CHAPTER 8
EATING DISORDERS

Case illustration of “Susan”

Introduction to the Video Interview

Mood Disorder

This interview with Susan highlights someone who is struggling with Anorexia Nervosa. Pay particular attention to how Susan talks about her fears of not being “skinny enough”. This points to the definite disturbance in Susan’s awareness of the size and shape of her body, a key feature of Anorexia. Listen carefully for how she sees herself as a failure for not having lost enough weight.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia Nervosa is evident by person’s terror about gaining weight. The individual does not maintain a minimally acceptable body weight, and:

∞ Refuses to maintain normal body weight (e.g.: weighs less than 85% of the ideal weight for the person’s age and height);
∞ Intensely fears becoming “fat” regardless of their low body weight;
∞ Has a distorted body image (sees themselves as fat even though they are under weight);
∞ Dreads loss of control; and
∞ In females, missed at least 3 consecutive menstrual cycles (or amenorrhea).

There are 2 subtypes:

∞ Restricting type severely restricts food intake without regularly engaging in binge eating or purging behavior;

∞ Binge-eating/purging type maintains weight at an abnormally low level through food restriction but also engages in binge eating or purging behaviors.

Interview Questions:

1. The interviewer asks Susan, “As you lose more weight, does your concern about the weight lessen or grow larger?” Describe Susan’s attitude toward food and the associated feelings that she has when she gains weight.
2. There are 2 subtypes for the diagnosis of Anorexia Nervosa. Listening to Susan’s response to the interviewer’s question, “You said that you have to get rid of weight when you gain it, how do you do that”, what subtype does she have?

3. Susan is asked, “In what way does your body not feel right?” How would you describe Susan’s perception of her body image?

Practitioner Reflections:


1. The competency-based assessment focuses on strengths and coping capacities in the client’s environment. Describe the interactions of the biological, psychological and social factors in Susan’s life. When formulating your assessment, what areas of competence did she demonstrate in the interview?

   - What internal and external strengths do you see in Susan’s situation?
   - What more would you like to know about Susan’s support system?
   - If you were the social worker assigned to Susan’s case, what steps would you take to assure that her support system stays intact?
   - What would you consider adding to Susan’s support system?

2. American society stresses physical beauty, fitness, and favors the thin and slim female as the ideal. After listening to Susan’s story and how her eating disorder began, identify what factors contributed to the development of her eating disorder? Mood disorders often co-occur with eating disorders. Susan comments about her struggles with depression. What role does this play in her eating disorder?

3. Eating disorders are influenced by many factors such as family rituals and values around food and eating, ethnic and cultural influences, societal influences, and individual biology to list a few. Looking back at the interview with Susan, what factors might have played a role in her problems with food?

4. Susan has so much hope and promise in her life but she tends to see herself as a failure. What is your initial response to Susan and how she talks about her weight? Identify the feeling (or feelings) her dialogue evokes in you.

5. How would you evaluate your ability to speak directly and forthrightly to Susan about her conflicts with food? What is the biggest uneasiness evoked for you by this approach? Comment about her acknowledgement that she does have an eating disorder.