent biopsies, tests and chemo. We all went off our food at the beginning – that was understandable I guess, but it didn't occur to me that Charlotte would develop a major problem with eating and lose weight as a result, so much weight so fast, that she became really ill. She couldn't eat and that was her way of coping, coping with the fear of losing her Dad and coping with our fears and worries even though we tried to keep them private. Despite all our reassurances and coaxing her to eat, we found she couldn't. To our horror, week after week she was losing more weight and over the months became dangerously ill with anorexia. I thought I'd lose them both.

Because Charlotte was so young, our GP didn't suspect an eating disorder at first, just stress, and

“She couldn't eat and that was her way of coping.”

it therefore took too long getting Charlotte some professional help. I continued to cook just the same as usual and Tony was very insistent that we all had our meals together even though he was often sick in private afterwards as a result of the chemo and his medication. It was Charlotte's emotional state that was so shocking and just became so much worse the lower in weight she got.

Life had become a nightmare and I felt so inept, overwhelmed and alone. I tried to keep a lot from Tony because he was too weak for the burden of this, but obviously he noticed Charlotte's gaunt little body, her distress and her inability to eat and this really grieved him and terrified us all.

All the sympathy was understandably for Tony and the cancer and we had some good support from family and friends but Charlotte on the other hand was blamed for being selfish and told just to eat properly or she'd make her mum and Dad even

more unhappy. That really didn't help her or us try to overcome her eating disorder. It just made her more anxious and her eating worse.

“Charlotte was told not to be so selfish and just eat better or she'd make her mum and Dad even more unhappy.”

Tony's doing really well now but Charlotte's still struggling to be free of her eating difficulties and needs therapy, support and medical monitoring to keep her weight stable and out of danger. It's still an up-hill battle which is ruining our life.

ABC helped me so much. They really understood and gave me lots of helpful and practical advice so that we could all find ways to help Charlotte. Sometimes I just rang to let it all out and cry. It was so good to know ABC was “there” for me if ever I needed to talk or ask questions – I don't know what we'd have done without them – they were a real lifeline.

“ABC helped me so much. They really understood and gave me lots of helpful and practical advice.”



Dear Friend

I feel privileged to be asked to write this introduction to the work of Anorexia & Bulimia Care, because I believe this work is incredibly important. ABC brings expertise, understanding and compassion to both the person suffering with an eating disorder and those who are supporting them, as well as hope for a better future.

At Care for the Family, we aim to strengthen families in the good times, and stand with them in the dark times. We frequently receive phone calls from people who are experiencing those dark times, and there are few calls as distressing as when a distraught parent phones because their child had an eating disorder and is seriously ill, perhaps even close to death, as a result.

Much of the time the simple message of hope that we pass on to parents is that 'You are not alone' – it's then that we call upon the expertise of ABC to help families, because we know they offer trusted advice and practical help. But we want to do more. We plan to work together to establish a telephone befriending network that will enable parents to talk about their situation and receive support, understanding and empathy from other parents whose children have recovered.

Eating disorders cannot be 'cured' overnight, so ABC supports families all the way towards recovery and a brighter future. It can be a long, hard journey, but with ABC's help many families make it to a place of healing and hope. It is a privilege to work with them.

I heartily commend Anorexia & Bulimia Care and their work to you.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Rob Parsons'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Rob Parsons

Founder & Chairman, Care for the Family

facts...

* Eating disorders affect the whole family, body, mind and spirit. The resulting misery, stress and isolation for sufferers and families can be overwhelming.

* Eating disorders cause more deaths in under 18 year olds than any other psychiatric disorder.

* Eating disorders are increasingly common and affect men, women, girls and boys of all ages.

* People can suffer at any stage of life, but most at risk are children and teenagers.

* The UK has the highest rate of eating disorders in Europe.

* It is possible to recover fully from an eating disorder.

* We need to understand eating disorders and support families and sufferers as they work together towards recovery.

* Some studies suggest as many as 25% of 11-14 year old girls are struggling with an eating disorder.

* Studies show that supporting and advising parents helps improve children's recovery rates.

* As many as 1 in 5 sufferers risk losing their life from the illness or from suicide as a result.

fiction...

* **An eating disorder is not about seeking attention.**

It is about coping with the pressures of life without bothering anyone.

* **An eating disorder is not about vanity.**

It is about poor self esteem and poor confidence.

* **An eating disorder is not being in control.**

It is being trapped and controlled by false beliefs.

* **An eating disorder is not just about food.**

It is depression, anxiety and many are victims of grief, bullying, family break up and even abuse.

* **An eating disorder is not a decision.**

It is not something people can just snap out of.

what our supporters say



Mind & Soul
EXPLORING CHRISTIANITY AND MENTAL HEALTH
A Premier Lifeline Resource



“Eating Disorders are part of the great silent burden of mental health problems in our society. Many suffer in silence and shame. ABC’s campaign will help change attitudes of stigma and allow people to find the hope and healing they need and deserve.”

Dr Rob Waller, a director of Mind & Soul



“Mercy Ministries UK wholeheartedly endorses, supports and promotes ABC’s campaign in Eating Disorders Awareness week. As a Christian community, we must rally together to offer a united response to this destructive and life controlling issue.”

**Arianna Walker, Executive Director,
Mercy Ministries UK**



“Thank God for ABC! Years ago in the middle of my battle with an eating disorder I was able to find help, support and understanding at ABC. This made a significant difference on my journey of recovery, and today I am completely free. ABC is a ‘light’ to sufferers and their families where hope is so vitally needed when dealing with such painful and difficult issues.”

Kim Hemsley, founder of New ID



“ABC’s campaign is a timely and essential reminder that we have to get to grips with this problem. With the wellbeing of increasing numbers of young people at stake, we cannot afford to have our heads in the sand.”

**Matt Summerfield, Executive Director,
Urban Saints**

the service ABC provides

- * Professional advice and support for the general public regardless of faith.
- * Telephone helpline for sufferers and email support.
- * A separate and unique helpline for parents and family members.
- * A long established Befriending Scheme for sufferers.
- * Training days and talks for church and youth leaders, counsellors and teachers.
- * Lifeline magazine to members, churches, colleges, universities and counsellors.
- * Web site with 250 pages of information and advice including a regional Help Directory.
- * To Be Honest - a blogsite for young people.

Name: _____

Church: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

ABC receives no government funding and is dependent on the generosity of individuals to be able to keep our services running. Please help us support parents and sufferers whose lives are threatened by eating disorders.

- I would like to enclose a donation for _____ payable to ABC.
I am a UK taxpayer and can Gift-Aid my donation.

Sign: _____ Date: _____

giftaid

- Please send me more information about ABC and publications.
- ABC can also offer professional training for leaders on eating disorders and related issues such as self-harm. Please tick for more info.

Please send to:

ABC, Providence House, The Borough, Wedmore, Somerset BS28 4EG