

00:00.00

theautismhelper

Hi Elizabeth thank you so much for joining me I'm excited to talk about picky eating because I think this is an issue for a lot of kids and especially children on the spectrum that I know a lot of teachers and parents.

00:01.71

Elizabeth Klein

Thank you so much for having me. It's an honor to be here.

00:17.19

theautismhelper

And Clinicians are working on So I'm excited to have you on to talk about this topic.

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Elizabeth Klein

Yeah, it's definitely a really big topic and one that's really impactful, not only on individuals with Autism but the whole community their families all the practitioners they work with so.

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theautismhelper

Um, yeah, really kind of bleeds into all these other areas if you're not you know, eating and feeling. Yeah, healthy. Yeah I mean I know for myself. But but so why is.

00:35.26

Elizabeth Klein

Yeah, absolutely, you don't have a full belly that can lead to a lot of problems. Yeah, and definitely. Yeah.

00:45.82

theautismhelper

But more why is picky eating or you know highly selective eating more common for kids with autism.

00:52.72

Elizabeth Klein

Yeah, it's definitely something. That's super super common. Um I know I've worked in several different settings with individuals with autism and other disabilities. Um and almost every single time you know when you ask parents or you talk to their caregivers. Um, the biggest issue that they talk about is eating. And not even just the food select activity. But um, it can be other eating problems as well. You know if they're um, you know hyposensitive. Maybe they just eat everything and that's not okay, either. Um, so yeah, eating problems are super super common in Autism and I think one of the biggest reasons for that is the sensory Issues. You know everyone always talks about.

01:17.10

theautismhelper

Are.

01:29.78

Elizabeth Klein

Oh It's a texture issue but it's also you know it could be a temperature issue. It could be shape issue a color issue. Um, so all of those sensory factors. Definitely play a big role and I think also just like the fixation on the routine and the sameness. Um, you know if you take a blueberry. You know they taste kind of similar every time but you don't know if that blueberry is going to be a little bit sour. A little bit sweet a little bit squishy. A little bit crunchy. Um, so that insistence on sameness and routine and um the fixation on that can sometimes be really difficult for kids with Autism Um, not knowing exactly what's coming as well as just eating in general includes. So many discrete behaviors that you have to learn you know, um from using utensils to chewing the food Um, asking for food. All of these different things. Um so eating itself is just such a big massive undertaking to really master.

02:20.34

theautismhelper

Yeah, that makes sense I mean I think as you're talking about that routine and sameness I notice this with my own kids who are not on the spectrum but just from a parenting perspective I tend to kind of give them what I know they'll like and then we're kind of eating the same chicken nuggets every week

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Elizabeth Klein

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theautismhelper

And then if I buy a different brand. They're like whoa Whoa Whoa. What's this and it's like you know because it's just not their routine which I didn't even realize I was creating.

02:44.34

Elizabeth Klein

Um, rough Yeah absolutely and so that's something that I always say from the beginning. Um, you know it's not really a solution to people who are already in this conundrum. But um, if you're starting out you have like a young child. Um I encourage just as much opportunities for generalization as possible. So like always put it on a different dish. You know don't have the red plate beat a chicken nugget plate just always put it on different dish. Um flip the flute upside down or um, you know cut it in different ways. Just do as many different things as

you can so that they're comfortable with a little bit more. Um.

03:04.87

theautismhelper

Um, and I.

03:16.95

Elizabeth Klein

Variety among those foods that you're feeding them and right? Yeah yeah.

03:17.60

theautismhelper

Yeah, that's such a simple thing that we wouldn't even think of to do with our little ones right? So why is this you know focusing on eating and increasing the variety and types of foods that kids are eating important like what implications does pick eating have.

03:36.57

Elizabeth Klein

It's so important Obviously food is you know, really really important to everyone just as far as Health um social interactions being able to participate in you know society with everyone else involves being able to eat so eating definitely has huge implications. Um, it impacts the family greatly. Um, you know most of the time parents have other children. Um, sometimes they have children who have disabilities as well. Other children with disabilities. Um, so being able to have everyone eat. Same food or a similar food or just eat something in general is so so important to just the family structure and being able to you know, serve something and then you know know that your child will sit down and eat it and you don't have to sit there and prompt them through it or they're not going to throw up or throw their food on the ground or whatever it may be so definitely I think the family function. Is a huge reason. Um, that piggy eating is important to address. But then. Also yeah, the social interactions and the stigma that come with not being able to eat. Um, you know if we're expecting them to be able to attend social gatherings where there's probably going to be food present if we're expecting them to sit in the cafeteria and eat among their peers. Um, all of these different things and then they need to master certain skills and be able to eat a you know a certain repertoire of foods. Um, so that they can you know look the same as just any other child who is eating their lunch in the cafeteria. Um and not have any really social state socially stigmatizing behaviors or um, you know.

05:06.64

Elizabeth Klein

Significant problems with sensory issues as they're going about those things and then of course the health. The Health is a huge one um food variety definitely impacts health but it's not necessarily one in the

same For instance, um, some kids might have fewer foods in their repertoire. Um, but that doesn't mean that they're less healthy because those foods might be. You know some great sources of protein or vitamins or whatever it may be whereas other kids might have more foods in their repertoire but be less healthy because those foods are not as nutrient dense. Um, so that definitely isn't one of the same. But um. Obviously food variety is going to have an impact on the overall health and so that you know leads us into the discussion about like setting events and um, you know if someone's not getting their physical needs. Met how can that impact the behaviors. Um, so it it bleeds out everywhere for sure.

05:55.61

theautismhelper

Do you notice that when kids have like a smaller set of foods that they eat that they tend to be more unhealthy foods like let's say I Only need a handful of things but those tend to be like more process less like fruits and vegetables does that tend to be the case.

06:14.15

Elizabeth Klein

Um, I would say as a general probably um and I think that's some that's a great thing for the feeding assessment tool to help diagnose as well. Um, is just kind of like what the patterns of eating are and what those patterns of the various foods are um because some kids really fixate on.

06:15.25

theautismhelper

Are.

06:30.70

Elizabeth Klein

We talk a lot about like the beige in brown foods. Some kids are like anything as long as it's a Beeian Brown um or you know they have like certain patterns of things that they're more willing to eat. Um, and so then that sometimes means that yes it is more processed or maybe it's more.

06:33.15

theautismhelper

Um, yeah, ah.

06:44.93

Elizabeth Klein

More of a certain type of food. So I think the feeding assessment tool is just a really great way to like recognize some of those things and.

06:48.32

theautismhelper

Yeah, so let's hear about the feeding assessment tool and I'd love to hear kind of you know what motivated you to create this.

06:57.35

Elizabeth Klein

Yeah, absolutely. Um so the feeding assessment Tool I Guess I'll start with what motivated me to create it. Um I've worked like I said in a variety of Contexts with individuals with disabilities specifically Autism Um, and currently and the clinical supervisor over an aba program where. Think every single child that we work with has probably had some some type of eating issue or parents have asked me a feeding question. So. It's just something that is constantly seen um and there are some resources out there. Um, there are there's you know, feeding therapy from slps and ots. But there's just not very much. Or kids who are food selective eaters. There's a lot for like if your child can't swallow if your child has these really severe oral motor deficits All of those things. But what about the kids who can eat but just don't that was kind of where I was seeing the issue so I kind of pursued some training in that specifically.

07:47.11

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

07:54.50

Elizabeth Klein

Um, and nutrition is something that myself and my family are just passionate about in general. Um, and it's always been. You know an interest of ours. Um, so I pursued like interdisciplinary training. So I could learn more about like the S O S approach which is you know, most commonly used by speech pathologists. Um, and just you know some other and kind of like the history feeding therapy and where we're at now because it's something that I think is going to really grow in the coming years. Um, and so I decided to develop this tool primarily to use with my own clients but then also to offer to other parents and practitioners who needed to know more about their food selective eaters. Um. As well as help develop more systematic goals because everything I was seeing was kind of um, not as data driven as you know other other aspects of behavior or things that we measure. Um it was a little bit more subjective or um, you know it was like what food do we start with I don't know how about eggs and they' were just going to pick a food. Um, and so I wanted something that was going to be a little bit more systematic so the feeding assessment tool is a virtual comprehensive super easy to use assessment tool designed for parents and practitioners. So if you're an ot the bcba n f lp and nutritionist anything like that. This could be beneficial for you. As long as you are helping a child or adult with their feeding goals. Um, it goes through all of the sensory features of foods. Um, so it'll measure. Um the food groups. The food textures. The food flavors ah food shapes um food colors food temperatures.

09:25.82

Elizabeth Klein

Um, and give you a score for each so you can kind of notice the patterns of like Wow they eat a ton of blue and Purple foods. Um, a lot of flat foods but they have almost no oblong foods in their repertoire things like that and then you can kind of make those more specific goals from that as well as it measures. Social eating behaviors eating compliance eating related communication skills physiological and motor Capabilities. So that you can see those as Well. The the common eating issues and eating behaviors that come up with autism as Well. Um, and then you can set a goal that's like instead of just the child's going to you know increase their food Variety. You could say the child will consume foods across at least 3 flavor profiles textures and colors by this state So something That's a little bit more objective and clear um to kind of guide that that feeding therapy process. Yes.

10:14.40

theautismhelper

Um, that's interesting I didn't you know you don't think about how many different ways you can group foods like temperature text or shape I mean there's so many different ways you can you know come at it from and then when you're picking goals. Do you does this kind of help you like I love that goal of like you know across 3

10:21.77

Elizabeth Klein

Yeah, absolutely.

10:31.68

theautismhelper

3 food groups does it then give you some ideas of foods in those groups that you could kind of like start with.

10:37.16

Elizabeth Klein

Yes, certainly so um, the the first part of the test is basically like a food inventory. So um, the respondent will Mark um, you know, let's say they're given um Carrot sticks. That's an oblong orange, crunchy, earthy food. Um, so that's going to contribute to their score for all of those categories. Um, so let's say um, we're seeing that they scored in about like the sixty sixty percent for oblong and crunchy foods then they might suggest Carrot sticks be where we start? Um, you know because you want to start with the food that's in that sixty to eighty percent range

11:08.40

theautismhelper

Um.

11:11.69

Elizabeth Klein

Um, rather than starting with like something that's really really out of reach. So.

11:13.82

theautismhelper

See I think I mean I'm like reflecting my own parenting as I have some picky eaters myself. But I that is my problem often as I go to like something they like I'm like here. Let's eat chili and they don't eat anything like chili and they're like no but you know, starting with something that's more familiar in their repertoires.

11:18.19

Elizabeth Klein

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11:24.44

Elizabeth Klein

Right? Yeah yeah. Yeah, yeah, so the low hanging fruit is a great strategy of just you know you want to be successful with something so um, sometimes it's hard to see ah if you're just just looking at the child. What's going to be more or less likely for them to eat. But when you have an assessment tool like this you can look at the graph and see. Oh wow, it's really not likely that they're going to have a spicy food but it's actually you know, semi likely that they might try something sour. Um, so let's let's try something sour first have them be successful with that and eventually maybe we'll get to spicy but um, it just allows you to be a bit more intentional about how you move through that picky eating therapy.

11:52.58

theautismhelper

Um, um, yeah.

12:04.48

theautismhelper

Love that and then do you re give this assessment on a regular basis or do you like do it once and develop your goals.

12:14.43

Elizabeth Klein

Um, it's similar to what you would do with any other assessment. So if you did like another adaptive behavior assessment um or something like that. You definitely want to do it at the beginning to get a baseline. Um, if you're a parent and you want to use it. It kind of helps answer that question of like does your child need feeding therapy. Um, if you're not quite sure is this like in the the typical range of picky eating or is this you know, really outside the norm. Um, and then if

you're a practitioner. Um, you know for myself I always like to reevaluate my clients like every six months or so depending on their needs and how much progress they've made. You might do it more or less often. Um, but I think it's just good to continue um to measure those things and see if anything's changed and.

12:53.23

theautismhelper

Um I love that this is something that a parent can use. That's not you know I think so often it's like there's these big assessments that are kind of tricky even for Clinicians but something that's user, friendly that a teacher a parent someone that you know doesn't necessarily have an aba background could jump in and utilize.

13:08.45

Elizabeth Klein

Yeah, absolutely I know that feeding therapy is not necessarily pigeonhold to 1 specific discipline so I wanted something that was going to be useful. Um, you know for slps ots b cbas and then parents as well because sometimes you know you might not be pursuing feeding therapy. But. You might be trying to do some interventions on your own.

13:24.50

theautismhelper

Yeah,, that's true thinking about teachers in the classroom setting that have students with you know, really picky eating. How can they support. These kids and then how can they support parents and caregivers that are trying to you know increase food variety. What? What's the kind of the teacher's role in this as you see.

13:43.78

Elizabeth Klein

That's a really great question. Um, and I think that's again a topic that's going to be coming up more often in the future. Um I know that I I worked on a case. Um, where there was 2 students in special education with Autism. Um, and we went back and forth about. Was there going to be feeding therapy at school was there not was there gonna be was there not and um, ultimately they ended up not receiving feeding therapy services at school. Um, whether they needed it I think is still kind of up for debate. Um, but I think again a tool like this is something that might be able to kind of help. Parents advocate for if some feeding interventions are necessary at school because when it comes to like teaching um for feeding therapy services to be delivered at school or for feeding interventions to be in the Iep Um, you know it needs to be some something that's really impactful on their. Ability to make social connections or ability to learn ability to function in the school setting. Um, so if a child is able to just sit there in the lunch you you know, eat alongside their peers. No problems. Great Um, but if their picky eating is resulting in. You

know, serious behaviors at school or.

14:37.39

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

14:50.82

Elizabeth Klein

Um, an inability to learn you know, Maybe they're not eating lunch and then they have a lot of behaviors and can't learn after lunchtime. Um in those cases Obviously we need to provide some interventions. Um, so I think a few things that you can do as a teacher would just be to collaborate with the family as far as lunches.

14:58.13

theautismhelper

Um, and the.

15:09.58

Elizabeth Klein

Um, usually there's only one meal eaten at the school. Sometimes it's 2 sometimes kids have breakfast as well. But really collaborating with parents about you know, did they eat breakfast are they eating breakfast here. What's for lunch um and paying attention to those setting events because. If they didn't eat breakfast then they might need a few snacks before they get to lunchtime to make it through or if they had a huge breakfast then maybe don't try to use food as a reinforcer at 9 am so really being in communication with the parents about um, just kind of their feeding status what they brought for lunch and how. Parents want them to go about giving those foods and then again with the generalization piece so always making sure that you have as much generalization as possible and avoid the really really rigid structure because for instance, if they're used to only having food delivered by the teacher on their yellow plate. And when a substitute comes and delivers them food on their green plates. They might not eat it. They might just throw it on the ground. Um, so really paying attention to those generalization pieces. Um telling them. You know you're going to eat at this table today. you're going to eat at that table today um you're going to sit with this peer. You're going to sit with that peer. Um, just as many different um you know small. Opportunities for variety that you can capitalize on so.

16:26.63

theautismhelper

Um, yeah I think that's such an easy way to just even like the seating like you said or the the plate or whatever could to just kind of start to build in that generalization pieces. You said.

16:36.74

Elizabeth Klein

Yeah, absolutely and I think something else too is eating with competing distractions in the environment can be really challenging for some kids um particularly if they have a code morbid diagnosis of Adhd or something like that. Um, and so maybe starting to like play some soft background music on some days. Not every day. Or um, you know having having different things going on in the environment so they can start to get used to like you know if there's a different sound if there's a different um person. You know if you're seeing something different. We're still going to continue eating as normal.

17:08.15

theautismhelper

Um, yes, speaking of competing distractions is kind of taking this conversation a different direction from school but you know I know a lot of parents rely on an ipad or a screen during during meal times and what's your kind of advice or perspective on that if that's something to avoid or to.

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Elizabeth Klein

Um.

17:25.71

theautismhelper

To be okay with sometimes.

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Elizabeth Klein

So that's a great question. Um, and I think in today's world is something that probably can't be altogether avoided you know you pretty much can't take someone to a restaurant without there being a screen somewhere. Um, so I think it it can't altogether be avoided. Um, if possible.

17:34.48

theautismhelper

Um, yeah.

17:45.24

Elizabeth Klein

Yeah I think it's great if people can eat without having a screen I think that's the most independent that they can be um, but for some people I think as a first step you kind of do what you have to do so if they're not eating at all if they have great struggles with sitting calmly in the chair. Um, then? yeah, maybe we do have to introduce a screen or um, you know reinforcers things like that for getting them to sit calmly at the table and eat their food because that's the priority I would say I think eating is you know, obviously really at the top the list of important behaviors for people to exhibit. Um, and then that's something that you'd want to fade away. Over time that

shouldn't be something that you want to have them be reliant on for the rest of their life. Um, but if it is necessary in order to get them to eat then I think then in that case, you do what you got to? do yeah as long as you have plans to I think faded away you know.

18:32.26

theautismhelper

Yeah I think like every parent was like yes, tell me that I can do it for a little bit but um, especially and that and like tricky followup question so you know parents caregivers are saying that are like okay we we need the fading piece now where do you start with that fading if a kid's super reliant on having that ipad there and out when they eat. What's like that first snap on fading.

18:51.12

Elizabeth Klein

That's a great question and that's a great question. So I think um 1 thing that I would start with is let's say they're just super reliant on watching a video the entire time they're eating you can still leave that video in front of them. But you can start by pausing it maybe like every couple of minutes you just pause. It. Have them take a couple bites to and swallow and then you hit play again. So the picture is still. There. The screen is still there but it's not actually playing I think that would be the first step in fading right.

19:16.20

theautismhelper

Yeah I love that advice because they're not like taking it away. It's like you know wait I was in the middle of that. It's just it'll come back. It's right here.

19:23.76

Elizabeth Klein

Exactly and as the pauses get longer and longer the screen gets further away eventually they start to not really attend to it very much anyways and then they don't you know react as strongly when it's actually physically removed.

19:36.74

theautismhelper

Yeah, that's great advice I love this? Um, okay Elizabeth so where can people go to learn more from the feeding assessment tool or utilize this tool.

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Elizabeth Klein

So yeah, you can visit our website. It's feedingassessmenttool.com um, all the information is right on there. But if for some reason you have any questions you can absolutely reach out. Um, my email is just contact at feedingassessment tool dot com and I'm happy to answer any

questions by parents or practitioners about how to use this assessment um or anything like that. But yeah, basically um, there's 2 2 styles to the assessment one is just the food selectivity and the other is the comprehensive The only difference is the comprehensive includes. The eating related behaviors as well. Um, so if you're maybe an adult who's curious about your own behaviors. You might just choose to use the food selectivity. Um, but for the most part for practitioners or um, if you're measuring behaviors of children with autism I recommend using the comprehensive.

20:35.53

theautismhelper

Um, awesome. Well thank you so much Elizabeth this has been super helpful.

20:37.10

Elizabeth Klein

Yeah, absolutely thank you so much for having me.