

# ABUHB ARFID

(Avoidant and Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) Service

## Eating as a Family

### Information for families

If you are given this information by a professional it does not necessarily mean that your child has a diagnosis of ARFID. All children will benefit from these strategies.

#### This leaflet will address:

Your role during support  
Relationships with food  
Structure and choice  
Appetite and stimulation



### Your role during support

#### The importance of trust

Talking with your child about what/ where/ when activities with the new food should happen helps your child to feel safe, supported, and build their trust in you.



It can be tempting to skip ahead with the step-by-step process of **chaining**\* if it seems like your child found a step quite easy. However, it is very important that you stick to the plan and do not rush your child. They may feel that you have asked too much of them by suddenly adding to their task, which can make them lose their trust in you as their support, and even take backwards steps.

It might also seem like a good idea to try and hide additional foods within your child's safe foods, or bribe them to try new foods, however both these things can also break trust.

Some parents may feel responsible for their child's eating difficulties, resulting in feelings of guilt. However, it is important to remember that eating difficulties often come from a number of different causes. Be kind to yourself and focus on how to support your child to move forward.

*\*see our leaflet on chaining for more information*

### Relationships with food

It can be really helpful whilst supporting your child to know yourself when it comes to food. This is because a lot of the time, or children look to us as parents to show them that food is safe and acceptable.



- If your child sees you expressing dislike towards a specific food, they might take on that belief themselves.
- Giving food labels such as 'good' and 'bad', or 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' can add to your child's fears and beliefs about trying new foods, so we advise not to use these labels when describing food. All food is good food!
- If you or the rest of the family don't eat a certain food, it is unlikely that your child will be willing to try that food either.
- Talk with your child about their taste buds. Let them know that as they grow older their taste buds do too! As they get older their taste buds start to like new foods so keep testing them out. Tell them that taste buds get excited when they have a new food. It takes over 13 times of trying a new food for the taste buds to calm down and decide if they really like the new food. So keep trying!
- Spending so much time thinking and worrying about your child's diet can sometimes make it feel like food is the centre of attention. However, life is so much more than mealtimes – make sure that time during and away from the dinner table is enjoyable for everyone!

#### More ideas that can make support easier:

- It can be hard to give praise when you are worried or anxious, however this can add to your child's anxiety. Try to stay calm and relaxed while supporting your child to taste or try a new food, and praise every effort.
- Explain to other family members what helps and what doesn't help so that they can support your efforts.
- Share any useful resources with family and friends.

## Structure and choice

When supporting a child who has eating difficulties, having a clear routine with regular meal times can be really helpful to the child for a number of reasons:

- Helps the child to know when to expect food
- Learning when to expect to feel hungry

When planning mealtimes, offering a fixed choices from two of their safe foods (e.g. pasta or chips) 5/6 times a day at regular intervals can help your child with having some control over their options whilst reducing their anxiety and encouraging routine. Setting a limit to time spent at each meal (e.g., 30 minutes) can also help to build a routine.

### Presenting foods

When your child has reached a point during **chaining**\* where they have tried a new food lots of times, it might be time to think about how to introduce the new food to the dinner table.

Always keep the new food on a separate plate away from safe foods. When a new food touches a safe food and the child no longer views the safe food as safe, this can activate your child's sense of **contamination**.

Allow your child to sit with the new food present on the table until they are comfortable with it being there. After that, the new food might be moved closer to the child for the next meal, etc.

Make the dinner table a place where your child can have fun and engage in non-food activities (e.g., colouring, Lego, etc.) so that they don't see the dinner table only as a place to eat or only a place that they might see as scary.



## Appetite and stimulation

A lot of young people who have eating difficulties often struggle with naming the physical and emotional feelings that come with being hungry, with some children even sharing that they don't feel hunger at all. Here are a few things we recommend trying with your child to help them understand the different ways hunger can affect us:



- Sticking to regular mealtimes can help your child stick to a routine, which can also help them to learn when to expect to feel hungry.
- Encouraging your child to exercise or do outdoor play can help their body to feel the physical feelings of hunger.
- Parents modelling labelling their hunger. E.g., "my tummy is rumbling because I am really hungry. Does your tummy rumble when you're hungry?"

Helping your child to understand about the effects of hunger can add to their understanding of why they need to eat regularly throughout the day, as well as why they may need to increase the amount they eat.



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