



YOU'VE TAKEN THE first critical steps toward helping your child by identifying her eating disorder and organizing a treatment team. I wish I could tell you the hard part was over. Realistically, however, you are now at the beginning of a very challenging, often frustrating journey. Even with an experienced and supportive treatment team in place, it still comes down to you. There's no place like home. This is especially true for a child with an eating disorder. Hospitalization will stabilize her medical condition; a residential treatment program can help her accept, understand, and begin to control her eating disorder; but the best possible place to restore her mental and physical health is at home. Ultimately, your child's recovery depends on what happens when she is living with you at home. "I don't think I can do this," one father admitted to me. "It's already been so exhausting with Laura in the hospital—the idea that she's coming home is too much to contemplate." I will tell you what I told this apprehensive father: "It won't be easy but you can do it with planning and patience. Supporting your child at home is like running a marathon: your need to set a slow and steady pace. Take note of your successes however small they might be, and take care of yourself along the way."

One of the most difficult aspects of helping a child with an eating disorder is accepting that you will need to be tough and, when necessary, uncompromising. I know this sounds harsh. As a parent, your instinct is to protect your child. Seeing your child in pain, whether it is emotional or physical, is one of the most difficult things a parent can experience. Parents want to make their children happy: when your daughter pleads not to be admitted to the hospital, the temptation may be to postpone her admittance. If she cries and says "eating hurts," you may be inclined to take the food away instead of making her sit at the table until she finishes. It is crucial that you are strong and consistent. Your son may shout, "I hate you" for making him go to a therapy appointment. Remember, your actions are based on love. Eating disorders have a mortality rate greater than some

types of cancer. If your child begged you not to get chemotherapy to treat cancer, you would make him go to the hospital for treatment and be there to support and comfort him. The same action is necessary when you are helping your child through the treatment for his eating disorder.

By using the tools and strategies in this section, you can create a safe haven at home, learn to cope with how your child's eating disorder is affecting you and your family, and find ways to support him at school.