



A FREE GUIDE FOR MOTHERS

The 167-Hour Guide

Supporting your child between therapy sessions, from the morning wake-up to the midnight worry

For mothers navigating a child's eating disorder, compulsive exercise, and the anxiety that comes with body image distress.

Your child may spend one hour a week in therapy. You walk beside them through the other 167.

A Note Before You Begin

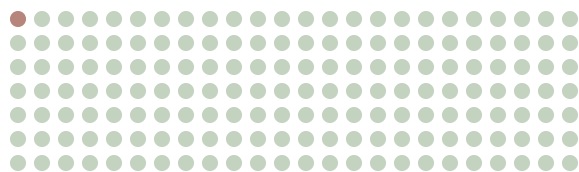
If you are reading this, you're likely in the middle of something hard. The kind of hard that doesn't let you rest.

You're probably already doing so many of the things you've been told to do. The specialists. The meal plans. The appointments you've coordinated. Trying to hold it all together.

There are the conversations you've tried to get right—and second-guessed afterward. The late-night research. The constant wondering if what you're doing is enough.

And still, the eating disorder doesn't wait politely for the next appointment.

It shows up at breakfast. After practice. At dinner when you don't know what to say. At 2 a.m. when you're lying awake wondering if you handled today right—or if anything you're doing is making a difference.



168 hours in a week.

- One with a therapist.
- 167 at home, with you.

So much of this happens in the ordinary hours of family life.

This guide is for those hours.

The morning. The table. The car ride home. The quiet of the evening when everyone else is asleep and your mind won't stop.

What I'm going to share isn't a treatment plan or a protocol. It's what I've learned walking this road with my own son and accompanying other families through eating disorders, disordered eating, compulsive exercise, and anxiety.

Again and again, I have seen how much a parent's presence matters.

Not a perfect parent. A steady one.

And steadiness grows when you have somewhere to bring what you're carrying, too.

I understand this road personally. I have lived the fear, confusion, second-guessing, and sleepless nights that come when someone you love is suffering.

Which is why I want you to know something from the beginning:

You were never meant to carry this alone.

Starting the Day Steady

Maybe your day starts before the alarm.

You're already running through it.

Breakfast. Whether he'll eat. Whether he exercised last night. What you'll say if he doesn't come downstairs.

Before my son was in treatment, 6 a.m. often started the same way. I was awake before the alarm, running loops in my head.

And underneath all of it was the question I didn't want to ask out loud:

When I opened his bedroom door, would he be breathing?

His heart rate had dropped so low that I would walk close to the bed to be sure.

I'd brace. Open the door. Watch his chest.

Then I'd let out a breath, close the door softly, and go downstairs to make the breakfast he was going to fight me on.

That was one morning.

I had hundreds of them.

If your mornings feel anything like this, of course your body is bracing. You are loving someone through something frightening.

Your steadiness matters more than you may realize.

You can often feel it before the moment even starts.

Your body tightens. Your mind races ahead. You rehearse what you're going to say. You prepare for the conflict before it has even happened.

That's your nervous system trying to protect someone you love.

And your child has a nervous system, too.

We are deeply attuned to the people closest to us. Your child may feel your fear before you've said a word. And you may feel theirs.

That doesn't mean you have to walk into every room perfectly calm.

It means you can begin to notice what is happening inside you before fear takes over.

A breath. Your feet on the floor. A moment to notice, *I'm scared right now*.

Sometimes that small pause creates enough space to choose how you want to enter the moment.

Not perfectly. Just a little more present.

You may still snap. Check. Overthink. Control. Go quiet.

Steadiness isn't a state you finally achieve.

It's a place you learn to return to.

BEFORE YOU GO DOWNSTAIRS

1 Name it.

What am I most afraid of today?

2 Find your feet.

Feel the floor. Unclench your jaw. Let your exhale be a little longer. Not because everything is okay, but because fear doesn't have to be the only thing in the room.

3 Choose one word.

How do I want to show up for my child this morning?

Warm. Firm. Quiet. Present.

A MORNING PRAYER

Jesus, quiet the part of me that believes everything depends on my vigilance. Help me love my child well today and entrust to You what I cannot control. Amen.

When You Don't Know What to Say

I remember standing at the edge of the kitchen, watching my son sit at the table.

Seventeen years old, and I was plating his meals like he was three.

Sitting beside him. Encouraging him. Watching closely and trying to read how the meal was going to go.

Would he eat? Would it turn into a clash? Would he shut down?

One evening, I went to check on him and found him quietly pouring out his milk.

I just stood there.

It didn't look like much from the outside. But I knew what it meant.

My heart sank, and I could feel my anxiety rising just as fast.

You may have been told to stay calm. Don't make food emotional. Don't argue with the eating disorder.

And you're trying.

But sometimes nobody gives you words for what to say when your child is sitting three feet away from you and falling apart.

I said the wrong thing more times than I can count.

Not because I didn't care. Because I was scared.

And sometimes fear spoke before I did.

There aren't magic words that will make an eating disorder disappear. Your treatment team should guide the nutritional and medical expectations around meals.

But there are ways of speaking that can help your child know:

I see how hard this is.

I'm not afraid of your feelings.

And I'm still here.

Connect before you direct.

When the plate gets pushed away

Instead of immediately trying to reason, persuade, or correct, begin with what you see:

"This feels really hard right now. I'm here with you."

You don't have to fix the feeling. You can make room for it while still following the plan your treatment team has given you.

When the tears come

"I see how overwhelmed you are. We don't have to figure everything out right now. I'm right here."

Sometimes your child doesn't need encouragement yet.

They need to know their fear isn't too much for you.

When you hear, "I'm not hungry"

You may be tempted to argue with the statement. Instead, you might begin with:

"I hear you. I know this feels really confusing and hard in your body right now."

Then follow the guidance you've been given by your treatment team.

Connection doesn't mean removing an expectation.

It means your child doesn't have to face the expectation alone.

When someone makes a comment at the table

You don't have to turn it into a lecture. A simple:

"Let's leave bodies and food choices out of the conversation."

may be enough. Later, away from the table, you can explain more.

Your child gets to experience something important in that moment:

Mom sees what is happening. I don't have to manage everybody else.

FIVE THINGS TO CARRY TO THE TABLE

Pause before reacting.

Get curious before correcting.

Let feelings be present without letting them run the room.

Choose presence over perfect.

Entrust what you were never meant to control.

A PRAYER BEFORE THE MEAL

Lord, let our home be a place where bodies, food, and worth are held with dignity. Help me see my child beneath the fear and stay close when this is hard. Amen.

Your child's medical and nutritional needs are individual. Always follow the guidance of your child's treatment team regarding meals and medical safety.

See the Person, Not Only the Disorder

Afternoons have their own weight.

The text from school. The car door after practice. Watching your child's face, trying to read how the day went.

Wondering if lunch was eaten. Wondering how far they ran.

Sometimes your child's anxiety walks in the door first. Sometimes yours does. Often it's both.

If there's one thing I want you to remember in those moments, it's this:

Your child is not the disorder.

The refusal. The anger. The hiding. The shutdown.

It can feel like you're losing the child you've known.

And then there are moments when they soften. They laugh. They tell you something about their day. You catch a glimpse of them again.

And you think: *Where did my child go?*

Eating disorders are serious illnesses. They can affect the brain and body, behavior, relationships, and the way someone experiences themselves and the world around them.

But the eating disorder is still not the whole person.

Sometimes when we are terrified by a behavior, our attention narrows around stopping it. And sometimes stopping a dangerous behavior absolutely is the priority.

But we can also remain curious about the person underneath it.

Instead of only *How do I make this stop?* we can begin to wonder:

What is happening inside my child right now?

What might this behavior be doing for them?

What are they having trouble putting into words?

We don't have to know the answer. Curiosity simply helps us approach the person rather than only the problem.

INSTEAD OF

TRY WONDERING

Why is she doing this?

What might be happening inside her right now?

He's being defiant.

What is making this moment feel so threatening or hard for him?

I have to fix this right now.

What needs to happen right now—and what can wait until we're both steadier?

Curiosity isn't passivity.

It doesn't mean ignoring medical risk or removing necessary boundaries.

It means that while you address the behavior, you keep looking for your child.

A gentle note: when a brain isn't receiving enough nourishment, reflection, flexibility, and emotional regulation can become much harder. If your child is medically or nutritionally unstable, medical and nutritional care comes first. You don't need to force insight that their brain may not yet be able to access.

Their worth has not changed.

Not because of performance. Not because of appearance. Not because of what they achieve—or don't achieve.

Their dignity isn't something an eating disorder can take away.

In the Catholic understanding of the human person, our worth is inherent. It is not earned.

Sometimes your role is simply to keep holding onto that truth when your child cannot hold onto it for themselves.

A TWO-MINUTE RESET

Before pickup. In the car. At the kitchen counter.

Put your feet on the ground. Notice what is rising in you.

Ask: *What am I afraid of right now?*

Then: *What does this moment actually need from me?*

And perhaps one simple prayer:

"Please help me see my child, not only my fear."

When the House Gets Quiet

The house finally goes quiet.

And that's when it starts.

You replay the meal. The thing you said. The thing you didn't say. The look on your child's face.

By 2 a.m., the questions get louder:

Did I handle that right?

Am I making this worse?

How did I miss this?

And all day people have asked: *How is he doing? Is she eating?*

Almost no one asks how you are.

Maybe you've stopped expecting them to.

How did I miss this?

Almost every mother I work with has asked some version of that question.

I asked it too.

It was winter, and I had just come home from a work trip to Israel.

I had felt so connected to my faith on that trip. And when I came home, I looked at my son and something in my gut told me this was more than what we thought it was.

The upper GI issues. Pulling away from friends. The increasing focus on clean eating and bulking up.

And somehow, while doing all of that, he was getting weaker.

I remember wondering: *Could this be an eating disorder?*

But even then, I didn't fully see it.

A few months went by and nothing was getting better. I started trying to get appointments, but this was during COVID. We had to wait until summer for restrictions to ease enough to finally see a therapist and dietitian in person.

I was angry with myself for not seeing it sooner.

I was angry that, at a time when people desperately needed care, it was so hard to get.

And underneath all of that was the weight of wondering: *How had I missed what was happening right in front of me?*

It was really heavy.

Eating disorders rarely announce themselves clearly.

The early signs can be tangled up in things our culture praises. Discipline. Achievement. "Clean eating." Exercise. Being "healthy."

You were loving your child with the knowledge you had at the time.

This is not about blaming parents.

I want to say this plainly because I needed someone to say it to me.

My fears came with me into this.

My history came with me.

My difficulty sitting with uncertainty came with me.

None of that caused my son's eating disorder.

But it shaped how I experienced what was happening. And sometimes, it shaped how I responded.

That isn't an indictment of me—or of you.

It's part of being human and loving someone who is suffering.

Blame does not help healing. Support does.

The Grief No One Names

There has been no death, and yet something has been lost.

The future you pictured. The child you remember before all of this began. The ease of ordinary things you never thought twice about.

Family dinners. Time with friends. Simply watching your child enjoy life.

By the time my son was finally diagnosed, it had been almost a year since the small shifts had begun.

There was so much grief in realizing how much had changed.

But alongside the grief were guilt and shame.

I kept going back over that year in my mind. The things I had noticed. The things I hadn't understood.

The moments when I wondered if something was really wrong but was afraid of what it might mean.

And there was this painful thought I couldn't shake:

If I hadn't been so afraid, maybe we could have reached him sooner.

Maybe it wouldn't have gotten this bad.

That was one of the heaviest parts for me.

Not only grieving what was happening to my son, but carrying the belief that somehow I should have been able to stop it.

If you're carrying that same belief, I want to gently set something beside it:

You were responding with what you understood at the time. Looking back with what you know now is not the same as having known it then.

You Cannot Give What You Have Not Received

During my formation with the CatholicPsych Institute, I read a short book by Catholic psychiatrist Conrad Baars called *Born Only Once*.

It's barely 80 pages. And it changed the way I understood my own story.

Baars writes about our need to be affirmed—not simply praised or told we're doing a good job, but truly received by another person.

To be seen. Known. Valued simply for who we are.

And there was one idea I kept coming back to:

You cannot give what you have not received.

I remember sitting outside on a sunny afternoon, thinking about how much I had been *doing*.

I was researching, planning, reading, trying to find the right doctors and the right answers.

I had overextended myself trying to help my son get better.

And somewhere in all of that doing, I realized how little I had simply been *being* with him.

Reading Baars helped me see something I hadn't understood before.

My son didn't only need me focused on what was wrong or what needed to change.

He needed to know that I saw *him*.

His humor. His kindness. His creativity. His love of sports.

All of the things that made him who he was—not just the eating disorder that had taken up so much space in our lives.

I had become so focused on helping him that, in some ways, I had stopped appreciating him.

That realization changed something for me.

He needed my help, yes.

But he also needed his mom to see him, affirm him, and enjoy who he was.

He needed to be seen.

And I began to understand something else.

I couldn't give that freely from an empty place.

I needed somewhere to be received, too.

Mothers tell me: "*I don't know who I am anymore outside of this.*"

Or: "*I just need someone to tell me I'm doing enough.*"

You matter in this, too.

Caring for your own heart isn't selfish. And it isn't another self-care item to put on an already impossible list.

Sometimes it simply means having a relationship where you can be known. Where you can bring the fear, anger, guilt, confusion, exhaustion—and not have to clean it up first.

Baars offered me something deeply hopeful:

It is not too late for us to receive what we may not have received before.

And when we are received differently, we can begin to show up differently in our relationships.

When You Don't Show Up the Way You Hoped

You will have moments you wish you could do over.

That's where repair matters.

First, notice what is happening in you:

"That was a hard moment. I was scared and overwhelmed. I can come back and repair it."

Then, when you're both calmer, you might say to your child:

"I said something earlier that I wish I had handled differently. I was scared and overwhelmed, and it came out in the way I spoke to you. I'm sorry. I'm still learning, too."

You don't have to defend it. You don't have to make your child tell you it's okay.

You can simply own your part and come back.

A relationship doesn't have to be perfect. It needs room for repair.

A FIVE-MINUTE EVENING EXAMEN

- 1 Where did I see my child today—not only the disorder?
- 2 Where did I brace, and where did I find a little steadiness?
- 3 What am I still trying to control that I need to hand back to God tonight?

AN EVENING PRAYER

Lord, I give You this day—what went well and what didn't. Hold my child tonight. And hold me, too. Amen.

The Whole Family Feels It

Eating disorders rarely stay contained to one person.

They show up at the table. In marriages. In siblings who are watching quietly and may be scared, angry, confused, or feeling invisible.

They change conversations and routines.

Everyone is affected, even when no one is saying it out loud.

Sometimes, in the urgency of helping the child who is struggling, everyone else begins to disappear a little.

You included.

So every once in a while, look around.

Who haven't you really seen lately?

Maybe it's another child. Maybe it's your spouse. Maybe it's you.

REFLECTION

Who in our family may be feeling invisible right now? What would it look like to make a little room for them this week?

BETWEEN SESSIONS

Why the 167 Hours Matter

Your child's treatment team is doing important work.

But the hardest moments rarely happen in the therapy room.

They happen at breakfast. At the table. After practice. In the car. Late at night when you're replaying everything.

These are the 167 hours when real life is happening.

And they can be very hard to hold by yourself.

Not because you're doing something wrong.

Because loving someone through an eating disorder asks a lot of a parent.

Having somewhere to bring the fear, confusion, anger, guilt, and second-guessing can give you more room to notice what's happening inside you—and choose how you want to respond.

This is where daily mentorship and accompaniment can help.

WHAT DAILY ACCOMPANIMENT LOOKS LIKE

1 Share the moment.

Leave a voice message while it's still fresh—the fear, the question, the interaction you can't stop replaying, or even the small win you don't want to miss.

2 Be received.

I listen and respond within 24 hours, Monday through Friday, with reflection, curiosity, and support.

3 Grow steadier.

Begin to understand what's happening inside you and between you and your child, so you don't have to navigate every hard moment alone.

You don't have to remember everything for an appointment next week.

We can work with what is happening in the middle of real life.

Mentorship isn't therapy. It's a relationship of steady support and accompaniment as you walk beside your child.

My work brings together psychological science, relational and attachment-based understanding, spirituality, and a Catholic understanding of the dignity of the whole person—body, mind, and soul.

You do not have to be Catholic to benefit from this work.

But for parents who want their faith to be part of the conversation, it doesn't have to be left at the door.

ONE STEP

You don't have to have all of this figured out.

You don't need one more thing to get perfectly right.

What I have come to believe is that parents often don't need one more article to read or one more strategy to master.

They need somewhere to bring what they're carrying.

A place to process what's happening in real time.

A place to understand themselves more deeply.

A place to become steadier.

A place where they don't have to carry the fear alone.

If it would help to talk through what's happening in your family, I offer a free consultation where we can simply explore your situation together.

No pressure. Just a conversation.

[Schedule a Free Call with Steph →](#)

accompanymehealing.com/book-a-call

About Stephanie Strick

Stephanie Strick is a Partner and Certified Mentor with the CatholicPsych Institute and the founder of AccompanyMe. She accompanies mothers and parents navigating eating disorders, compulsive exercise, anxiety, and perfectionism within their families through daily mentorship rooted in psychological science and the Catholic understanding of the human person.

Her work draws from attachment, interpersonal and family systems psychology, nervous system regulation, and spiritual wisdom. But this work is also personal. She has walked this road with her own family.

She knows what the table feels like.

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