

Family Mental Fitness North East

Programme Overview Sensory Food Exploration Group



EYFS	KS1	KS2	KS3	FAMILIES
------	-----	-----	-----	----------

Food Explorers is a 10-week sensory food exploration programme for children who experience anxiety or overwhelm around food. Designed to support those with avoidant eating behaviours (including ARFID), the group offers a pressure-free space for curiosity, sensory play, and confidence-building around safe foods. The programme is led by an adult facilitator who is themselves autistic and diagnosed with ARFID. Their lived experience means they understand the importance of control, safety, and respect in food exploration—and how to create a space where children feel genuinely understood.

Purpose

To reduce the emotional and sensory stress linked to mealtimes by creating a safe, exploratory environment where children can prepare, touch, and engage with food—without any expectation to eat or taste.

The aim is to help children feel empowered and respected, while gently increasing their comfort and confidence with safe foods through sensory-based play and preparation.

Impact

- Builds familiarity and trust in handling, preparing, and exploring food
- Supports sensory regulation and autonomy
- Reinforces to children that they are not alone in their experiences
- Provides lived-experience peer modelling in a neurodivergent-affirming environment

Outcomes

- Reduced distress around food preparation and shared meals
- Increased willingness to engage in food-related activities
- More positive associations with safe foods
- Greater confidence and control at mealtimes

Example Session Structure

Each session includes:

- Sensory warm-up using food textures, smells, and colours
- Exploration of one safe or familiar food (e.g. pasta shapes, fruit, bread dough)
- No-pressure preparation activity (e.g. make-your-own food face, fruit kebab design, soft dough shapes)
- Group reflection and optional “food adventure” challenge to share at home
- Take-home recipe card or visual recipe strip

Session Duration

10 × 30 minute sessions

Cost Per Session

Schools and Public Bodies: £32

Subsidised for families: £16

For Funders

Fully funded cost per 12-week programme: £1800

(£36 per user per session)

Fully Funded includes delivery by qualified practitioner, programme administration and evaluation reporting, in-session resources, venue hire, and take-home items.

Version: 1.0

Approved by: Director

Date: 19/08/25

Review Date: 19/08/26