

Food Aversion Therapy



Ahoy, all adventuring pirates! Here is a quick sheet to outline our approach to mastering the exciting adventure that is new food discovery!

While you may have encountered these steps before, at Social Butterfly, Inc. our focus is on your child as the official captain of their food exploration experiences. Encountering a new food can set off a physical anxiety response in a person with food sensitivities. If every time we saw a new food it felt like we were being attacked, we would probably stick to what was safe, too! It is very important that your personal pirate is clear that they are the Captain of their food exploration ship.

How does the adventure work?

Before we start any journey, a Captain needs to be sure they can trust their crew. That means that the speech therapist will talk about food as a journey “Food is fun!”. The therapist will build trust with the Captain by playing games, reading stories about trying new foods, playing with food, and spending some time letting the child lead the interaction. A panic about unexpected squalls will mean your pirate will stay firmly on the shore of what they already know.

1. After the Captain is comfortable enough to set sail, we always start with a food the child likes (“preferred food”). This means a food that they will gladly and safely eat in any situation.
2. After going through all the steps with the best food ever, the Captain gets to leave the table and do an obstacle course of movement on their journey to help them regulate their body and its response to new foods.
3. The next food we take through the hierarchy may be a food that is another “always eat” food, or it maybe a “sometimes eat” food. If the Captain has been on this journey a while, we may go directly to a new food.
4. Your child will move forward through the hierarchy with each food. We will celebrate each success with singing shanties that the Captain enjoys, high fives (don’t use your hook hand!), and get some plunder! (Stickers)



5. When the Captain goes back to shore life for the week they will come home with a booklet with their current challenge food on it and the level at which they are willing to travel with that food. At home, three to five times a week, they will get to the comfort level with that food (for example: Kiss a carrot). Every success will get a sticker and we will celebrate it when

they return to the high seas in therapy, then take the next step in the journey.

What is the goal?

You may be wondering how we will know when your particular Captain has achieved what is best for them. That will depend upon your family dynamic, the goals that you have as a parent, and what they are able to tolerate (how strong that “attack” feeling is when they see a food they don’t know).



The SLP will sit down with you and outline what success looks like to your family. Some examples are:

1. Eating all together at the table as a family with no electronics or toys for 15 minutes
2. An ability to have all foods on all plates, so that restaurant eating/group meals becomes more comfortable
3. A child who will eat some of their school lunch
4. A child who is willing to view an unfamiliar food as a possibility instead of a threat

Can you guarantee that my child will eat all new foods they encounter or that they will eat a particular food?



That is almost never a goal of feeding therapy. Most people of all ages don’t try every new food they encounter. And, many of us try foods willingly that we then do not like. Making a child chew and eat food they do not enjoy is very likely to backfire and we may actually lose ground as they limit more to demonstrate that they are the Captain of their own eating ship.

We are far more likely to see success adding new foods, particularly more healthy foods, if the child feels that they can successfully navigate the emotional challenges associated with encountering a new food and can independently identify whether that food is something they can add to their list of approved foods. Therapy is not focused on giving a child X or Y foods, but instead giving them words and power so that they feel brave and comfortable enough to overcome any fear that might linger and the words to determine how the food feels, smells, tastes, and sounds.

What are these “steps” to successfully encountering a food?

These are the stepping stones to empowerment. We work with each child at their level of comfort and make sure we are asking them to start at a level that keeps them in control. We are predictable with the steps and consistent in what we ask, and if they take a new step we never add a step beyond what



