

# WE ARE SAFEGUARDIANS

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We believe that it is the duty of every civilised society to take care of all children and adults wherever they live, learn and work.

**FOR EVERYONE,  
EVERYWHERE.**



THE  
SAFEGUARDING  
COMPANY

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EATING DISORDERS IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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(Dip CNM, Dip NCFED, ANP)

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**FOR EVERYONE,  
EVERYWHERE.**



## OUR SPEAKER

# Jenny Tomei

(Dip CNM, Dip CNFED, ANP)



Jenny is a Qualified Personal Trainer, Nutritional Therapist, and holds the NCFED Diploma in Eating Disorders. She suffered from an eating disorder herself, and her passion now is to guide and help others who are currently struggling with eating disorders, disordered eating, and to help spread awareness about the importance of early intervention of eating disorders.

Jenny uses practical interventions, and nutritional rehabilitation guidance to support change and recovery from eating distress. Her work includes mentoring and helping people with emotional and disordered eating issues, binge eating disorders, poor body image, low self-worth, weight control problems, and IBS. Jenny empowers her clients to overcome disruptive eating habits, improve their relationship with food, optimise digestion, & lead a healthy and happy life.



# Learning Outcomes



- Understanding the impact of lockdown on young people
- Understanding the key areas Covid-19 has affected
- Considering how Covid-19 has exacerbated eating disorder symptoms in young people
- Early signs to look out for – ‘SOLD’
- How to help – what can be done to help young people

# Key areas Covid-19 has affected

There are five key areas on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected individuals with eating disorders

1. Social isolation
2. Disruption to living situations
3. Changes to physical activity
4. Changes to relationship with food
5. Use of social media

Eating disorder behaviour that occurred during the pandemic may have been reinforced by repetition during a lengthy lockdown period. These reinforced or 'habitual' behaviours can be resistant to change



# 1. Social Isolation

- Reduced access to healthcare services - young people with EDs felt like a “burden”, an “inconvenience”, and “forgotten” by the government and NHS.
- Reduced access to support networks - decreased motivation to recover, unable to see friends, which helps to boost mood.
- Increased screen time
- Increased anxiety - due to increased preoccupation with thoughts
- Anxiety about returning to social eating situations



## 2. Disruption to living situation and routine

- Less control over meals - causing increased stress and anxiety
- Increased pressure to eat - appears to be worsened by others worrying that the individual will be unable to recover if they contract COVID-19, due to not correctly fueling their body.
- A lack of routine and/or distractions created more time for rumination about weight, exercise habits, and meals.
- When perceived control is low (such as during the pandemic), disordered eating can represent one thing that the individual can control.
- Due to the pandemic's overwhelming impact on routines, we may see an increase in ED behaviours as a coping mechanism.





### 3. Changes to physical activity

Research indicated that physical activity rates would reduce, which was the case. However there has been a rise in physical activity among young people.

Activity increases were driven by anxieties about weight gain and a desire to counteract the effects of inactivity during lockdown.

It became easier for individuals to defend and rationalise physical activity, especially during lockdown when daily exercise was so widely discussed in government daily COVID-19 updates

# 3. Changes to Physical Activity Rates (continued)

“Can't exercise as much / the way I was, and not getting in as many steps, so being more restrictive with foods eaten, calories, and timing of eating”. “Doing intermittent fasting again”.

Participants were aware of this tension between healthy activity and over-exercise, and reported finding it difficult to manage their relationship with exercise during lockdown.

Many social media posts refer to the general public's “*fear of gaining weight*” during lockdown -these messages have been particularly triggering for individuals living with eating disorders.

There is a heavier push on ALL social platforms to ‘stay in shape’ - content promoting exercise, also caused participants to engage in social comparisons (e.g. comparing their body to others, or comparing their level of exercise).

# 4. Changes to Relationships with Food

- Increased patterns of disordered eating - involves concerns related to health, rather than weight and shape, have been investigated in the context of orthorexia nervosa.
- Increased levels of stress and emotional distress - key risks for disordered eating, binge eating, restrictive eating patterns, traumatic events, which can be a trigger for an eating disorder.
- Anxieties around weight gain - provided a driver for engaging in restrictive eating behaviours
- Increased promotions around extreme weight loss diets - increased access to e.g. “thinspo” or “thinspiration” content during lockdown which promote a drive for thinness.



# 5. Use of Social Media

- Increased messages on social media about COVID-19 weight gain – many social media posts refer to the general public’s “fear of gaining weight” during lockdown. These messages can be particularly triggering for individuals living with EDs.
- People may have found support from less helpful sources – encountering extreme content (such as pro-anorexia content) or coming across misinformation online.
- Increase in posts about physical activity – for example, people sharing information on their ‘daily exercise’ or sharing content to encourage others to stay active at home. Excessive exercise is a major factor in many EDs and participants reported finding it difficult to cope with this increased emphasis around physical activity.
- Content promoting exercise, also caused participants to engage in social comparisons (e.g., comparing their body to others, or comparing their level of exercise)



# Early Signs to Look For – ‘SOLD’

If you're concerned that someone you know could have an eating disorder, then aside from obvious signs like fluctuations in weight, you might have noticed some changes to their relationship with food, exercise, and social interactions.

Keep a tab on all possible symptoms with the handy acronym, ‘SOLD’:

**SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL:** Are they spending a lot of time alone, and eating in private? Do they avoid leaving the house, and skip out on plans to meet up with friends? These are clear indicators that they are putting control measures around food and mealtimes.

**OVER-EXERCISING:** Has their exercise regime quickly become a non-negotiable part of their day, whatever the circumstances? Do they seem to be exercising more than necessary or usual?

**LOW MOOD:** Do they seem more anxious and irritable? Are they increasingly sensitive and touchy? Have they developed a low self-image?

**DIETARY CHANGES:** Have they started to cut out various different types of food from their diet? Are they skipping meals? Do they seem preoccupied with counting calories due to fear of weight gain?

# How to Respond?

If you're concerned about a student or your child and their eating habits, it's important to take quick but appropriate steps to getting them the help they need.

Remember that eating disorders are not really about food, and that their emotional well-being must be the focus.

As a first step, try to start a gentle conversation, with the individual

Do's	Don'ts
Schedule a private place to talk to the student, where they feel safe and comfortable	Be put off by silences, pauses or lack of immediate response
Approach the conversation in a calming manner	Ask them to make immediate changes in their behaviour
Do be prepared for denial, resistance, silence, and even emotional outburst	List all your fears and concerns, as this may lead to them feeling overwhelmed and guilty
Report any concerns to the appropriate member of staff within your school*	
Express your concerns for the welfare of the student using "I" statements e.g. I am concerned about you	

# Reading list and useful links

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## Books:

Why We Eat Too Much by Andrew Jenkinson  
Spoon Fed by Tim Spector  
Gut by Giulia Enders

## Web links:

Beat Eating Disorder Charity:  
[www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk](http://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

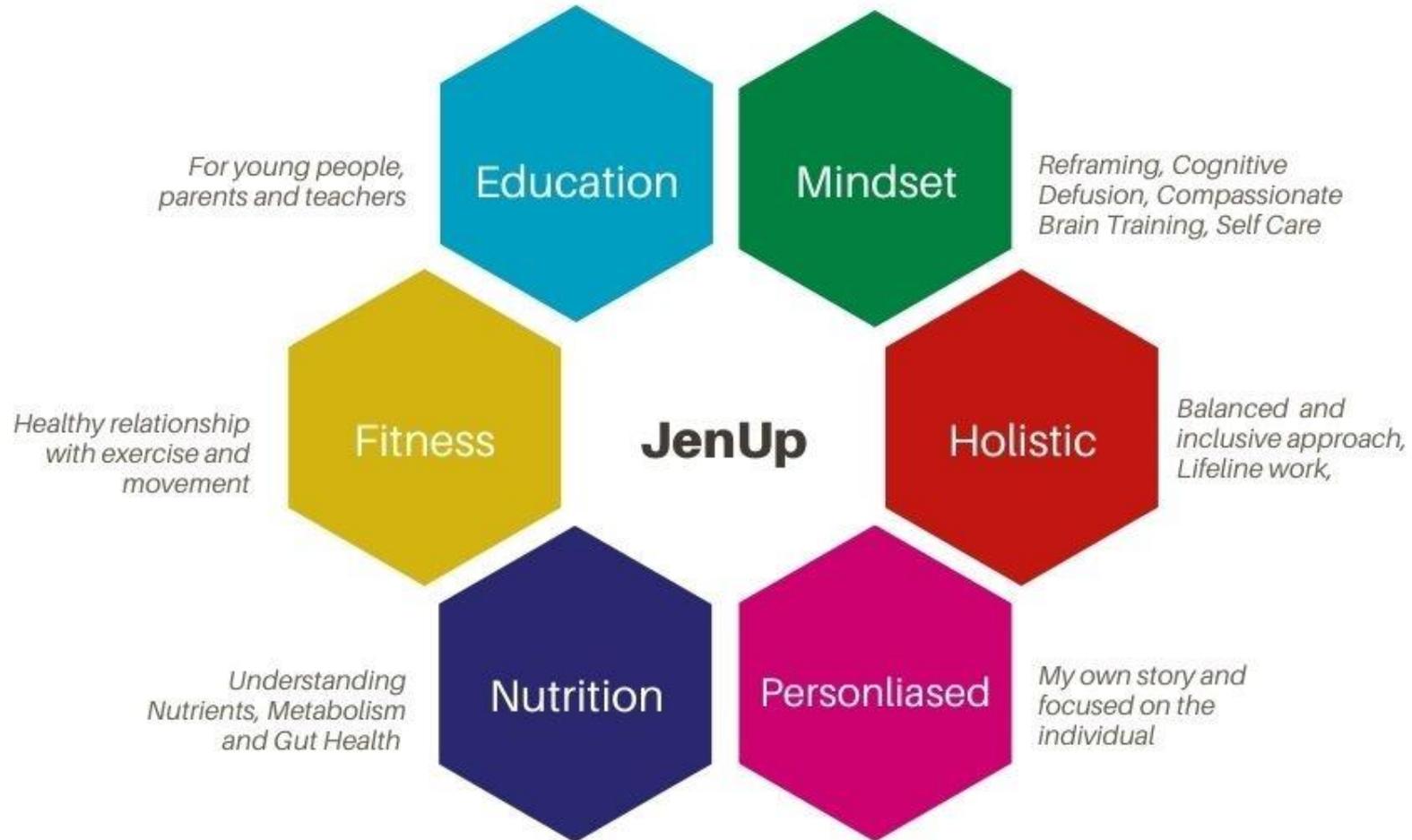
JenUp: [www.jenup.com](http://www.jenup.com)

National Centre for Eating Disorders:  
[www.eating-disorders.org.uk](http://www.eating-disorders.org.uk)

Eating Disorders Association:  
[www.eatingdisordersni.co.uk](http://www.eatingdisordersni.co.uk)

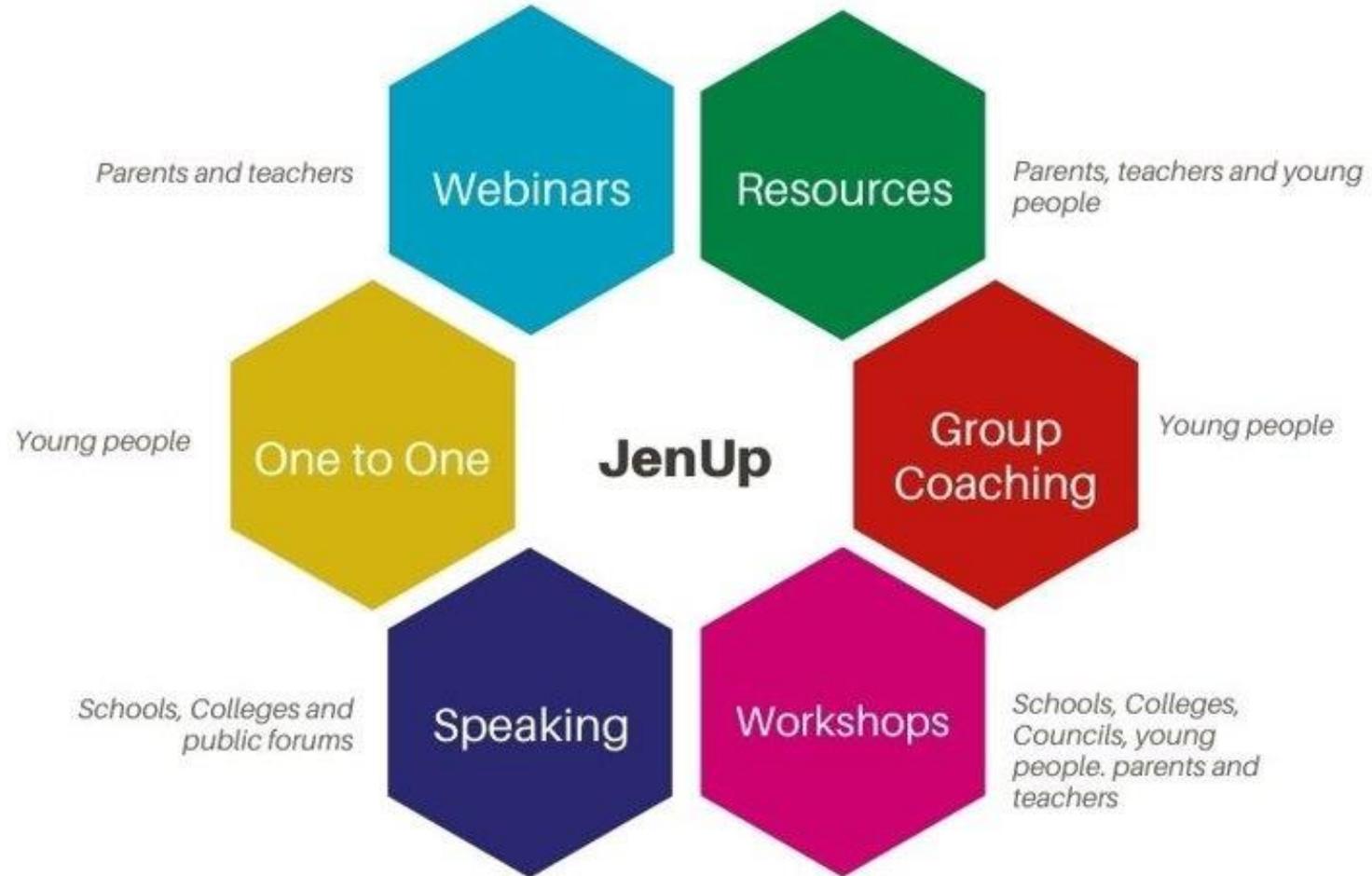
Maudsley Carers: [newmaudsleycarers-kent.co.uk](http://newmaudsleycarers-kent.co.uk)

# Early Intervention and Prevention for Eating Disorders in Young People





# JenUp Services





# Contact Details

If you're interested in booking any of the JenUp services please see Jenny's contact details below

[www.jenup.com](http://www.jenup.com)

[info@jenup.com](mailto:info@jenup.com)

Instagram: [askjenup](#)

Facebook: [askjenup](#)

TikTok: [askjenup](#)

# Get in touch

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To find out how we can provide support for safeguarding in your organisations, visit our website or speak to one of our team today.

 [info@thesafeguardingcompany.com](mailto:info@thesafeguardingcompany.com)

 0330 6600 757

 [thesafeguardingcompany.com](https://thesafeguardingcompany.com)

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## THE SAFEGUARDING COMPANY

One Team Logic Ltd, are pleased to announce that we will now simply be known as The Safeguarding Company.

Why? You may know us best for MyConcern, but we want everyone to know that we provide a whole raft of safeguarding solutions that prevent, reduce and eliminate abuse, harm and neglect; solutions that protect the wellbeing, health and human rights of children and adults all over the world.

What won't change is our world-class service, our brilliant people or the capability, security and reliability of our outstanding safeguarding solutions. But there will be a new website, it's coming soon.

In the meantime, if you're looking for more information about MyConcern, Clarity, Sentry and Safeguarding Training, they're right [here](#) as normal, just like we are.



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