

OUR EYES

By teens • For teens • About teens

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Dinner skipper

Poor body image, eating disorders common among Salinas-area teens

By RIA MEGNIN
The Salinas Californian

Two years ago, 16-year-old Natalia Bazzola started high school at Notre Dame and met a girl she describes as “not heavy, but you could tell she had some extra (pounds).”

But then, she started losing weight drastically. Soon, Bazzola said she and her classmates became concerned.

“She was skin and bones,” Bazzola said. “She had to wear a belt because her pants were loose to the point they’d fall off. She had hand warmers with her at all times and wore layers: it could be 70 degrees outside, and she’d be in the corner in a sweatshirt trying to absorb sun.”

“She didn’t have the amount of body fat she needed.”

This winter, the girl — whose family asked she not be named for this article — left California for one of the country’s top eating disorder treatment centers, for help battling anorexia nervosa.

She’s one of about 10 million Americans struggling with an eating disorder like anorexia or bulimia, according to the National Institute of Health.

The disorders, which involve intense fears of gaining weight and either self-starvation or a cycle of binge eating and vomiting, lead to serious health problems such as hair loss, dental problems, heart damage, kidney failure, stomach rupture and death.

In Salinas, the 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey showed some dangerous figures for some of the 1,100 high school students surveyed.

About 42 percent of girls and 30 percent of boys feel they’re overweight; the actual percentages were 12 percent and 20 percent, respectively.

To lose that weight, 12 percent of girls and 6 percent of boys went without food for 24 hours or more, 6 percent and 4 percent took diet aids without a doctor’s advice, and 5 percent and 3 percent vomited or took laxatives.

See **DISORDERS**, Page 2



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD GREEN

TO GET HELP

Help is available for teens with eating disorders, from school counselors to doctors to support groups. Here are some resources:

- National Eating Disorders Association: <http://edap.org>, toll-free help line: (800) 931-2237.
- The National Institute of Health: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/eatingdisorders.html
- In Salinas, the Celebrate Recovery 12-step program provides group help for eating disorders and other recovery issues at three sites: Echoes From Calvary Church, 1025 Post Dr., 442-1381; First Presbyterian Church, 830 Padre Dr., 422-7811, Ext. 119; Salinas Valley Community Church, 368 San Juan Grade Road, 449-2500, Ext. 110.

SHOUT OUT

JakeHorn

What are you willing to sacrifice for freedom?

I have a question. Could we teens survive on our own? I’m not merely talking about financial responsibilities (given that not many employers are willing to hire a part-time teenager with little experience); I’m also referring to our sense of entitlement.

Not only do we feel entitled to certain things (a cell phone, a room to ourselves, a car on our 16th birthday, a TV), but we also don’t want to rely on our parents. It’s the paradox of this generation.

‘We forget we need to prove that we can take care of ourselves’

It seems to me that our generation longs for independence, but we are not willing to make many sacrifices. This is clearly illustrated in teens’ tendency to complain about our parents, even when we have a car, a TV and freedom to do almost whatever we want. It’s not enough for us!

We live with them, they provide for us, and we don’t get in their way; that’s how we want it to be. We forget we need to prove that we can take care of ourselves, if that is in fact what we want to do.

When the day comes that we move away to go to college (or perhaps not), we’d like to feel like our parents support us and believe we can take care of ourselves and be responsible. When we leave the house, we will suddenly need to pay countless bills and will probably make barely enough to get by.

Will we ignore the bills until tax-day and spend all of our money at the mall? But I had to have that outfit! What if it cost more next week? What if it was gone!

The sense of entitlement will definitely carry over to our independent lives, but this time, we’re on our own. If we mess up our credit will come back negative, we’ll be in debt, and we’ll have to come crawling back to our parents.

For this generation of kids

See **SHOUT OUT**, Page 2

SOUND BITES

Is it possible for a teenager to have a successful relationship?

Our Eyes writer Veronica Diaz-posed this question to her fellow classmates at North Monterey County High School. Here are the results:

To suggest a question for **SOUNDBITES**, send e-mail to OurEyes@thecalifornian.com



Of course! You have to have all the confidence to do it, despite all the drama.

— Diane Casper, sophomore



It depends on who’s in the relationship. (They) have to be very loyal to each other.

— Ian Samuels, freshman



It’s like a garden. You have to give it water, sunshine and the magical ingredient of love.

— Jean Miller, junior



They just have to be mature enough. It all depends on the person.

— Michael Holland, freshman



If you’re a senior, no. Because at least one of you is going to college. Ya feel me, playa?

— Nick Gutierrez, senior



It depends on your definition of success. At our age, we don’t understand the concept of love.

— Tina Stokes, junior