



The Association
for Child and Adolescent
Mental Health

Thinking about feeding difficulties....

In the context of neurodiversity

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How can we identify feeding difficulties?

- Child not eating enough to sustain growth
- Child not eating a nutritionally balanced / adequate diet
- Only eating particular foods, presented in a specific way
- Missing out whole food groups
- Being unable to eat in certain environments
- Behaviour that challenges at mealtimes
- Finding it difficult to tolerate others eating nearby
- Being reliant on distraction to eat
- Mealtimes taking an excessively long time
- Fear of negative consequences that could result from eating
- Being unable to sit or focus long enough to eat
- Lack of interest in eating
- Not recognising or responding to hunger cues



How do feeding difficulties impact on families?

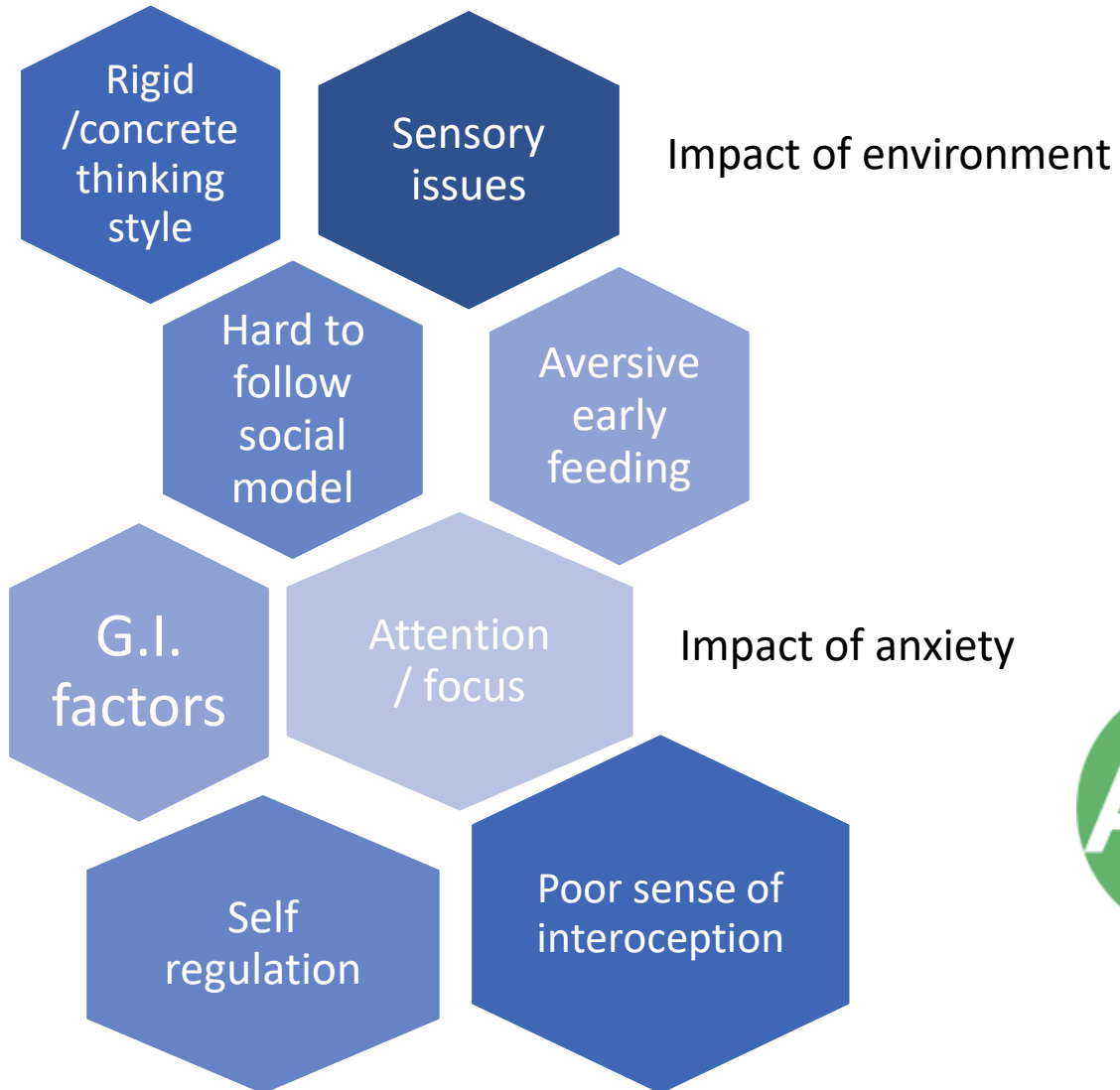
- Parents and carers experiencing anxiety
- Family may feel isolated from social events
- Feeding difficulties commonly misunderstood by wider family and society
- Conflict at mealtimes
- Worry about siblings copying behaviours
- Not able to go on holiday
- Unable to eat at restaurants
- Difficulty in sourcing preferred foods
- Additional expense of restricted diet
- Having to prepare several different meals



Why do so many neurodiverse children struggle with feeding?

Pre-disposing factors

Family / cultural beliefs and expectations re: feeding



Why do so many neurodiverse children struggle with feeding?



Maintaining Factors

- Rigid / concrete thinking style
- Sensory sensitivities
- Ongoing difficulties with constipation
- Ongoing difficulties with attention
- Side effects of medication
- Poor sense of interoception
- Stress in social situations
- Avoidance



ARFID - Also known as

- Behavioural feeding difficulties
- Selective eating
- Perseverant eating disorder
- Sensory-based feeding difficulties
- Feeding aversion
- Food refusal
- Extreme fussy / picky eating
- Feeding disorder of infancy or early childhood
- **Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder**



ARFID - DSM V 2013

- An eating or feeding disturbance
 - apparent lack of interest in eating or food
 - avoidance based on the sensory characteristics of food
 - concern about aversive consequences of eating as manifested by persistent failure to meet appropriate nutritional and/or energy needs
- Associated with one (or more) of the following:
 - Significant weight loss (or failure to achieve expected weight gain or faltering growth in children)
 - Significant nutritional deficiency
 - Dependence on enteral feeding or oral nutritional supplements
 - Marked interference with psychosocial functioning



Strategies for calmer mealtimes

What doesn't tend to work....

- Tricking by hiding or disguising new foods in preferred foods
- Force feeding
- Withholding preferred foods
- Using preferred foods as rewards
- Star charts for eating new foods
- Leaving long gaps between meals
- “Leave them to get hungry and they'll eat”

What can be helpful....

- Regular familiar mealtimes and routines
- Avoiding standard healthy eating advice
- Giving permission to give child preferred food to maintain weight and reduce mealtime stress



Child Feeding Guide

➔ Sign in or register - it's free!

🔍 Search

Parents

Health professionals

Childcare professionals

How it works

Tips and pitfalls ▼

Real strategies and tools to
tackle fussy eating and
create happy mealtimes



Award-winning tools and support for

Parents

Health professionals

Childcare professionals

Division of responsibility – Ellyn Satter

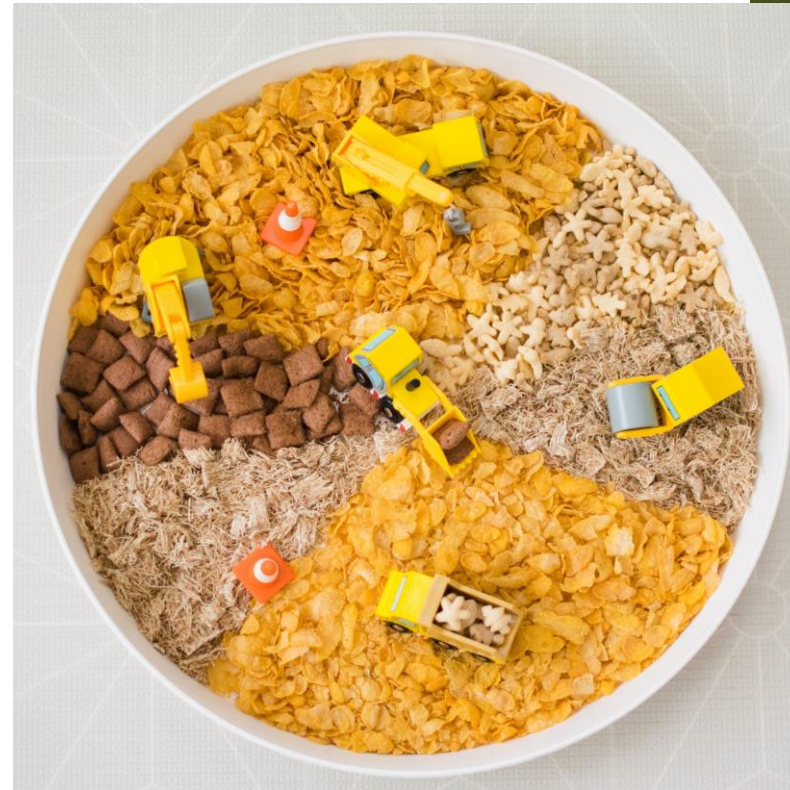
- <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/how-to-feed/the-division-of-responsibility-in-feeding/>



Strategies for introducing new foods

For younger children or children with intellectual disability

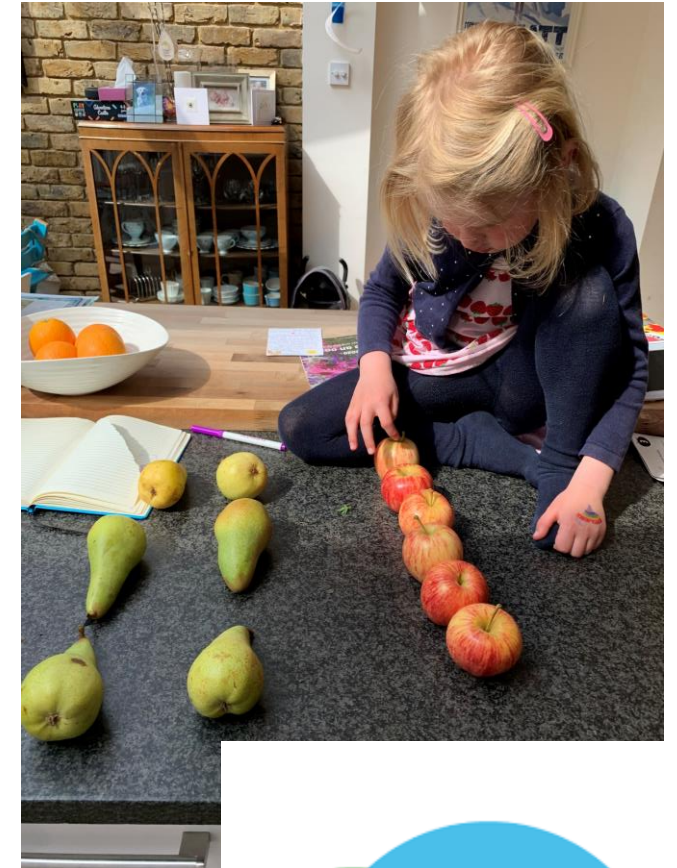
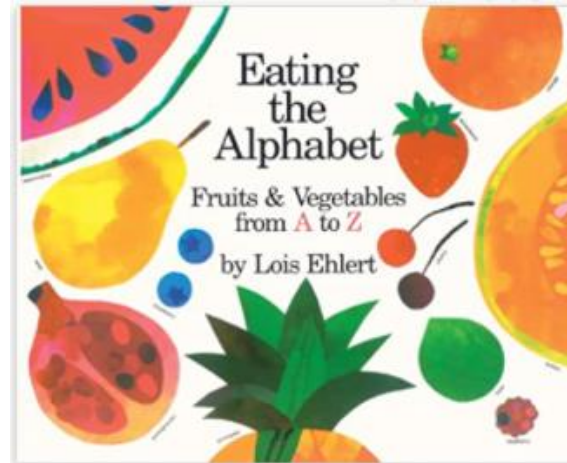
- Messy food play
 - Child led
 - Progression through textures
 - Avoid 'contamination' of preferred foods
 - Across a range of contexts if possible
 - Use child's interests
 - Follow 'steps to eating'
- tolerate – look – smell – touch – lick - taste



Strategies for introducing new foods

For older children

- Use special interests
- Reward charts if appropriate to encourage 'brave behaviour'
- Encourage child to participate in programme development
- Encourage a 'scientific approach' make predictions and test them!
- Follow 'steps to eating'
tolerate – look – smell – touch – lick - taste





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Food chaining

- Identify safe acceptable food
- Identify other foods with similar sensory properties
- Introduce very small changes
- Avoid contaminating 'safe' foods
- Likely to take multiple attempts
- No expectation but praise if happens

Further resources

