

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



we've asked. When we set the goal we leave it where it is, even if it turns out to be an easy goal to meet. They are the Captain and they should see every challenge coming a mile away. No sudden squalls!

1. **PRESENCE:** The Captain can see the food on the horizon. They can see the food in the room or on the same table. Eventually the food can even be on their plate/ship!
2. **TOUCHING WITH A UTENSIL:** The Captain can interact with the food. They can spear it with their cutlass. They can lasso it with a rope. They can slide it around the deck without touching it.
3. **SMELL:** The Captain can smell the food and describe what it smells like.
4. **TOUCH WITH SKIN:** The Captain can actually touch the food with their skin! How brave! They picked it up with their non-hook hand! Remember that the closer the food gets to the face, the more threatening that unknown food may seem (might be poisoned by enemies!) so we go slow.
5. **TASTE AND CONSIDER THE TASTE:** The Captain is able to taste the food. They may lick it, put their teeth into it without taking a bite, or actually take a bite and spit it out.
6. **EAT:** The Captain is able to chew and swallow the food, no matter how much or how little.

These are the hierarchy guidelines, but each adventure will be different. Some foods will move quickly, others will require focusing step by step and taking our time.

What are some guidelines for this therapy at home?



1. Always let your Captain know what adventure is coming when. Be clear and predictable.
2. No "hiding" non-preferred foods in preferred foods (for example, purée broccoli in Mac and cheese). These Captains have very refined tastes and always seem to know. The risk is that they will then decide that a previously eaten food is now not "safe" and will lose a food off of their list.
3. Follow through at home - The SLP will make sure that the foods that are being incorporated are already foods your family eats. Life is crazy enough without adding more food prep to your life! Following through with the daily goals ("kiss the carrot) and getting the stickers will help to desensitize your Captain and let them be ready for the next steps in therapy! Without follow-through at home, feeding therapy is unlikely to be successful.

What if my child doesn't like pirates?

The framework for adventuring with new foods is endless. Let's spark your child's imagination and keep them the hero in their own story. Thank you for letting us guide and empower your child to realize that Food is Fun!