How does MFT help?

“Anorexia had us beaten but now we’re fighting back…”

MFT can help young people and their families:

- feel more confident in the possibility of overcoming the illness
- gain a better understanding of the illness and put together a ‘toolkit’ of skills and techniques to beat it
- build up existing family relationships and develop new ones with other families in MFT
- take charge of anorexia and ‘boss it back’ with renewed strength!

We are confident that committed participation in the MFT programme offers young people and their families a real hope of overcoming anorexia, even where other, more traditional treatments have failed.

“The group was immensely helpful to both me and my family. It benefitted me because I was given the opportunity to voice my opinions to other people who were not necessarily biased like my parents. It was also comforting to meet other people in a similar situation. I hope that some of the insights we shared and I gave them will have helped them realise things about what they were doing etc. that no one else could.

It helped my family, my parents most of all, because it gave them a chance to share and discuss their problems with people in a similar boat and to vent their frustration on someone other than me.

The activities we did provided good talking points and allowed us to discuss subjects that may have been too awkward or difficult otherwise.

For siblings who are struggling to accept and understand the illness, I think it is reassuring to see that their family is not the only anomaly and that if they have harsh words to say then the group meetings are the place.

More than anything I would say to just ‘go for it’ with an open mind.”

Louise, 15, anorexia nervosa patient
What is MFT?
The Maudsley Multi-Family Therapy (MFT) for anorexia programme has been used successfully with hundreds of children and young people, from all over the country, since 2000.

It is an innovative way of working with anyone up to age 18, and their families, where anorexia nervosa has ‘taken hold of their lives’. By participating in this intensive therapeutic group treatment programme alongside 4—6 other families with similar problems, young people and their families can reach a significant turning point – where real recovery becomes achievable and hospital admission is averted.

The MFT group encourages everybody, parents included, to play critical roles in becoming instruments for change. MFT can facilitate a new way of thinking about habits and behaviours leading to positive improvements.

How does the programme run?

We invite families to first attend an introductory meeting with the team who will be running the programme and a ‘graduate’ family who has completed the programme.

The following week all the families attend (often with siblings) for four days. Here, we work closely together to guide every person through the structured programme, which includes eating together in a supported environment. The whole group then takes part in four to five further MFT follow-up days/workshops over the next six to nine months.

Who comes to MFT?
We invite:

- The young person with anorexia nervosa
- Parents – but also any other significant adults who are in that person’s life. In the past we have included step-parents, grandparents, and partners and are open to any family set-up.
- Siblings – for however many sessions they are able to attend

The MFT team:

- Two lead therapists
- Up to four additional supportive therapists and trainees.

Who happens in MFT?

MFT combines group therapy, family therapy, psycho-education with creative and supportive activities and interventions.

There are exercises for the whole group, as well as some just for the young people, their siblings on their own, and some for parents as a separate group. Each one gives different opportunities to share experiences, and ideas to support one another.

Our experience has shown us that working together to challenge anorexia works.

A typical workshop day

10.00 Family introductions.
   Take part in whole group task.
   
   **Morning snack – parents bring snacks and lunch according to the meal plan**

Separate activities:

- Parent group
- Young people’s group

12.30 Lunch: families eating together and helping each other
   
   **Break**

1.30 Group feedback from morning and lunch. Separate activities:

- Parent group
- Young people’s group
- Siblings group

3.00 **Afternoon snack**

3.30 Main group reflections

4.00 End of MFT day – everyone goes home.