



**Sensory Food Education
EYFS 3-4 Years**

**Starter Programme
Early Years Practitioners' Manual**



All about Flavour School EYFS

1. About the programme

What is Flavour School?

Flavour School EYFS is a programme of sensory food exploration activities for EYFS, ages 3-4 years.

Flavour School is all about exploring food and flavour with all the senses: sight, touch, smell, hearing and taste. The programme provides fun, simple multisensory play activities to help children 'make friends' with veggies and fruit, learn about their flavours and textures, and learn sensory words to express their experiences and describe their food.

The aim is to expand children's food horizons in healthy directions. Many children can be reluctant to try new foods in the complicated context of mealtimes. Flavour School activities provide fun, simple exploratory context and structure, to help get children in the mood to explore and try new foods. The goal is to support the development of happy, healthy relationships with food.

Flavour School is a healthy eating intervention. Flavour School avoids telling children what they 'should' (or should not) eat to be healthy. However, each session is an opportunity to expose children to healthy vegetables and fruits to help make these foods familiar and interesting for children. Think of it as growing their 'vocabulary' of foods and flavours, and engaging them in the tastes, smells, sounds and joy of food.

What is it not?

Flavour School is not a cookery lesson, so it doesn't require Early Years practitioners to be skilled cooks. It is not about making children taste foods, or about assessing children on how much they know. The programme doesn't promote any food brands or specific diets (other than a healthy diet in line with national nutritional guidelines and including plenty of veg and fruit). It focusses on fruit and vegetables, and avoids using snacks and confectionery high in salt, sugar and fat, such as biscuits, crisps, cakes, breakfast cereals.

How to do Flavour School

The activities suit 2-4 year-old children. They are best delivered in the order they are presented in this manual, but this is not crucial. This manual doubles as a teaching guide and training process. Once you have delivered this programme, we hope you will be able to create your own Flavour School sessions. It's really not so difficult – so give it a go!

You could:

- Repeat the activities with different vegetables and fruit. Children enjoy mastering through repetition.
- Get creative! Find some fruit and veg, and design your own multisensory exploration activity.
- Incorporate veg and fruit exploration into activities. Draw some colourful pictures of a lovely melon or leek.
- Engage younger children by putting some (robust) vegetables into your sensory exploration tray or home corner. The more colourful and oddly shaped the better!
- Offer children little tastes of new veggies and fruits during play times, and get them to rate for yumminess, just for the fun of exploring and discovering new foods and flavours!

2. About the charity

The charity Flavour School was founded in 2016 by a group of people brought together by a shared passion for improving kids' diets and relationships with food. The charity's mission is to promote sensory food education in the UK, as a route to healthier, happier relationships with food for children. We think every child should benefit from sensory food education – we're working on it! Our work focuses on developing and improving the Flavour School programme, and sharing it with schools, nurseries and education specialists.

www.flavourschool.org.uk

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How to teach Flavour School

1. Delivering the Flavour School activities

This manual contains five simple activities to do with children aged 2-4 in your setting. All activities are done in small groups, sitting in a circle around a low table.

- Age 2-3: Best group size 4 children
- Age 3-4: Best group size 6 children

For every activity, you will need:

- Clean chopping board
- A sharp knife (kept separate and secure)
- Clean safety knife for use around children
- Food-safe sanitiser and cloths or kitchen roll
- Water for the children to drink
- A bucket or bin for bits and rubbish
- A few little bowls on the table

JOIN IN! Remember to narrate using lots of descriptive words to talk about and share your experiences. Focus on colours, shapes, sizes etc, as well as tastes, flavours and textures. Practise other learning goals such as counting. Model tasting behaviours, examine and share your own flavour experiences. Give each child attention and let each have their moment to join in and share to the extent they wish to. Use a safety knife around the children, and keep a sharp knife handy but separate and secure in case any foods are too difficult to cut with the safety knife.

One session per week is about right, at a time when children are not too tired or hungry. Use produce in season where you can. It is generally cheaper and more delicious. You can find a guide to UK seasonal produce here for example: www.bda.uk.com/food-health/your-health/sustainable-diets/seasonal-fruit-and-veg-a-handy-guide.html. If you can't find any of the foods for the sessions, feel free to improvise with what you can get, and invent some fun new sensory exploration activities. Have fun! Flavour School is all about enjoyment and pressure-free exploration of lovely fresh produce.

2. Golden Rules: remind the children (and yourself) of the Golden Rules at every session



Golden Rule no. 1: No one has to try anything

Children do not have to touch, smell, listen to or taste any foods. In Flavour School we don't force or coax children into trying anything. Give children time and space to approach on their own terms. Most will probably join in after a while when they see their friends having fun.



Golden Rule no. 2: No one has to like anything.

Everyone's experience is valid, and there is no wrong sensory experience. It's ok to like something no one else likes, and to dislike something everyone else likes. Respect the preferences of others.

3. General guidance

Food safety and hygiene

1. **Avoid allergens:** Make sure you're aware of any food-related allergies, intolerances or restrictions (it's best to avoid nuts altogether), and act accordingly.
2. **Clean hands:** Ensure all grown-ups wash their hands thoroughly before preparing/touching food. Remove rings and ideally work without nail varnish (it can be harder to see dirt under nails). Use hand sanitiser regularly. Ensure children wash their hands with soap before sessions. You can use food-safe sanitiser too during the session.
3. **Clean equipment:** Ensure surfaces, utensils and crockery are clean. Wear an apron to help keep food samples clean. Have tools and equipment reserved solely for food and make sure they are clearly identified as such, stored and washed separately to others in your setting.
4. **Handling utensils:** Keep sharp knives safe and secure. Children will copy what they see you doing, so handle foods and utensils (especially knives) carefully.
5. **Handle all food as if the children will taste it:** Wash fruit and vegetables. Avoid cross-contamination. Where possible, give children individual samples to taste and avoid double-dipping or sharing.



Flavour Adventure 1:

My favourite apple

Did you know that there are hundreds of varieties of apple, each with its own colour, texture and flavour? In this activity we'll explore different varieties of apple. We'll learn that even with this very familiar fruit there is still lots to discover if we explore attentively, and that different varieties of apple are distinctive eating experiences. Which is your favourite?

What you'll need per group:

- 4+ different varieties of apples – 1 apple of each. Aim for different colours, textures and flavours. If it is autumn, try to find some British seasonal varieties. Wash the produce in advance.
- A clean opaque hidey-bag

The Activity

Use our narration examples as is helpful, but feel free to improvise too!

- In advance, put all the apples into the hidey-bag to introduce them. Remind everyone of the Golden Rules.
- Demonstrate: Feel inside the bag and describe, then pull one out. Narrate as you go, using lots of descriptive words:

"Can you guess what I've got in this hidey-bag? It feels hard and smooth and round-ish with a hard stick at the top."

"Let's find out what it is. [Pull out an apple] Ooh – does anyone know what this is? That's right, it's an apple."

- Look closely at the apple. At the top it may have a hard stalk, and at the bottom it has an indent with little brown bits (the remains of the flower blossom from which it grew).

"Who knows what this stalk is for? It holds the apple onto the apple tree." [Hold the apple by the stalk to demonstrate]

"What's this on the bottom side? Anybody know? This is the flower the apple grew from, after it was pollinated by a bee!" [If you like, show a timelapse video of an apple growing from flower – you can find them on the internet]

- Choose one volunteer at a time to reach in and feel the apples, and pick one out. Repeat for all four apples. Point out the different colours, shapes and sizes.

"Who would like to find out what else is in the hidey-bag? What can you feel? That's right, it's another apple!"

"But this one is bright red. And that one is green. I wonder if they might taste different too – what do you think?"

"I wonder what they will look like on the inside? Did you know that every apple has a star inside? No? I'll show you."

- Cut an apple along its equator (not top to bottom as you usually would). Open it up and you'll see that the seed pods in the middle make a star-shape.

"See! The apple has a little star in the middle to hold its seeds. Do you think this red apple will have a star inside too? Let's have a look... [Cut another apple the same way]...yes this apple has a star inside too!"

"Are all the apples the same colour on the inside? Not exactly, but they are quite similar, all sort of whitey-yellow. Shall we see if they all taste the same, or different?"

- Cut up some small chunks of each apple and pop them in separate bowls for each apple type. Offer them around. Remember, no-one has to taste if they don't want to – let the children approach on their own terms. Chat amongst yourselves, comparing the textures and flavours of the apples and sharing your favourites. . Children who do not wish to taste might like to squish apple chunks in their fingers to feel the texture and smell the appley scents.

"Who'd like to try these different apples?"

"Hmmm the red apple is sweet and quite soft. The green apple is more tart and crispy. The yellow one is bland and a bit spongy. Which is your favourite apple?" [For example – but use your own words]

"What makes that one your favourite?"



Flavour Adventure 2: Herbs

The children get close up to herbs to smell, touch and taste, exploring with all their senses. Apart from just exploring the lovely scents and tastes of herbs, children learn an important lesson that green things (which many children are quite suspicious of) are not all the same – they can have many different feels, scents and flavours. **Make sure to tell the children that not all leaves can be eaten, so they should only eat leaves as directed by a trusted adult.**

What you'll need per group:

- 3 different strongly scented aromatic herbs, ideally living plants in pots (e.g. basil, mint, thyme, rosemary, oregano). You could even grow them yourselves if you plant them a couple of months earlier
- 3 icing sugar shakers or jam jars wrapped in foil with holes in the top. You want to smell what is inside, but not see it. Put a good sprig of each herb in its own shaker, and bash it up a bit to release the scent. Cover the jar/shaker. We'll call these 'smell jars'.

The Activity

Use our narration examples as is helpful, but feel free to improvise too!

- Remind everyone of the Golden Rules. Take a big sniff of one of the smell jars. Try to describe the scent, or what it reminds you of. Narrate your experience using lots of descriptive words.

"Ooh it smells fresh and cool. It reminds me of my grandad's garden." [e.g. for mint]

"Mmmm this one makes me think of pizza and pasta!" [e.g. for basil]

- Pass it around for everyone to smell. Put the three herb bunches/plants on the table, and try to match the smell to one of the herbs on the table. Encourage the children to get up close to smell. Can you match the scent?

"Let's see if we can match the smell to one of these plants on the table [SNIFF SNIFF]. Hmm, I don't think it's that one. Maybe this one [SNIFF SNIFF]. What do you think?"

- Repeat for each smell jar and herb. Next, explore the herb plants on the table with all your senses. Look at the different shapes, colours and textures. Listen to the sounds each makes when you brush the leaves. Feel the leaves and describe their texture. Crush the leaves between your fingers to release more scent.

"The basil leaves are big and soft. The rosemary leaves are small and hard and spiky. If you squeeze them in your fingers, it makes the lovely smell come out – have a go!"

- Pull off a leaf and nibble to have a taste. Demonstrate and try to describe. Offer a taste to the children, and encourage them to compare the different textures and flavours of the herbs.

"Hmmm these rosemary leaves are quite hard and pointy. They have a woody, fragrant flavour."

"Oooh, the basil leaves are soft and have an aniseedy, grassy flavour."

"They are both green, but they taste and smell completely different!"

- Try holding your noses whilst you taste – what happens? (The flavours will be muted, as this blocks the nasal aspect of flavour). Then release your noses – the flavours will come flooding back.

"Lots of flavours are really smells. Let's try holding our noses to find out which flavours are tastes in our mouths, and which are scents in our nose. [Hold your noses and taste a leaf] I can't taste much at all! Now let's stop holding our noses [release your noses]. Oh, the flavours come back! Smells are really important to flavour!"

"Which herbs are you favourites? I love the basil, it is so fresh and fragrant!" [Use your own example in context]



Flavour Adventure 3: Sweet and Sour Citrus

We use the bright colours, fresh scents and strong tastes of citrus fruits to engage the children. Demonstrate each action you want the children to do, and narrate as you go. Count the fruits and name their colours, roll them, sniff them, taste them and have fun! Use lots of descriptive words.

What you'll need per group:

- 1 lemon, 1 lime, 1 orange, 1 pink grapefruit
- 1 grater
- Wash the produce in advance.

The Activity

Use our narration examples as is helpful, but feel free to improvise too!

- Remind everyone of the Golden Rules. Line up the four citrus fruits on the table, in order of size. Count the fruits, and name their colours. Show how to roll the fruits under your hand, squashing them a bit to release the juice inside. Use the activity to practise words for comparing. Show how to scratch the skin with your fingernail to release the scent, and sniff the fresh zesty smell. If children struggle with this, grate the zest a little with your grater. Narrate as you go.

"Look at these lovely citrus fruits! Let's count them together. We have 1,2,3...4 different citrus fruits, all different colours. A yellow lemon, a green lime, an orange...orange, and what colour is this grapefruit?"

"Which is the biggest? And which is the smallest? Is the orange smaller than the lemon? No, bigger!"

"Look at this bright yellow lemon! I can roll it under my hand like this to make it soft and juicy."

"Scratch the skin with your fingernail like this [SCRATCH]. And have a smell...ahhh it smells so fresh and zesty!"

- Demonstrate, then roll and fruit to a child to copy. Repeat for lime, orange and grapefruit. Roll the citrus fruits around the group so everyone can feel and smell the different fruits. When the group has sniffed all the fruit they want to, cut the lemon in half along its equator.

"Roll the yellow lemon to me. Shall we cut it open? What colour do you think it will be inside? [CUT] Oh look, it is yellow inside too. And very juicy and fragrant!"

- Have a big sniff of its fresh juicy centre and pass one half lemon around the group to touch, squeeze, sniff and explore. Cut the other half into small slices with your safety knife, or use your sharp knife away from the children if necessary. Taste it, narrate your experience, and offer the children a slice to taste.

"I'm going to taste the lemon! Eeeooow it's so sour!! And a bit sweet. Who'd like to taste?"

- Repeat for the lime and the orange. Finally, cut the grapefruit. Unlike the other fruits, it is a different colour inside – bright pink! Discuss and compare. Enjoy the sour faces! Explain what distinguishes the citrus family. Compare the similarities and the differences – point out the segments and the little juicy cells, bright coloured zest, and use the correct words to point out the zest, pith, seeds, and segments.

"Citrus is a family of fruit. They all have bright colour skin and this fresh zesty smell, and inside each segment holds lots of tiny juicy cells. But they are different colours and sizes, and each type has its own special flavour. They mostly like to grow in warm places with plenty of sunshine."

"Let's taste the orange? It is much sweeter than the lemon. It's a bit sour but just a little."

"Which one is the sweetest? The sourest? Which one is your favourite?"

"Who likes sour? Who does not like sour?"

"Different people like different tastes. The way to find new foods you like is to try out lots of new foods!"



Flavour Adventure 4: Apple, Beetroot & Carrot

We'll explore how texture changes flavour, and how mixing foods together can create new flavours. If it is convenient for you, you could also cook a carrot, a beetroot and an apple in advance (or buy some pre-cooked), to add another texture to explore. Beetroot can stain, so take care, use a dedicated container and aprons for the children, and make sure hands are well-washed afterwards with soap.

What you'll need per group:

- A fine grater, a peeler, and a clean opaque hidey-bag, aprons (because beetroot can stain), a small plate per child
- 2 large carrots, 2 beetroots, 2 apples (you'll cut up one of each per session, so you can re-use the second for the next group). If you can, get carrots and beetroots with their leaves (but it's not essential). Wash all produce. Cut enough small pieces (~1cm²) of carrot, beetroot and apple for 1-2 per participant (adults included), keeping each in a separate container.

The Activity

Use our narration examples as helpful, but feel free to improvise too!

- Remind everyone of the Golden Rules. Introduce the vegetables and fruit by hiding them in the hidey-bag and inviting the children to find out what is inside. Narrate as you go, using lots of descriptive words.

"I have a secret food in this bag. Who'd like to reach in and find out what it is? Ooh it's a pointy orange carrot!"

"Who'd like to get the next one? Does anyone know what it is? It's a beetroot. Look at the lovely purple leaves!"

- If the carrots/beetroot have leaves, remove the leaves and pass them round to feel. Use a carrot like a snooker cue to knock around the beetroots (not the apples) between you on the table. Pass the carrots around so everyone has a go. It is safe to taste the (clean) carrot and beetroot leaves if you like - they can be quite bitter tasting.

"Let's have a feel. The beetroot is round and quite heavy. The apple is round too, but not so heavy. The carrot is long and pointy and bright orange. Its leaves are long and feathery and bright green."

"I bet I can paff the round beetroot with this pointy carrot [PAFF]. Heehee! Who'd like to have a go?"

- After a bit of playing, peel one of the carrots and grate it into a container. Compare the experience of eating the carrot chunks you prepared in advance versus the grated carrot. First demonstrate listening to the sounds foods make, by closing your eyes and putting your fingers in your ears whilst you chew. Then give each child a pinch on their small plate to copy. Repeat with a beetroot and an apple.

"Did you ever listen to the sounds food makes in your mouth? There are crunches and squelches and squashes and all sorts of sounds. I wonder what sounds these will make."

"Hold your hands over your ears and close your eyes, like this [DEMONSTRATE], and listen to the sounds inside your mouth. Do you think the grated carrot will be different to the carrot chunks? Let's find out!"

"Oh the chunk is noisy and crunchy in my mouth!"

"The grated carrot is squishier but still a bit crunchy. It's juicier and sweeter too."

"Wow the beetroot is so purple! It even makes my fingers and my mouth purple. Watch out, the beetroot is so purple it can stain you purple too, so just pop it carefully into your mouth."

- Next, combine the grated carrot, apple and beetroot to see how they all taste together. Mix them up in a little bowl. Take a clean teaspoon or finger pinch and taste it, and offer all the children a taste too.

"Let's mix them all up and see how they taste together."

"Wow look they all go pink from the beetroot juice! Who'd like to try?"

"How do they taste all together? The sweet apple makes all the flavours sweeter!"



Flavour Adventure 5: Fennel and Pomegranate

In this session, we'll explore some lesser-known produce whose flavours are often liked by children. Fennel is difficult to cut with a safety knife, so you may prefer to cut some thin slices for tasting in advance, using a sharp knife. Cut across the grain to avoid long tough fibres in the pieces.

What you'll need per group:

- 1 pomegranate, 1 fennel bulb. Wash the produce in advance
- A touching tray or similar (e.g. a tray full of soft paper strips in which you hide objects to find)
- Two little bowls for passing around slices of fennel and pomegranate seeds to touch/taste
- Aprons for children and adults – this one can get a bit messy!

The Activity

Use our narration examples as helpful, but feel free to improvise too!

- In advance, put the pomegranate and the fennel bulb in your sensory touching tray, or a similar location. Reach inside and feel, and try to describe the touch sensations. Then let the children reach in and feel and pull out the pomegranate and the fennel. Pass them round and discuss how they look and feel. Remind everyone of the Golden Rules.

"Hmm this pomegranate is quite big and round. It's waxy and smooth. It has a hard rough bit at one end."

"The fennel one is smooth and white but with big green arms sticking out a bit like an octopus."

"Who would like to have a go? What can you feel?"

"How many colours can we see in this pomegranate? Yellow, red, brown..."

"I wonder what the fennel looks like on the inside."

- Cut the fennel in half top-to-bottom, and look inside. Give the newly open inside a sniff – it will probably be quite fragrant. Pass one half around for the children to touch and smell. Cut some thin slices across the grain of the other half (or get out your pre-prepared slices). Draw the children's attention, and taste a slice. Place some slices in a little bowl for the children to taste, and offer them around.

"I'm going to taste it...[TASTE]...yum it is crunchy and a bit juicy. It tastes a bit sweet and a bit like aniseed."

"Who'd like to taste the fennel? What flavours can you taste? Can you taste the anis flavour?"

"Has anyone tasted fennel before? Where was that? Who did you eat it with?"

- Next, cut and cross into the top of the pomegranate and then crack it open using your fingers. Juicy little red seedpods will pop out. Put a pile of seeds into a little bowl and pass it around. Chat about the flavours and textures.

"What about this pomegranate? Who has tasted one of these before?"

"Let's have a look inside the pomegranate. Wowee look at all these lovely little red gems!"

"Shall we taste them? I'm going to taste one. Yum! It's super juicy and sweet and a bit tart, and it goes "Pop!" in my mouth. The little seed inside is bitter if you crunch it."

"Who'd like to have a taste?"

- Try tasting some fennel and pomegranate together. What do you all think of the flavour combination?

"What do you think? Do they go well together? Why/why not?"

- Show the children how to pop a pomegranate gem between their fingers. Just hold between thumb and forefinger and squeeze until it pops. Juice will squirt out in fun little pops – act surprised!

"Hey look, I'm going to pop one between my fingers! POP! Oh!"

- Pass around the pomegranate. Let the children pick the pomegranate gems with their fingers and pop them (great for practising fine motor skills). Beware, this is fun and messy and everyone will want to join in!



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