

**Dear Steve,**

My daughter has anorexia. She is just plain afraid of eating and gaining weight. We've tried to convince her to eat. We have tried to coerce her, force her, even bribe her. She started seeing a therapist a while ago. She was even hospitalized and fed intravenously for a while so she could recover. She realized that if she didn't clear it up she could die. She is now "maintaining", but we can see that it hasn't cleared up completely. It is something that is always hanging over our heads. If we don't stay on top of things, she will go back to not eating again.

She is 15, a straight A student in school, has some nice friends, and is a fairly responsible person in a lot of ways. We live in a nice home. My wife and I have good jobs, but would like to spend more time with our kids. We're working on that. The therapist has recommended family therapy, but we have only met together once so far.

What can we do to help?

Tired of Force Feeding our Daughter,

Alan - Madison, WI

**Dear Alan,**

It is good to take this condition seriously as it IS life threatening. Anorexia nervosa, in which a person does not eat, can have various causes - peer pressure to be "beautiful", an urge to be physically fit (oddly enough), proving that SHE is the one in control of her life. The end result is the same - losing strength, self confidence, and self efficacy. Your daughter may have a learned injunction against being strong. She may be getting a message from you and/or your husband that she should be independent, but not too independent, strong, but not too strong, decisive, but not too decisive, think for yourself, but think this way. She may have even been accomplishing much in her life to please others, but not sure of what WILL please others.

Instead of trying to avoid the unhealthy situation, it is time to focus on her strengths and positive goals - healthy goals that please HER, whether they lead to anything successful long term or not. Be aware of not "pulling the rug out from under her" when she does have some goals or successes. Don't be "proud" of her. Rather, be happy for her. There is a big difference between the two. Problem solve with her about ways of reaching her goals, even little ones. Do not overly judge possibly limiting solutions. Basically, support her on her strengths, instead of being threatened by them. Do not belittle her weaknesses. Follow through on family therapy WITH YOUR WIFE AS WELL! Support her DAILY on the following affirmation.

**Positive Thought for Her to Manifest:** I accept my strengths. And I ALLOW others (my friends and family) to feel safe with that.

Additional responsibility also means additional privileges (right?)

Steve