

# **SURVIVING AN EATING DISORDER: STRATEGIES FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS BY MICHELE SIEGEL, JUDITH BRISMAN, MARGOT WEINSHEL**

"Clear, wise, and eminently useful advice. This book offers solid and specific guidelines for understanding and change."

—HARRIET LERNER, Ph.D., author of *The Dance of Anger*

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*Strategies for  
Family and Friends*

THIRD EDITION • *Revised and Updated*

Michele Siegel, Ph.D., Judith Brisman, Ph.D.,  
Margot Weinschel, M.S.W.

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## About the Author

Michele Siegel, Ph.D., initiated the idea for this book and was co-founder with Judith Brisman of the Eating Disorder Resource Center. She died in 1993.

Judith Brisman, Ph.D. (left), the director of the Eating Disorder Resource Center, is on the faculty of William Alanson White Institute and has a private practice in New York City.

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# **SURVIVING AN EATING DISORDER: STRATEGIES FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS BY MICHELE SIEGEL, JUDITH BRISMAN, MARGOT WEINSHEL PDF**

Surviving an Eating Disorder has become a classic since it was first published in 1988. It was one of the first books to offer effective support and solutions for family, friends, and all others who are the "silent sufferers" of eating disorders. This updated and revised edition provides the latest information on how parents, spouses, friends, and professionals can thoughtfully determine the right course of action in their individual situations.

With its combination of information, insight, case examples, and practical strategies, Surviving an Eating Disorder opens the way to new growth and helpful solutions in your relationship with your loved one.

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## Most helpful customer reviews

13 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

## Surviving and thriving

By Deb

As an eating-disorder therapist, I'm always on the lookout for resources to help families, partners, and friends better understand the complex world of eating disorders. I felt like I struck gold when I discovered this book, and it's now on the top of my recommended reading list.

Beyond just covering the basic eating disorder 101's (which it does quite impressively), this book offers comprehensive, clear, and concrete strategies for supporting loved ones who are suffering from eating disorders, including anorexia, bulimia, and binge-eating disorder. The table of contents speaks for itself:

Introduction: How to Survive

Part I: Gaining Perspective

Chapter 1: What You See--The Behavioral Aspects of Eating Disorders

Chapter 2: Hidden Feelings--The Psychological Aspects of Eating Disorders

Chapter 3: Rules and Relationships--The Family Context of Eating Disorders

Part II: Confronting the Problem

Chapter 4: No More Secrets--Bringing It Out in the Open

Chapter 5: When She Says Nothing is Wrong--Coping with Denial

Chapter 6: No One Can Go It Alone--Seeking Help

Part III: Using News Strategies

Chapter 7: What to Do About the Problems with Food--Practical Advice for Disengaging from the Food Fights

Chapter 8: When It's Hard to Let Go--Understanding What Keeps You So Involved

Chapter 9: Developing a Healthier Relationship--Relating to the Person, Not the Eating Disorder

The book is packed full of so many gems that powerfully summarize the underlying, and often overlooked, components of an eating disorder. Here's just a small sample:

\*\*\*An eating disorder is not merely a problem with food or weight. It is an attempt to use food intake and weight control to solve unseen emotional conflicts or difficulties that in fact have little to do with either food or weight. An eating disorder is *\*never\** simply a matter of self-control. Healthier eating habits and stronger willpower are not the missing ingredients that will make the problem disappear. (p. 40)

\*\*\*Because the symptoms of bingeing, vomiting, exercising, or starving can be so disruptive and frightening, it is easy to pay attention only to those behaviors. To do so, however, misses the point. The overt symptoms are just the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the surface lies a much larger piece of the picture--a complicated and complex world of feelings and experiences that are very much a part of the eating disorder. Both the visible and invisible parts need to be acknowledged in order to understand the disorders of bulimia nervosa, anorexia nervosa, and binge eating. (p. 53)

\*\*\*In every eating disorder, it is only when the person is able to find healthier means of taking care of herself and generating internal sources of self-esteem that she can give up attempts at coping that have, ironically and tragically, led to further emotional and physical damage. Only by understanding the protective and adaptive functions of these behaviors can *\*you\** begin to appreciate why it may be so hard for someone to just "give it up." (p.42)

\*\*\*Sometimes one feeling conflicts with another, such as wanting to be grown up and wanting to remain a child at the same time. Feelings can be, and often are, intense for the eating-disordered person, who fears being overwhelmed by them, or worse still, overwhelming others with them. The fear of her feelings then exacerbates the problem, leading the person to panic and rush to food. (p. 52)

\*\*\*Not only is the eating-disordered person in need of approval, but inside she is "hungry" for care and affection as well. Often she has been so attuned to everyone else's needs that her own have gotten overlooked. Despite feelings of dependency, women with eating disorders don't want to rely on or need other people. Feeling dependent or needy leaves them feeling weak or like a failure and is to be disowned and avoided at all costs. For some women, there is an intense fear that others will be overwhelmed by their needs and leave them or stop loving them. To avoid this, they try to be perfect inside and out. The strain is enormous. (pp. 52-53)

\*\*\*The self-imposed demands of perfection and the fear of rejection that eating-disordered people experience interfere with the development of comfortable, intimate relationships. The dilemma is a difficult one. If someone can't reach out and allow herself to need someone else, to be vulnerable to someone else, how can she really get to know that person and let herself be known? (p. 53)

\*\*\*As the eating-disordered person is more fully able to accept herself as well as her feelings about others, the need to block out parts of herself through food can be lessened. One aspect of this is helping her differentiate her feelings from physiological hunger. People with eating disorders tend to misinterpret emotional experiences as hunger and respond by eating. (pp. 123-124)

Along with these gems, one of my favorite parts of the book is the practical advice offered for disengaging from the "food fights," including these rules (pp. 172-212):

Rule #1: Accept your limitations.

Rule #2: Accept the other person's right to be different from you.

Rule #3: Don't purchase (or avoid purchasing) food solely to accommodate the eating-disordered person.

Rule #4: If a meal plan has been established by a professional, unless you are involved in a therapeutic refeeding program with your child, do not comment on what is eaten.

Rule #5: Don't make mealtimes a battleground, even if you are refeeding your daughter.

Rule #6: Be willing to negotiate household chores involving food.

Rule #7: The eating-disordered person is responsible for her behavior whenever it affects others.

Rule #8: Do not monitor someone else's behavior for her (even if you are invited to) unless this is part of a treatment plan set up with the support of professionals guiding the way.

Rule #9: Do not use money to control another person's eating behavior.

Rule #10: Do not anticipate someone else's needs. Ask!

Rule #11: Don't make eating out a battle of wills.

Rule #12: Do not offer advice or opinions.

Rule #13: Do not play therapist.

Rule #14: Do not comment about someone's weight and looks.

In addition to all of this invaluable information and insight, the book is infused with hope. In the authors' own words:

"Someone with an eating disorder has a long road to recovery. How she manages food and weight issues along the way will be part of her independent struggle to get well. What you do can make a big difference both for you and for her. Remember, this is an opportunity to fine-tune your relationship and to provide a strong base from which everyone can grow and change.

There are many ways in which you can create an environment that allows for a richer, fuller way of relating that can minimize the need for the maintenance of a symptom...Don't go it alone. Be patient, and learn to discover the ways in which you and the person you care about can enjoy one another and expand your relationship, even if the person is critically struggling with her eating and weight.

This is not an easy task. But if you continue your efforts, there is much hope for the future." (p. 254)

Clearly, I can not recommend this book highly enough! I'm confident that family and friends who take this book to heart will be able to survive--and ultimately thrive--while supporting their loved ones through this difficult journey.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Invaluable resource for anyone who is in a relationship with someone who struggles with disordered eating

By Dewie Weiner

I am a psychotherapist who has been working for 30 years with families where disordered eating is an issue. I recommend "Surviving an Eating Disorder" to practically every family I see in order to help them develop strategies for addressing specific situations. This book is easy to understand, informative, and offers a tremendous amount of practical advice. It can serve as a guide to families who are attempting to negotiate their tricky relational waters when someone they love is dealing with an eating disorder. Dewie Weiner, LICSW, ACSW

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

perfect first step

By J. Burns

Surviving an Eating Disorder, Strategies for Family and Friends is a poignant, insightful and sympathetic look into helping a loved one who is currently suffering or who has suffered from an eating disorder. Although the book focuses on the firsthand victims of the disorder it also offers advice to the "silent sufferers", the family and friends, in order to cope with the feelings of guilt and responsibility that inevitably occur. Opening the book with personal details from their lives give the authors more of an empathic feel rather than a medical one. You feel as though this is a close friend speaking to you, giving you knowledgeable insight into helping someone you care about regain control of their life, all the while aiding you in the understanding of what is truly going on and how you can be proactive in the journey to recovery. The many individual stories of patients brought a deep emotional connection to the book - it makes it much more real and much less lecture-based. It is impossible not to be emotionally touched by the subject matter, especially when it will hit so close to home for so many. Surviving an Eating Disorder, Strategies for Family and Friends is an amazing starting point to begin to help a loved one recover and to understand what we can control and accept what we cannot.

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