

## Hunger Games

Are you, or is someone you love, struggling with an eating disorder? Specialist Bridget Whitlow says help and recovery are at hand. **By Emelina Minero**

From emotional eating to anorexia, binge eating to bulimia, eating disorders (EDs) are some of the most mysterious and misunderstood medical conditions of recent times. Although many lesbians assume that EDs are a problem for heterosexual women, lesbian actor Portia de Rossi wrote a book on the subject. Her 2010 memoir, *Unbearable Lightness: A Story of Loss and Gain*, details her struggle with anorexia nervosa, revealing that EDs can become a potentially life-threatening affliction regardless of sexuality. In the San Francisco Bay Area, therapist, active community member, loving mother and wife, and out lesbian Bridget Whitlow specializes in helping people recover from eating disorders. Whitlow has an unbridled passion for her community, has worked with the San Diego chapter of the International Association of Eating Disorders Professionals, and is currently the president of Eating Disorders Recovery Support, Inc. (EDRS, Inc.), a Bay Area nonprofit. Whitlow also acts as the social media committee member of the Academy for Eating Disorders; volunteers with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the Spectrum LGBT Center, Art for AIDS, and Pets Are Wonderful Support; and has her own private practice. Clearly, Whitlow is nothing if not committed to helping others, and took time out to reach out to **curve** readers and offer her expertise.

### What motivates you to give so much of your time and energy to the cause of eating disorders recovery?

The largest motivator for me is that despite the notable prevalence of eating disorders in all genders and ethnicities, and the fact that they have the highest mortality rate out of all psychiatric diagnoses, eating disorders still remain largely misunderstood—both in society as a whole and in the healthcare community. There is a tremendous need for increased education. Being able to contribute to this, working



alongside other passionate people in this field, is incredibly rewarding.

### Why is it so important to spread awareness and education about eating disorders?

Because eating disorders remain largely misunderstood. Many harmful myths continue to be held as truth, even among healthcare professionals. With more education on how

to identify, intervene appropriately and properly treat eating disorders, people can recover and get on with their lives.

### What are the most important things people need to understand about the nature of eating disorders?

One, eating disorders are not a choice. While we do not know the exact cause of these

disorders, research indicates that there is a large genetic component—there is a 50 to 80 percent heritability risk. Two, eating disorders impact all genders, sexual orientations and ethnicities. And three, full recovery is absolutely possible!

**How can someone be supportive of a loved one who is struggling with an eating disorder?**

The number one thing that people can do is express their concern to their loved one and help them seek out treatment, consistently and relentlessly. As with any sensitive issue, scaring, blaming and using threatening words is not helpful. Talking one-on-one, and using a calm and loving approach, will yield the most positive results. Resources and support are available for friends and family, and they can be very helpful in figuring out how to best support your loved one. The National Eating Disorders Association has a helpline, 800.931.2237, and locally, all of us at EDRS, Inc. also welcome calls to provide further ideas and support at 415.827.0283 or 707.778.7849.

**What are some of the steps that someone**

**struggling with an eating disorder can take to get help?**

The first steps to getting help include reaching out to someone you trust, telling them what is going on and asking for support to get additional help. Undeniably, eating disorders thrive in isolation, and letting someone in—someone who knows you and will be with you for the long haul—is incredibly valuable. The next imperative step is to look for a healthcare provider who specializes in the treatment of eating disorders and who can assess your treatment needs. It is critical that whomever you work with is connected to other specialists and can assist in forming a treatment team.

At EDRS, Inc., part of our mission is to provide treatment scholarships to California residents who might otherwise lack the funds to pursue treatment. If you know anyone who might benefit from this resource, or if you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to this fund, please visit [edrs.net](http://edrs.net). ([bridgetwhitlow.com](http://bridgetwhitlow.com)) ■



Bridget Whitlow



Bridget Whitlow encourages any curve readers who are struggling with an eating disorder to seek help. “Recovery is truly possible and there are many healthcare providers who are well-trained and available to support you in your process. Take one recovery-minded step today and reach out!” To find an eating disorders recovery specialist, visit:

- [edrs.net](http://edrs.net)
- [edrcsv.org](http://edrcsv.org)
- [aedweb.org](http://aedweb.org)
- [aptedsf.com](http://aptedsf.com)
- [nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://nationaleatingdisorders.org)

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