# Papillon House Therapy Newsletter
## Summer Term 2026

This final therapy newsletter of the year will focus on eating difficulties.

**Autism and food-related challenges**

Food-related challenges are very common among autistic people and are often influenced by sensory sensitivities. Restrictive eating can cause parents and caregivers extreme anxiety and guilt, but it is important to understand it is no-one's fault!!

Many individuals with ASD experience heightened or diminished sensory responses to food textures, tastes, smells or appearances leading to selective eating habits or aversions to certain foods.
For the children and young people at Papillon who have food related difficulties, it is important for their caregivers, both at school and at home, to understand the association between food and sensory sensitivities in autism, so to help them to support their children to develop healthy and positive eating habits and effectively address eating related concerns.

**ASD and ARFID:**

Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID), previously known as Selective Eating Disorder is a complex eating disorder characterised by persistent avoidance or restriction of food intake which can lead to nutritional deficiencies, impaired growth, development and overall functioning.

While accurate prevalence rates for ARFID are difficult to determine due to underreporting and misdiagnosis, recent research suggests that it is more common in children and adolescents than previously thought.

Recognising symptoms of ARFID is essential for early diagnosis and intervention to support individuals and families impacted by the challenges associated with ARFID and food related difficulties.

ASD and ARFID share many characteristics and symptoms and therefore distinguishing between feeding difficulties related to ARFID and those associated with ASD can be extremely challenging. A comprehensive evaluation by a multidisciplinary team including a paediatrician, psychologist and dietitian is often the first step to accurately differentiate between the two conditions and determine if intervention and treatment is required.

**When to seek medical advice:**

If eating is very limited, stressful or affecting growth and wellbeing, it is important to seek advice and guidance from a GP, dietitian or specialist trained in ARFID. Early support and intervention can help children and young people to feel safer with food and can reduce long-term anxiety around eating.

**If you have any questions regarding your child's eating habits, please do not hesitate to contact the therapy team here at Papillon and we will listen to you concerns and help you to get the guidance and support your need if required.**

# What is ARFID?

## Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder

ARFID is a recognised eating disorder. It affects children, teenagers and adults. It is far more than **"fussy eating"**.

## ARFID IS

- **A real, serious and complex eating disorder.** Recognised by medical professionals.
- **Often linked to sensory differences, fear** (such as choking, vomiting or contamination), or a low interest in eating.
- **Not about body image or a desire to lose weight.** Unlike anorexia.
- Can have a huge impact on health, growth, nutrition, mental health, education, relationships and quality of life.
- **A journey.** Progress isn't linear. There can be good days, setbacks and plateaus.
- **Exhausting** for the whole **family.** Parents and carers need support too.

## ARFID ISN'T

- **Not picky eating.** It's not a phase and they won't just "grow out of it".
- **Not a choice or a behaviour for attention or control.** They are not trying to be difficult or manipulative.
- **Not about wanting to be thin or lose weight.** ARFID is not driven by body image.
- **Not solved by pressure, bribes or punishment.** These approaches cause harm, not improvement.
- **Not something that only affects children.** ARFID can continue into adulthood.
- **Not something to minimise or dismiss.** Understanding and compassion make a real difference.

## How can you help?

- Believe them when they tell you food feels difficult.
- Reduce pressure around eating.
- Respect safe foods, even if they seem repetitive.
- Offer opportunities to explore new foods without expectation.
- Focus on feeling safe around food before focusing on eating more foods.
- Celebrate small wins.
- Remember that progress may not always look how you expected.
- Understand your child is not giving you a hard time. They are having a hard time.

**Parents and carers, look after yourself too.**

It's exhausting and all consuming. You cannot pour from an empty cup.
Taking a break, accepting help, connecting with others and prioritising your wellbeing is not selfish. It is necessary.
**Your child needs support, but so do you.**
ARFID affects the whole family.

**Remember**
Every person's experience of ARFID is unique.
Listening, learning and believing can change lives.

**Understanding helps.**
**Judgement doesn't.**

JoSoHappy