

# The Worth Warrior App

A booklet for parents and carers from stem4



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# About

Worth Warrior is a free app created for young people to manage negative body image, low self-worth, and related early-stage eating difficulties or disorders. Created for teenage mental health charity stem4 by Dr Krause, a Consultant Clinical Psychologist, and in collaboration with young people, the app uses principles from the evidence-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for eating disorders (CBT-E).

Like all stem4's award-winning apps, it is free, private, anonymous, and safe.

stem4 is a London-based teenage mental health charity creating a portfolio of mental health apps for young people and mental health literacy in secondary schools and colleges.

Dr Nihara Krause is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist, with many years of clinical practice and who is also the clinical creator of the stem4 digital portfolio.

stem4 thanks the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) for their generous sponsorship of an Invention for Innovation grant that has enabled the development of the Worth Warrior app and this user guide, which forms one of three user guides – for Young People, for Parents and Carers and for Health Professionals.

## Introduction

Eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder, are psychological conditions that affect eating behaviour and through this, health. Low self-worth and body image issues often lie at the heart of the development of eating issues and an eating disorder. Taking steps early to boost self-worth and challenge negative body image concerns has been shown to help.

Parents and carers know their child or young person, so trust in your intuition or recognition that something isn't right. Taking early steps to change helps because, by addressing any underlying issues in time, young people, with parent and carer support, may be able to manage the escalating symptoms of body unhappiness and eating issues. Unfortunately, services for eating disorders are stretched and parents and carers play an important part in the treatment plan, so the more educated you become about how you can support your young person effectively, the more progress you can all make. By using this guide and the Worth Warrior app, we hope you can not only get through this period to protect your young person's mental health as best you can, but that you can also support them in taking their first preventative steps to change.

Please note however, that the app does not substitute for the assessment and intervention offered by a mental health professional. Early diagnosis and intervention is recommended, and your family doctor can help in the first instance.

# Contents

# About low self-worth and body image



Self-worth is a concept that is defined as the way in which you value and respect yourself as a person. It enables you to think positively about yourself, take steps to look after yourself and make positive connections with people.

Body image is the view and opinion a person has of their body (or parts of their body) and how accepting, or not, they are of this. Since young people's bodies are changing as they grow, their acceptance of their body will often be influenced by how similar or different they may be physically to friends or family members, and the positive and negative experiences they associate with their body.

Low self-worth affects a person's body image negatively and negative body image affects self-worth, creating a circular pattern of negative thoughts, unhappy feelings, and related behaviours.

Some of these behaviours may include not eating in a way that looks after one's body, not sleeping, not interacting openly with friends, and turning down doing things that are enjoyable.

After all, everyone is more likely to care for their body if they like it.

When negative thoughts about one's body go on for a while, they become automatic and people tend not to question these, accepting them as the 'truth.' This makes it hard to listen to and accept positive comments, and instead maintains negativity. Learning to recognise these negative thoughts and replace them, as well as altering behaviours, helps bring about positive emotions and better connections between people.

The treatment of eating issues and disorders that arise because of negative thoughts and behaviours often requires medical monitoring and may benefit from extra psychological and nutritional treatment. Getting help regarding family meals, dealing with eating issues at school or college, and learning how to manage stressful situations such as eating out can often be very helpful for both the young person and their family.



# About the psychological model used in the Worth Warrior app



The Worth Warrior app uses a structure that has emerged from a treatment called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for eating difficulties and disorders (CBT-E). CBT-E is a leading and well-researched model and as a result it's called an evidence-based treatment.

The approach is self-explanatory and works on helping an individual understand the interaction between their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. It provides the opportunity for them to understand their triggers and provides alternative, more helpful ways to cope.

CBT-E was developed in the late 1970s by three clinician researchers called Wilson, Fairburn and Agras and focuses on all forms of eating difficulties.

It is a model that encourages changing diet, identifying and challenging underlying unhelpful thoughts, encouraging new behaviours even if they generate some anxiety to break habits, and soothing emotions.

Newer models of CBT for eating disorders in young people have also added elements such as focussing on the effect of social media on body image, as well as emphasising the importance of family-based support.

Due to the delay in being able to get treatment, parents and carers can often support first steps to change by ensuring that:

A. You support your young person to regularly have three meals and three snacks a day;

B. You work as much as you can together on stabilising weight loss and helping regain lost weight, one small but sustained step at a time;

C. You set boundaries around excessive behaviours such as exercise and in some instances (after a doctor's assessment) ensure that they refrain from exercise until they are physically stable.

For the young person, CBT-E has several components including:

- Challenging diet 'rules' which usually maintain low weight.
- Journaling negative thoughts and focussing on steps to change.
- Reducing excess behaviours such as binges or problematic exercise.
- Learning about body image, low self-worth and eating disorders.
- Monitoring for risk factors and seeking help.

If you suspect your young person may be physically at risk, either because of low weight, because of the effects of various weight management behaviours they may be carrying out or because their mood is very low, please note that these physical factors need addressing first for psychological techniques to work. This is because brains need 'fuel' in the form of food to function properly.

Like any change, it's important to support your young person to practise applying the model regularly. They will need to give themselves some time to improve and your role will be to remain vigilant to negative change but also encouraging.



# About and how to use the Worth Warrior app

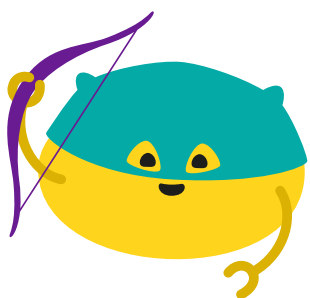
Worth Warrior is a free app to help young people manage low self worth and poor body image leading to eating difficulties and disorders.

Created for the teenage mental health charity stem4, this clinically-led app has been co-designed with input and user testing by young people.

The app is completely anonymous and does not collect any identifiable data. It has embedded analytics on how helpful it is, which provides stem4 with anonymised information on how many young people tell us it is useful and in terms of feedback. Using an app such as Worth Warrior is helpful as it can be available whenever it is needed. It doesn't use any data and doesn't need Wi-Fi for use.

The Worth Warrior app is a helpful self-management tool to learn to change negative thinking and worries, set goals for change, learn to self-reassure, manage difficult feelings, and monitor progress whilst working on keeping things in check.

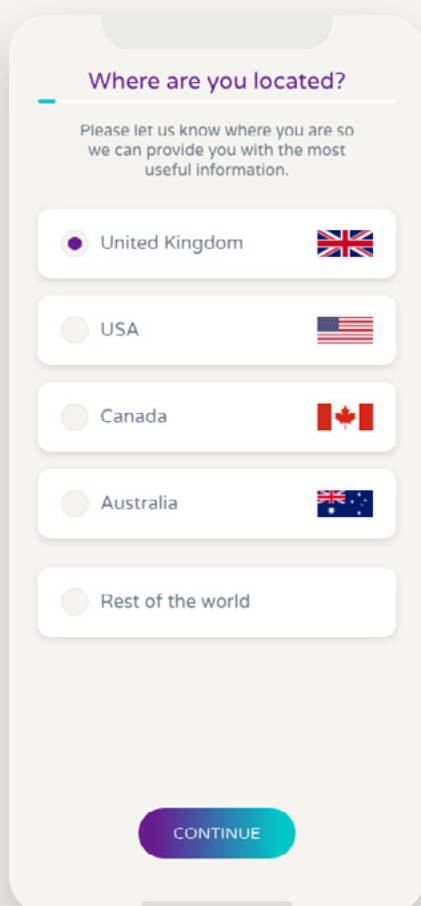
Whilst the Worth Warrior app does not substitute for a treatment plan with a mental health professional, at a time when services are stretched and access to a service can be difficult, it can be helpful to have a self-management tool like Worth Warrior to prompt change and help in the long term with building self-worth and creating balance. It can also help alongside treatment.



The Worth Warrior app uses the following archery metaphor to help users manage their low self-worth, poor body image and associated eating and body related difficulties:

*“To hit a target of worth takes practice and courage. Believe you can do it, keep trying and you will get there.”*





When a young person initially downloads the app, they are asked to specify their country and are asked for optional information about their county (if in the UK), age, gender, ethnicity, and whether they are in treatment.

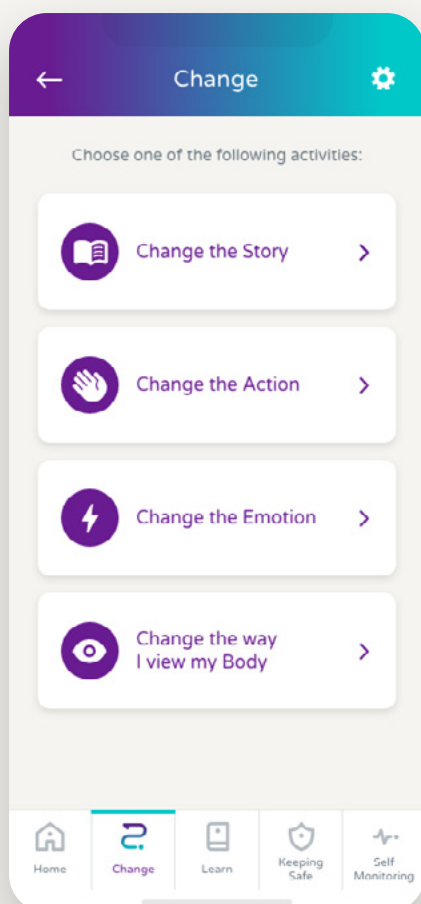
This data is completely anonymous and helps the Worth Warrior team at stem4 to adapt the app to suit the person using the app even more accurately. Users will then be able to set a passcode if they wish.

The young person will also be asked to set up a **'safety net'** with useful behaviours, thoughts and contact numbers, as well as sections of the app they can use, which can be done when starting the app or as they work through the app.

Whilst respecting their privacy at all times, you may wish to find out whether there are any elements of the safety net that your young person might like to share with you, for example, things you can say, people you can direct them to, or behaviours they can carry out.

However, please keep in mind that if your young person is very distressed, they may reject your support. If this is the case, help them to reduce their distress instead.





The main CBT-E element in the app can be found in the '*Change*' sections:

The '*Change the Story*' section of the app helps identify negative self-thoughts and teaches your young person how to substitute these for positive self-thoughts.

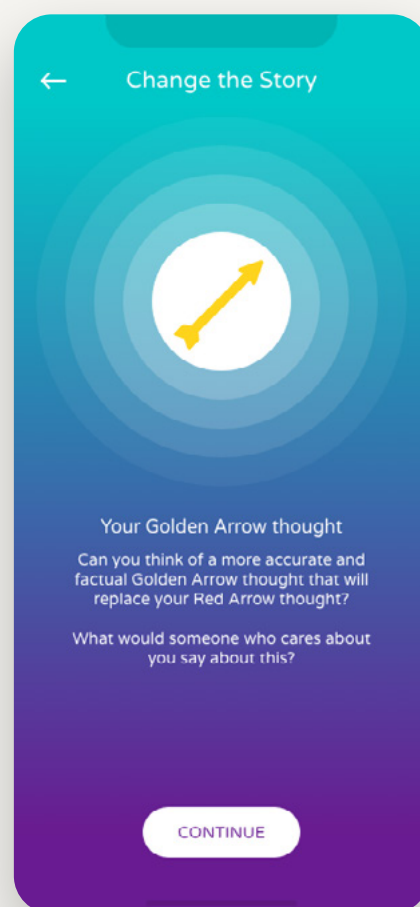
'*Change the Action*' focuses on identifying negative behaviours and altering them.

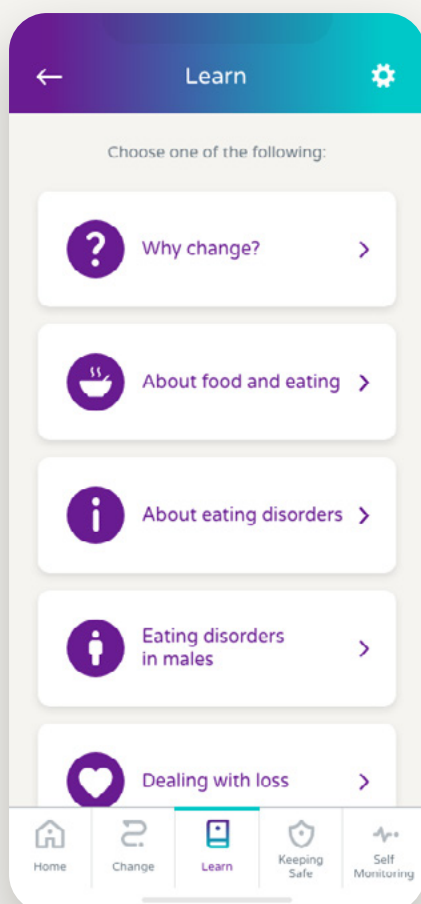
In '*Change the Emotion*' the young person is provided with alternative, self-soothing behaviours to regulate their eating.

In '*Change the way I view my Body*', users are taught how to separate fact from assumption in terms of body perception, since emotional feelings about one's body can lead to a form of thinking called emotional reasoning which often leads to negative assumptions.

Parents and carers can offer to help by setting up some shared time to work through the '*Change*' sections if your young person would like to.

Hearing your perspective on how to challenge negative thoughts, working with you on creating a list of alternative behaviours, or having an agreement on things they can do and how you can help when they feel emotionally overwhelmed can all help towards better communication and closeness.





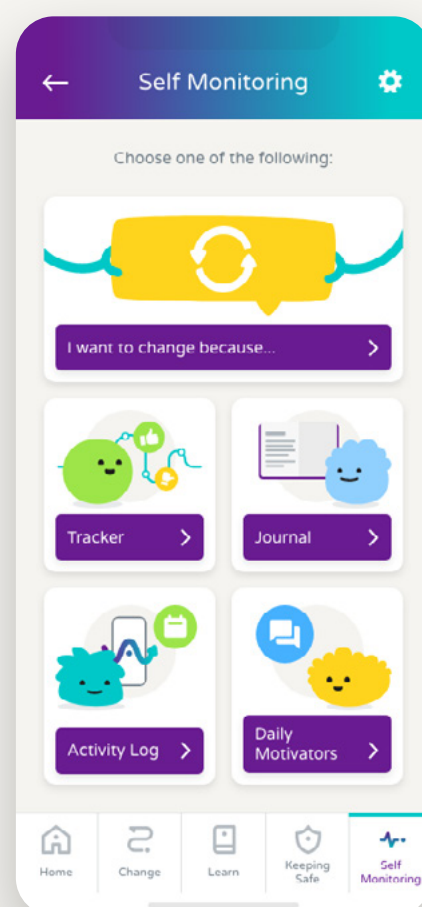
The '*Learn*' section provides a range of information within the app for your young person and yourself to learn more about eating disorders, such as the importance of regular eating and hunger, the health consequences of eating-related behaviours, and issues that maintain eating disorders.

There are also sections on eating disorders in males, dealing with loss, dealing with perfectionism (which is very common in this group) and helpful tips on social media and eating disorders.

Finally, in the '*Self Monitoring*' section of the app your young person can monitor and keep track of which app activities help, record thoughts and feelings in a journal (which they can keep completely private) and view daily motivators (these are encouraging statements).

They can use the app to monitor their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. They can also share their results with a doctor or therapist, or with you.

The '*Keeping Safe*' section will allow your young person to build their '*safety net*' of helpful thoughts, behaviours, people to contact, and signposts to help. It also helps them to keep a section of 'golden' arrows which are positive thoughts that they have generated whilst working through the '*Change the Story*' and '*Change the way I view my Body*' sections.



# Physical risks and ‘red flags’ to look out for



The Worth Warrior team at stem4 encourage the monitoring of physical signs and symptoms that indicate that a young person’s health may be at risk. The following list might seem scary, but the young people we worked with in creating the app told us that it would be useful to know what calls for a visit to the doctor.

This list doesn’t cover all possible ‘red flag’ symptoms but does provide an idea of the kinds of things to look out for. If you are worried about the physical changes noticed, or feel that your young person’s physical health is declining, then even if they don’t have any of these red flags, please arrange a health check to confirm that they are keeping well.

- Weight loss – significant, rapid
- Rapidly fluctuating weight due to binge eating
- Increasing tiredness getting in the way of being able to do the things they would like to
- Stomach aches and pains, especially after eating
- Digestive problems, for example, being constipated
- Mood changes, for example, quick to get angry, anxiety/panic, low mood

- Feeling very cold when the temperature is not particularly low
- Feeling light-headed
- Fainting when they haven't had a history of doing so
- Nutritional problems related to under eating, for example low iron
- Low blood pressure
- Fine hair growth on their body
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Constant and/or repetitive thoughts about food and body image worries
- Avoiding social situations where there is food and eating
- Aches and pains in their muscles, especially when climbing up-stairs or squatting and standing
- Very low mood
- Being on online sites around body matters, exercise, eating disorders (including social media)
- More frequent fractures
- In females, disruption or stopping of periods
- Numbness and tingling of hands
- Blood in stools or in vomit
- Dry, yellow coloured skin
- Sleep disturbance, especially waking up early in the mornings
- Bloating of stomach



# Further support for your young person, their siblings and yourself



## Supporting your young person to build their self-worth

Every young person is different, and positive self-esteem can be easier for some than others. However, the good news is that self-esteem can be raised.

### Some tips include:

- Encouraging independence one step at a time.
- Providing 'descriptive praise' which means noticing when they have done something they are proud of, describing to them why it's an achievement (e.g., 'Your hard work really paid off, well done') and providing a vote of confidence (e.g., 'I'm sure with the same effort you can continue to do really well').
- Catching self-critical statements that are said in the family and changing them to self-coaching ones instead.
- Helping them to recognise their strengths by focussing on them and providing them with opportunities to develop them further.
- Appreciating unique qualities by avoiding comparison.
- Providing opportunities to be generous and to give, so that they can develop empathy and learn to see that what they do matters.

## Supporting siblings

Managing low self-worth and eating issues can impact the whole family. This is because sometimes managing an eating disorder can be very focussed on the person who is unwell. It can affect family life by creating stress or tension, developing a focus on food and eating, and generating worry and concern. Sometimes siblings might find it hard to confide in friends about what's happening at home, making them feel on their own.

### Some tips include:

- Trying to be open with siblings who are at an age when they can understand things.
- 'Externalising' the eating disorder. This means separating the eating disorder from their sister or brother so that they can start to see that it is the condition that changes the way their sibling thinks or behaves.
- Spending one-on-one time with them. Remember things that are important and show them you haven't forgotten.
- Making sure they don't feel guilty or to blame. Siblings are often reassured by knowing that the condition is an illness and that no one is to blame.
- Making sure they don't step into a supporter role. Maintain suitable boundaries.
- Being watchful of any possible signs of eating issues in them, too.

## Supporting yourself

Parents and carers are an important part of the treatment team. However, this can have a significant emotional impact.

### Some tips include:

- Make sure you carve out some time for yourself to do some things you enjoy.
- Challenge guilt by reminding yourself that eating disorders are illnesses. Take steps to feel effective and integral to helping make change.
- It might raise concerns about your own eating behaviours or body related issues. Get some help in identifying these and managing change.
- You may feel exhausted in your role as an advocate for your young person. Challenges in accessing suitable health care, keeping an eye on the impact of eating behaviours, supporting siblings, and supporting a lack of engagement with treatment are some of the difficulties that parents can experience. Get some support from your partner, a relative, a friend or a health/mental health professional. Learn to also advocate for yourself.



## Signposts for your young person and for you

Here are some resources outside of your young person's GP, school or college that may benefit them:

### UK

Here are some National UK organisations that you may find helpful:

### Mind

## US

The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)

The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD)

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Crisis Text Line

## Canada

Crisis Text Line

Kids Help Phone (English and French)

## Australia

The Butterfly Foundation

Kids Helpline

## These organisations can also support you:

Beat

FREED

stem4

Combined Minds app

Email: [enquiries@stem4.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@stem4.org.uk)

Twitter: [@stem4org](https://twitter.com/stem4org)

Instagram: [@stem4org](https://www.instagram.com/stem4org)

Facebook: [@stem4](https://www.facebook.com/stem4)

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