

elena vanishing

A MEMOIR



# STARTING A CONVERSATION

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By Elena and Clare B. Dunkle

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

Seventeen-year-old Elena is vanishing. Every day means renewed determination, so every day means fewer calories. This is the story of a girl whose armor against anxiety is artillery against herself; a girl battling on both sides of a lose-lose war; a girl struggling with anorexia. Co-written with her mother, Elena's book painfully examines the horrors of being trapped in one's mind—and how those horrors turn girls into ghosts.

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“When I offered to help my daughter Elena write about her life with anorexia nervosa, I thought I already understood her disorder. Like most educated women, I’d been reading articles and watching focus pieces about it for years. But I quickly discovered how little I knew. Most of my basic assumptions were wrong.”

—Clare B. Dunkle

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*Dear Readers,*

*It’s a fair guess that every one of us knows someone who has struggled with an eating disorder. Yet it’s often challenging to bring up the subject, even with a friend, a teammate, or a family member.*

*We hope that Elena Vanishing will help start an essential conversation in families, peer advisory groups, and other support networks. While no experience with an eating disorder is identical, this memoir is an important and rare insight into the disorder. This conversation guide aims to provide you with the resources to discuss the issues related to eating disorders. You may choose to begin this conversation by talking about Elena’s experiences, and then move into the broader questions. Lastly, find out more about how to get help or how to support others.*

## Discuss the Book

Keep a reading journal to record passages that inspire a strong reaction, raise powerful questions, or challenge a previously-held assumption. You might use these reading journals as a starting point to discuss the book. Below are several additional prompts.

What are three words that you would use to describe Elena, and why?

Elena calls the voice inside her head her “conscience.” How would you describe the tone of this voice? Where do you think this voice gets its power from?

Why is “the number” so important to Elena? What does this number represent?

A number of doctors and therapists don’t think Elena has anorexia. Why not? Why is it difficult to diagnose Elena with anorexia?

How would you describe Elena’s relationship with her mom? her dad? her sister? How does each attempt to help Elena?

What would you identify as the turning point in Elena’s struggle with anorexia?

What most surprised you about Elena’s experience? What part of her story did you find most touching or moving? Were there any moments in which you felt frustrated?

What did you learn about anorexia—and eating disorders in general—from *Elena Vanishing*?



## Raise Awareness Through Conversation

The following are broader questions to bring up with your group after reading and discussing *Elena Vanishing*. We encourage you to conduct deeper research into eating disorders for statistics and facts. See “Find Out More” for more information.

Is there too much pressure on girls to have “perfect bodies”? How much pressure do boys face? What evidence can you identify in our culture?

What is an assumption you previously made about anorexia or other eating disorders that you now realize is untrue?

What attitudes and approaches seemed to be most helpful to Elena in her recovery? What approaches were unhelpful, or perhaps even harmful, to Elena?

Given what you have learned about Elena’s experience, what challenges might you anticipate in helping someone who you think may have an eating disorder?

Do you think there is a stigma against people with eating disorders? If so, why do you think this stigma exists?

What did you learn about anorexia—and eating disorders in general—from *Elena Vanishing*?

## Find Out More

There are many non-profit organizations with valuable resources on eating disorders available on the Internet. Whether you want to find out more about symptoms of eating disorders, learn how to support a friend, or coordinate an awareness campaign, these organizations provide the tools you need.

*Reach out for help.* The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) offers a free, confidential online eating disorder screening that can help you self-assess whether you or someone you know is at risk. NEDA and the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa & Associated Disorders (ANAD) offer toll-free, confidential helplines that provide advice and treatment options. Contact NEDA at 1-800-931-2237. The ANAD helpline, (630) 577-1330, can help you find the treatment to fit your needs. You can also contact them via email at [anadhelp@anad.org](mailto:anadhelp@anad.org).

*Learn how to support others.* NEDA offers a wealth of resources for family members and friends who are helping someone cope with an eating disorder, including a Parent Toolkit, which contains information on common myths about eating disorders; eating disorder signs, symptoms, and behaviors; how to be supportive; and step-by-step instructions on how to begin a discussion with someone who may be struggling with an eating disorder.

There are also toolkits available on the NEDA website for educators, coaches, and advisors who have a student showing signs of having an eating disorder, or who work with groups of students wanting to raise awareness.



## Get Involved

National Eating Disorders Awareness Week is the last week of February. Get involved by visiting their website and choosing what works for you. Doing just one thing can make a difference. You can:

- Host a program or a workshop about eating disorders and body image on your campus
- Start a student group that focuses on promoting healthy, positive body image
- Join or coordinate a NEDA Walk, the largest fundraising walk that brings awareness and funding to combat eating disorders

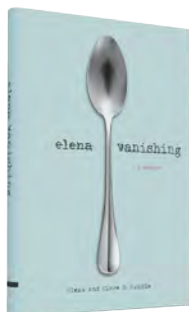


## About the Authors

CLARE B. DUNKLE is an award-winning author of seven acclaimed fantasy and science fiction novels, including *The Hollow Kingdom Trilogy*, the first book of which was the winner of the 2004 Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature. A Texan and former Texas librarian, Clare now lives in Germany, but travels often to the United States to see her family, especially her two daughters, Valerie and Elena, and her grandchildren. Find out more about Clare at [www.claredunkle.com](http://www.claredunkle.com).

ELENA DUNKLE is Clare Dunkle's daughter. She spent her teenage years exploring the German countryside and considers Germany her second home. She was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa at the age of seventeen and has always wanted to shed a light on her experiences with this complicated and misunderstood disorder. Elena currently roams across America with her wonderful husband and her travel-size Chihuahua, Mimsy. This is her first book. Find out more about Elena at [www.elenadunkle.com](http://www.elenadunkle.com).

For more information or questions about this reading group guide, contact Jaime Wong at [jaime\\_wong@chroniclebooks.com](mailto:jaime_wong@chroniclebooks.com).



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Also by Clare B. Dunkle:  
**Hope and Other Luxuries:  
A Mother's Life With a Daughter's Anorexia**  
978-1-4521-2156-7 \* \$25.00 HC  
978-1-4521-3697-4 \* \$19.99 EB

Copublished with *Elena Vanishing*, this is the story—told in brave, beautifully written, and unflinchingly honest prose—of one family's fight against a deadly disease, from an often ignored but important perspective: the mother of the anorexic.



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