Beyond the Lunchroom: Supporting Students with ARFID at School

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www.FormedFamiliesForward.org

Formed Families Forward - who we are...

- A **family-led resource center** in Northern Virginia supporting foster, adoptive and kinship families who are raising children, youth & young adults with specialized needs, and professionals who work with our families.
- We offer free training, consultations to families, events, resources, and systems navigation. Also - peer support groups; webinars; virtual trainings; Resource Directory; videos and other resources.
- Family partner to Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS; a VDOE project)
- Email Sperry.Perry@formedfamiliesforward.org if you need a **certificate of attendance**.

Learning Your Way

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- ★ Free online, self-paced learning
- ★ Earn certificates of completion
- ★ 8 courses to choose from

- Special Education 101
- Constructive Communication & Collaboration
- Trauma 101
- Special Education Dispute Resolution
- Kinship Care
- Other Health Impairment
- Positive Parenting
- FBAs and BIPs

Support Groups

For foster, adoptive, and kinship parents and caregivers

- Virtual on first Sunday evenings
- In-person on third Wednesday evenings
- Register at https://bit.ly/FFTgroupFFF



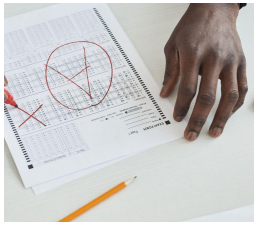
Is Virtual Therapy Right for Your Child? A Caregiver's Guide to Telehealth webinar

Tuesday, November 10, 7- 8 PM

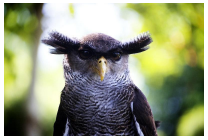
Register today:
https://bit.ly/FFFvirtualtherapy



Pre Test



Who are you?



Choose all that apply and
Enter your answers in the chat!

- Adoptive parent
- Kinship caregiver
- Foster or resource parent
- Professional
- Birth parent

Chat in any additional roles

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Have you heard of ARFID?



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What ARFID is (DSM Definition)

Food restriction/avoidance may be related to:

- Sensory characteristics of food
- Lack of interest in eating/food
- Fear of aversive consequences such as choking or vomiting

The eating disturbance is associated with (must have 1+):

- Significant weight loss/difficulty with expected growth
- Significant nutritional deficiencies
- Dependence on nutritional supplements or tube feeding
- Marked interference with psychosocial functioning

Summarized from DSM-5-TR Criterion A. Additional diagnostic criteria apply

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What ARFID is



- An eating disorder that can:
- Cause nutritional deficiencies and inadequate intake
- Cause struggles with relationships/social experiences
- Fluctuate in intensity
- Involve wanting to eat but being emotionally or physically unable to
- Involve difficulty with interoception
- Impact quality of life even without weight loss
- Involve large financial costs to access safe foods

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What ARFID is NOT



- Picky eating
- A childhood 'phase'
- A choice
- Exclusive to autistic people
- Attention-seeking
- Always visible/obvious
- Failure of parenting
- Always caused by trauma
- Fixed through force or punishment

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How ARFID shows up for kids in school

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Seven Hidden Barriers to School Success for Students with ARFID

1. The Sensory Environment of the Lunchroom
2. Lack of "Safe Food" Predictability
3. Misunderstanding by Staff (The "Picky Eater" Myth)
4. Severe Time Constraints
5. Peer Scrutiny and Social Isolation
6. Classroom and Curricular Triggers
7. Cognitive and Physical Fatigue



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Cafeteria & Sensory Accommodations

- Offer a quieter, less crowded eating location.
- Allow preferred seating away from strong smells.
- Permit noise-reducing headphones when appropriate.
- Provide access to a trusted peer or supportive adult.



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Predictability accommodations

Lack of "Safe Food" Predictability

- Allow students to bring familiar, preferred foods from home.
- Provide advance notice of cafeteria menu changes.
- Maintain access to backup safe foods when possible.
- Avoid unexpected food substitutions or pressure to try new foods.

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Staff training on mealtime rules

- Strict "No Pressure" mandate: Explicitly state in writing that staff members must never comment on the student's food, mandate a "try-it bite," require them to finish a portion, or restrict recess/privileges based on what they ate.
- Staff professional development: Provide a brief, one-page informational sheet to all of the student's teachers, substitutes, and lunch monitors. This sheet should explain that ARFID is a neurological and medical condition, not willful defiance or picky eating.
- Neutral food language: Require staff to refrain from labeling the student's safe foods as "unhealthy," "junk," or "bad" during health lessons or casual conversations.

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Time and access accommodations

- **Extended eating time:** Provide the student an extra **10 to 15 minutes** to eat their meal without penalty, recognizing that anxiety dramatically slows down processing and chewing speeds.
- **Locker and backpack access:** Waive standard classroom rules to allow the student to keep safe snacks in their backpack or locker. Allow them to discreetly eat a safe food during class if they were unable to eat during the designated lunch period.
- **Flexible storage solutions:** Allow the student to store a small cooler bag in the nurse's office or a staff refrigerator if their safe foods require precise temperature control to remain palatable.

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Peer Scrutiny & Social Isolation

- Provide discreet eating accommodations that protect privacy.
- Address teasing and negative comments about food.
- Allow students to choose a supportive lunch companion.
- Include students in social activities without requiring food consumption.



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Classroom and assignment accommodations

- **Advance notice of food events:** Require teachers to provide parents with at least **48 hours' notice** of any classroom activities involving food (e.g., parties, science experiments, or rewards). This allows parents to provide an exact, safe alternative.
- **Non-food rewards:** Ensure that the student's teachers use stickers, extra free time, or small privileges as academic and behavioral incentives instead of candy or snacks.
- **Alternative academic assignments:** Modify lessons in classes like Health, Biology, or Home Economics if analyzing food, tracking calories, or tasting ingredients triggers severe anxiety or a medical restriction.

Physical health support

- **Nutrition**: Allow familiar foods from home, adequate time to eat, and access to safe snacks.
- **Hydration**: Ensure regular access to water and bathroom breaks.
- **School nurse support:** Record concerns about food intake and physical symptoms, and communicate with families as appropriate.
- **Individual health plan**: Establish agreed arrangements for meals, snacks, symptoms, and emergency procedures.
- **Medical escalation**: Refer concerns to the family and healthcare team; seek urgent assessment for dehydration, fainting, or severe weakness.

School toolkit



https://www.feedingmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/School-Toolkit-5.pdf

Resources

Resources for parent/family education and support

- https://feast-ed.org/guided-learning/
- https://anad.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/ARFID-Back-To-School.pdf
- https://www.feedingmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/School-Toolkit-5.pdf

Resources for professionals

- https://anad.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/ARFID-in-Schools-for-SW.pdf
- https://bebodypositive.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/How-Schools-Can-Support.pdf

Northern Virginia Dietitians with ARFID specialty

- https://nourishfamily.com/about/ (multiple dieticians specialized in ARFID, takes most PPO major insurance plans)
- https://www.rockrecoveryed.org/ (offers free and low cost therapy and dietician services as well as support groups.
- https://anad.org/learning-library/treatment-directory/ (search for dieticians, therapists, doctors etc by your specific insurance plan)
- https://www.theprojectheal.org/ (offers treatment scholarships and cash assistance for services, as well as free support groups, case management, meal support, and BIPOC community care).

Questions?

Post test

https://forms.gle/6jf2tGu8J4bZDLuCA



Looking for Consultation, Training, Support, or something else? Connect With Me!

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Patreon: Flourishing Wildly
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THANK YOU FOR COMING!



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Formed Families Forward – Stay in Touch!

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