

A Parent's Guide to Supporting a Child with Anorexia Nervosa or ARFID



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A Letter to Parents

Dear Parent,

If you're reading this, food may have become one of the hardest parts of your day.

You may be exhausted from worrying, researching, questioning yourself, and wondering if you're saying the right thing.

I want you to know something:

You do not have to be perfect to help your child recover.

Recovery is built through hundreds of ordinary moments.

Breakfast.

After-school snacks.

Family dinners.

Car rides.

Hard conversations.

Those moments matter more than you think.

— Karen

Understanding the Difference

Anorexia Nervosa

Fear drives avoidance.

The eating disorder creates intense anxiety around food, weight restoration, and recovery.

Goal: Help your child eat despite fear.

ARFID

Avoidance drives eating difficulties.

Food refusal may be related to sensory sensitivities, fear of consequences, lack of interest, or past experiences.

Goal: Increase flexibility and comfort around food.

The strategies are not the same because the challenges are not the same.

Anorexia Nervosa

What Helps

- Consistent meals and snacks
- Calm confidence
- Structure
- Following through
- Less discussion, more action

Scripts to Try

"I know this feels scary."

"You can do hard things."

"You don't have to like it to do it."

"The eating disorder doesn't get a vote at this table."

Avoid

- Negotiating
- Arguing
- Threats
- Reassurance loops

ARFID

What Helps

- Curiosity
- Repeated exposure
- Flexibility
- Small wins
- Low pressure

Scripts to Try

"You don't have to eat it today."

"Let's learn about it."

"Can you smell it?"

"Can you touch it?"

"Can you sit with it on your plate?"

Reminder

Success is not just swallowing food.

Success may be:

- Looking
- Touching
- Smelling
- Licking
- Tasting

Every interaction counts.

Real Life Situations

Restaurants

- Review menus ahead of time.
- Keep expectations realistic.

Focus on participation.

School Lunches

- Look at patterns, not single days.

One difficult lunch is not failure.

Holidays

- Expect anxiety.
- Maintain structure.

Prioritize connection.

Recovery happens in real life, not perfect circumstances.

When You Feel Like You're Failing

You will second-guess yourself.

You will have meals that don't go well.

You will wonder if you're helping.

That does not mean you're failing.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is showing up again tomorrow.

Parent Reflection

One thing I did well today:

One thing I can let go of:

One reminder I need tonight:

Additional Support

Craving More Podcast

Recovery isn't about caring less about food. It's about caring more about your life.

Honest conversations about eating disorders, recovery, parenting, and building a life bigger than food.

Read My Book

Within

Making Peace with Food and Body Image to Create a Happy, Healthy Home

Available on Amazon.

Karen Diaz, RD

Helping individuals and families build healthier relationships with food, body image, and recovery.

www.karendiazrd.com