

SPECIALIST TRANSDISCIPLINARY FEEDING THERAPY FOR PAEDIATRIC FEEDING DISORDERS (PFD) AND DEVELOPMENTAL FEEDING DIFFERENCES



**Feeding Development
Matters**

Registered Charity 1205834



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Introduction

At The Feeding Trust, we recognise that eating is not a binary task to be completed but a developmental journey unique to every child.

Our specialist, transdisciplinary feeding therapy, including expertise from Occupational Therapy (OT), Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) and Dietetics, is designed to support children affected by Paediatric Feeding Disorders (PFD) and developmental feeding differences through a dynamic, child-led approach.

Using evidence-based methods and tailored interventions, our goal is to empower families, educators and health professionals to foster confidence and competence in children's feeding development.

Understanding PFD & Developmental Feeding Differences

Developmental Feeding Differences and Paediatric Feeding Disorders (PFD) are complex and multifactorial. They can impact a child's nutritional intake, growth, and psychosocial well-being. The challenges of PFD extend beyond the mechanical act of eating to encompass sensory, motor, nutritional, emotional and psychosocial dimensions. Without timely, tailored intervention, children with PFD are at risk of developing nutritional deficiencies, faltering growth, dehydration and long-term social and emotional challenges.

Who We Are and Our Mission

The Feeding Trust is a specialist charity committed to supporting those affected by PFD and developmental feeding differences.

Our core activities include:

- **Individualised Education and Training:** Equipping parents, educational staff and health professionals with the skills to advocate for and support children.
- **Bespoke Intervention Programmes:** Tailored initiatives developed by our inter-disciplinary team, based on the child's needs in line with the Eating as Learning Framework.
- **Advocacy and awareness raising:** Acting as a voice for those affected by PFD and feeding differences in the UK, to improve timely support and early intervention.
- **Research:** Identifying at-risk populations, early risk factors and supporting earlier interventions for better outcomes.

Our Transdisciplinary Approach to Feeding Therapy

The Eating as Learning Framework

Central to our service delivery is the Eating as Learning Framework: A Developmental Approach to Feeding. Unlike conventional models that treat feeding as a problem to be fixed, our framework views eating as a skill to be learned gradually, mirroring developmental milestones such as walking and talking. The approach is:

- **Child-Led:** The pace and style of learning are guided by each child's individual needs.
- **Responsive:** Interventions are adjusted based on sensory, motor and emotional cues.
- **Empowering:** The focus shifts from compliance and pressure to curiosity and progress.



Eating as Learning © The Feeding Trust 2025

Principles of Feeding Therapy

Our framework rests on 4 fundamental principles:

Feeding as a Dynamic, Developmental Journey

- Developmental Stages: Just as other skills are acquired over time, feeding development progresses through distinct stages.
- Skill Development: Multiple internal and external factors may disrupt progress; recognising these allows us to provide tailored support.
- Unique Feeding Journeys: Success is individualised; what works for one child may differ for another.
- Assume Competency and Adapt: Every child has the potential to learn when provided with inclusive, pressure-free learning opportunities.



Felt Safety – The Foundation for Feeding Success

- Predictability and Routine: Consistent routines create a secure environment that anchors the child's sense of safety.
- Responsive Cues: Verbal, visual and child-specific signals provide guidance without overwhelm.
- Pressure-Free Environment: Mealtimes must be free from coercion or excessive expectations, allowing natural exploration.
- Attending to the Body's Needs: Addressing issues such as pain, posture, sensory needs and stress responses is paramount.
- Emotional Regulation: A calm, regulated caregiver is key to establishing a nurturing feeding environment.



Neuro-Affirming: Respecting Individual Needs and Autonomy

- Individual Differences: Every child experiences food, textures and mealtimes in their own way, necessitating personalised approaches.
- Strengths-Based Perspective: Rather than focusing on limitations, we celebrate each child's natural abilities to build confidence and independence.
- Child-Led Choices: Encouraging autonomy in decision-making about eating fosters independence.
- Collaboration Over Compliance: Success is achieved through partnership with the child, their families and professionals.



Regulating Adults: Reassurance and Validation

- Parent and Caregiver Coaching: We equip parents with strategies to manage their own emotional responses while supporting their child in a calm, responsive manner.
- Collaborative Goal Setting: Families are active partners in creating realistic, responsive and individualised goals.
- Shifting from Control to Connection: Emphasising connection over control ensures that small wins are celebrated and progress is sustained.
- Emotional Support for Caregivers: Recognising and validating caregiver emotions is a key component in achieving long-term success.

Our Therapy Programme

The Feeding Trust develops individualised therapy programmes that integrate a range of techniques from the Eating as Learning Framework. Our comprehensive activities include:

- **Regulate to Educate – Action for Learning:** Techniques to help children manage their internal states as a precursor to more complex feeding tasks.
- **Eating as Learning Ladder:** A stepwise approach that builds and reinforces new feeding skills progressively.
- **Eating as Learning Language:** Establishing a shared vocabulary that facilitates clear communication and modelling without expectation.
- **Eating Around Others:** Structured activities that promote the social aspects of mealtimes, fostering independence and inclusion.

- **Food Explorers:** Guided, sensory-based introductions to new foods to encourage curiosity and reduce anxiety.
- **Food Frameworks:** Establishing predictable routines and frameworks to make mealtime structure clear and reassuring.
- **Food Rotation and Menu Planning:** Nutritionally focused strategies to ensure a balanced diet and address specific dietary needs.
- **Parent Education and School Training:** Comprehensive training modules for parents, school staff and other professionals, equipping them with evidence-based strategies to support feeding development.

Each element of our programme is tailored to the individual child's developmental needs and the context of their daily life, ensuring interventions are both effective and sustainable.

Training, Supervision and Collaborative Support

Beyond direct intervention, The Feeding Trust is committed to supporting the wider care network through:

- **Face-to-Face Clinic Appointments:** Personal, in-clinic sessions that provide direct, hands-on assessments and therapy.
- **Online Coaching and Education Sessions:** Flexible, accessible support that reaches families and professionals regardless of location.
- **Ongoing Supervision:** Continuous guidance and updates to ensure that parents, educators and clinicians stay informed as the child's needs evolve.

This multi-pronged model ensures that all those involved, parents, school staff and healthcare professionals, are provided with the skills and knowledge to deliver responsive, informed and evidence-based care.

Why Do Feeding Therapy?

Without access to specialist intervention, children are at risk of:

- **Nutritional Deficiencies:** These may include anaemia, hypocalcaemia, low protein intake and deficiencies in micronutrients and vitamins, with potential adverse health outcomes that can extend into adulthood.
- **Faltering Growth, Malnutrition and Dehydration:** These complications can lead to long-term medical issues and increased future use of NHS resources.
- **Social and Emotional Challenges:** Untreated feeding difficulties often result in social isolation, reduced participation in daily activities and long-term mental health difficulties.

Benefits of Therapy

By receiving intensive, interdisciplinary feeding therapy, children and families can expect:

- **Improved Nutritional Status:** Significant enhancements in feeding development leads to better nutritional intake and overall well-being.
- **Enhanced Social and Emotional Outcomes:** A supportive, pressure-free environment helps boost social engagement and self-confidence.
- **Empowered Families:** Parents and caregivers gain the knowledge and skills needed to advocate effectively for their child, ensuring consistent support across home, school and community settings.
- **Prevention of Long-Term Health Risks:** Early intervention reduces the chance of complications that might otherwise lead to increased healthcare utilisation in the future.

Clinical Effectiveness and Research Evidence

A growing body of evidence supports an intensive multidisciplinary approach to feeding therapy:

- Sharp et al. (2017): A systematic review and meta-analysis demonstrated that intensive multidisciplinary intervention leads to significant improvements in feeding behaviours, weight gain and overall nutritional status.
- Dharmaraj et al. (2023): Research highlights the necessity of addressing the complex interplay of medical, behavioural and sensory issues through a collaborative, transdisciplinary team.

Advocacy

The Feeding Trust is dedicated to transforming feeding development, viewing it not as a pass/fail task but as a progressive developmental journey. By empowering parents, educating professionals and delivering tailored, evidence-based interventions, we create a pathway for children to thrive nutritionally, socially and emotionally.

We invite parents, educators and healthcare professionals to join us in creating an environment where every child with PFD and developmental feeding differences is given the opportunity to learn, explore and succeed in their feeding journey.

Additional Resources

For further information on the practical applications of the Eating as Learning Framework or to explore detailed case studies and intervention techniques, please ask about our extended training modules and in-depth workshops designed for professionals and caregivers alike.



H's Story

H was exclusively breastfed and, at weaning, it became apparent that he had some feeding issues. During weigh-ins, we were told that it was normal and that he would eventually learn to eat. At one year of age, during a check-up appointment—even after we had tried to get him to drink fortified milk—his weight remained worryingly low.

A nasogastric (NG) tube was inserted to improve his weight. Unfortunately, he vomited much of his milk, and over the next 18 months we were in and out of hospital. We underwent various tests and were initially written off with reflux.

Changing both milk and feeding routines had little effect. The NHS staff supporting us suggested several methods to encourage him to eat whilst he was being tube fed. However, with all the tube changes and episodes of vomiting, his gag reflex and sensory issues became amplified.



H's Story continued...

A desperate Google search brought up **The Feeding Trust** and we approached them for help. Following an assessment by their team, H was diagnosed with Paediatric Feeding Disorder (PFD).

An individual plan was created according to his condition, age and developmental stage, and this was implemented in stages both face-to-face and virtually during the COVID pandemic.

The turning point was fitting a PEG and transitioning to a blended diet. The removal of the tube, along with the lower volumes of food, reduced his oral aversion and allowed us to more successfully teach him to eat.

Over the next year, we gradually reduced his tube feeds whilst engaging in food play and slowly expanding his food list.



H's Story continued...

H put on weight; more importantly, his confidence and stamina grew, enabling him to learn to ride a bike and play in the playground. He became that happy, cheeky little boy we had only glimpsed on the best days.

H has since started school and, whilst he still has sensory needs and does not yet have a wide variety of foods in his diet, he is a happy child learning to read, write and play alongside his friends. The team not only supported H and devised a plan that worked, but they were also incredibly supportive of us, the nursery and our entire family throughout the process.

They were always available to answer questions, provide training, assist with funding or council application forms, and cheer us on, making us feel truly heard.



H's Story continued...

Although our dedicated NHS team were very supportive, they simply did not have the specific experience or capacity to give H the targeted support he needed.

We could not have done it without The Feeding Trust team, and we are immensely grateful that we found them.

They helped both H and us to reach his full potential. I sincerely hope that they continue to grow, supporting more families like ours and spreading knowledge among schools and support workers so that issues can be identified early and the appropriate advice provided.



Contact:

For more information and free resources, visit **www.feedingtrust.org**

The Feeding Trust
17 The Square
Alvechurch
Worcestershire
B48 7LA

Call us on 0121 289 3204

Email us on admin@feedingtrust.org