

Jewish Women's Foundation Grant Will Expand Education and Training to Prevent Eating Disorders

By **Shari Cohen** - 01/26/2022 8:00 AM



(iStock)

During National Eating Disorder Week—Feb. 21-27, 2022, JFS will offer free educational programs for teens (Feb. 22) and for parents and other adults (Feb. 24) via Zoom.

Eating disorders can be serious health problems but often are unrecognized or misunderstood. Dini Peterson, chief program officer, Family and Community Services, Jewish Family Service (JFS) of Metropolitan Detroit, says that 9% of the American population is believed to have an eating disorder — two-thirds of them girls and women. Eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia and binge eating are most common among adolescent girls, but boys and men also may struggle with such problems, she explains.

JFS recently received a one-year \$20,000 grant from the Jewish Women's Foundation of Metro Detroit primarily to train clinicians and educate the community about eating disorders. The goal is to help parents raise children who have an emotionally and physically healthy relationship with food.



Dini Peterson

During National Eating Disorder Week—Feb. 21–27, 2022, JFS will offer free educational programs for teens (Feb. 22) and for parents and other adults (Feb. 24) via Zoom. (See below.) The curriculum will focus on preventing “disordered eating” and helping individuals develop a positive body image.

“Eating disorders may be underdiagnosed in some groups and JFS is conducting more training to help our staff recognize signs and symptoms. We want JFS therapists to recognize eating disorders even if their clients are accessing treatment for a different reason. Food issues increased during the pandemic because there was more stress and isolation. Who doesn’t feel out of control?” Peterson says.

Body Image and Jewish Culture

Peterson points out that society and the media present messages about body image and diet culture that can encourage individuals to view themselves in a negative way and compensate with detrimental eating habits. Jewish individuals may face particular eating challenges due to a cultural focus on food that can feel at odds with societal pressure to be thin,” she adds.

JFS has connected with Marcy Forta, Ed.D., a holistic nutritionist, who has provided training in Jewish day schools and for JFS staff. Forta, who

overcame an eating disorder in her teens, focuses on driving awareness, education and prevention in the Jewish community, especially among Orthodox individuals.



Marcy Forta

“Food is important in Jewish life, and we experience significant perfectionist pressure to adhere to a super woman ideal,” Forta says. She cites the importance of young Jewish women feeling pressure to be attractive in order to make a good shidduch.

“Being thin as an ideal is more important in Jewish communities,” Forta explains. She stresses the importance of “appreciating your unique self or essence (*atzmi* in Hebrew).” Forta has founded a nonprofit organization — atzmi.org — to help educate and change attitudes within the Orthodox community with help from JFS.

Too often “we moralize food and use it as a reward, which can be very dangerous. Food is not good or bad. It’s a gift from God,” she says.

“There is a lot of misinformation about eating disorder signs and symptoms. You don’t have to look emaciated to have one. And there is stigma about mental health, and families can be secretive about eating disorders,” Forta explains.

Peterson says that therapy for eating disorders — which can include individual or family-based treatment — can be very successful. When necessary, JFS therapists can refer patients to specialists in the field and to residential treatment facilities through their network, which includes kosher options.

Educational Events for National Eating Disorder Week

Jewish Family Service and Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit are presenting these Zoom events:

For Tweens, Teens & Young Adults

#RealTalk: A Conversation about Mental Health and Body Image with Victoria Garrick

Feb. 22 at 7 p.m. <https://jlive.app/events/1491>

For Parents & Youth Professionals

Eating Disorder Advice from the Experts: What Parents and Youth Professionals Need to Know

Feb. 24 at 7 p.m. <https://jlive.app/events/1488>

Shari Cohen

FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM

[@DETROITJEWISHNEWS](#)

