

# ABUHB ARFID

(Avoidant and Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) Service

## Managing Emotions

### Information for families

#### Emotions and Their Importance

We all feel lots of different emotions as human beings, such as sadness, fear, joy, disgust, and anger.

Sometimes these emotions are **helpful** (e.g. feeling fear when there is danger helps us know to keep ourselves safe, feeling joy helps us to make the most out of positive experiences).

However, sometimes our minds can act like **overly helpful friends**, by reminding us of all the possible things that might be a threat to us. This is because **our mind's most important job is to keep us safe!**

This can sometimes mean that we have feelings and thoughts which become **overwhelming and pull us away** from doing things that are important to us, like being able to eat a new food.

When our minds are giving us these unhelpful messages, we might need some **extra skills** to help us **turn down the volume** on our thoughts and feelings so that we can still do the things that matter.

This resources will provide some tips about how to support a child that is struggling with big feelings when trying to eat.



### Getting to know our emotions

Encourage your child to talk about how they are feeling and help them to label which emotions they are experiencing.

Some of the common emotions your child might have when faced with a new food are **anxiety, worry, disgust and fear**.

A good way to help children develop their understanding of different emotions is to watch Pixar's 'Inside Out' with them.

It can be helpful to explain to your child about how our mind wants to keep us safe, and sometimes does this job so well that it stops us from doing anything that might feel different or unsafe.



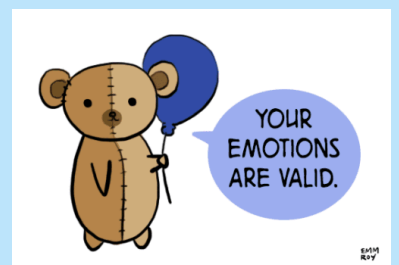
### Validation

**Validation** is an important skill we can use to support our child with their emotions. This means letting your child know that what they're thinking and feeling makes sense.

Validation helps the child to feel understood and supported, and can actually help to reduce the impact of difficult emotions!

**An example** would be "I understand that this is so difficult for you, and you're feeling scared to try this new food. I am here with you to support you, let's do this together."

Validation is **not praise or encouragement**, which although often done in a well-meaning way, can feel like pressure for your child. An example of this might be "You can do this! You're so brave!"



## Strategies for managing unhelpful emotions

There are lots of different strategies you can use to support your child to manage their difficult emotions around food.

**Grounding techniques** can help your child to have space from their difficult thoughts and feelings as they refocus their attention to the present. Examples include:

Senses task: name three things you can hear, four things you can feel, five things you can see

Mindfulness jars: fill a jar with glitter, glitter glue, and water. Seal it shut and shake it so that the glitter is shifting around inside – watch until the glitter settles. Imagine your thoughts settling with the glitter.

For more examples of grounding and mindfulness techniques, visit: [Managing Difficult Thoughts and Feelings - Aneurin Bevan University Health Board \(nhs.wales\)](https://www.nhs.uk/healthboards/aneurin-bevan-university-health-board/mental-health/grounding-techniques)

**Positive self-talk:** talking to yourself in a positive and encouraging way. E.g., "I am proud of myself for trying", "I am doing a really good and important task by trying this food", "I am moving towards my goal."

**Reminding ourselves that thoughts are just thoughts!** Often, our thoughts and feelings can feel so powerful that we take them as facts and change the way we act because of them. Try putting "I notice I'm having the thought or feeling that..." in front of your thought or feeling. This can help to remind us that we can just simply notice our thoughts and feelings as they show up, and that we don't need to be pushed around by them!

**Reminding ourselves that thoughts and emotions are temporary and will pass.**

Picture your emotions as the weather, you are the sky. The weather is constantly changing, but the sky always remains.

## Bringing It All Together

- Be open to have conversations about what emotions your child is feeling and how that feels for them. Use validating statements to help them feel understood and supported.
- Help your child to remember their personal goals and why trying new foods is important to them.
- Make sure everyone (including the child) knows what the next step will be for trying a new food, so they have time to mentally prepare themselves.
- Decide on a time-frame together of how often trying new foods will happen and when.
- Help them to practice using grounding and mindfulness to give them space from difficult thoughts and feelings. Try and practice this in all types of situations where difficult feelings show up, not just about food.
- Keep the atmosphere calm and supportive. What does your child need to feel safe and happy in their environment?
- Celebrate any successes (no matter how small!) in a way that your child finds helpful. Remember that some children respond well to lots of praise, but others can find this stressful and prefer a more subtle approach such as a thumbs up or smile.
- Ask your child about how you can help them to make things easier next time or what you can do differently.



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