

# UNDERSTANDING ARFID

## (AVOIDANT/RESTRICTIVE FOOD INTAKE DISORDER)

www.SocialWorkersToolbox.com

### WHAT IS ARFID?

ARFID is an eating disorder that affects a person's ability to eat a varied diet. It is more than picky eating and can affect nutrition, growth, health and daily life. ARFID is not the result of poor parenting, lack of effort or deliberate behaviour.

### COMMON SIGNS AT HOME

- Eats a very limited range of foods.
- Finds unfamiliar foods difficult or distressing.
- Avoids foods because of taste, texture, smell or appearance.
- Mealtimes can become stressful for the child and family.

### COMMON SIGNS AT SCHOOL

- Brings the same foods every day.
- Avoids eating at school or social activities.
- May say they are not hungry to avoid food.
- Eating difficulties can affect energy, concentration and learning.



### WHAT THEY MAY BE FEELING

- Anxiety about trying unfamiliar foods.
- Fear of choking, vomiting or feeling unwell.
- Distress caused by certain textures, tastes or smells.
- Frustration when others do not understand their experience.

### HELPFUL MESSAGES FOR CHILDREN WITH ARFID

- Small steps are still progress.
- New foods take time.
- We are proud of your effort, not just what you eat.
- You are safe.
- You do not have to do this perfectly.



### WHAT HELPS

- Keep mealtimes calm and predictable.
- Offer familiar foods alongside opportunities to explore new foods.
- Introduce changes gradually and without pressure.
- Recognise effort and celebrate small steps forward.

### WHAT DOES NOT HELP

- Forcing, bribing or punishing.
- Pressure to take "just one bite".
- Negative comments about eating habits.
- Comparing the child with siblings or peers.

### BUILDING CONFIDENCE

- Every small step is progress.
- Children learn best when they feel safe and supported.
- Confidence grows through positive experiences with food.
- Patience and consistency can make a lasting difference.

### WHEN TO SEEK SUPPORT

- Eating difficulties affect growth, nutrition or health.
- Food choices become increasingly restricted.
- Anxiety around eating is severe or persistent.
- Family life, school or social activities are affected.

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE

ARFID is treatable. With understanding, patience and the right support, children can expand their confidence around food and make meaningful progress over time.