

Navigating Early Childhood & Food Allergies

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Hello!

I am Sarah Valaika

I am passionate about creating developmentally appropriate food allergy education for children under 6 and those who live and work with them.





Hello!

I am Dr. Ruchi Gupta

I am a pediatrician and health researcher. I am passionate about clinical and community-based research related to food allergy.



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Tell us about YOU!

- I'm a Parent of a child under 6yrs.
- I'm an Early Childhood professional- I work w/children under 6yrs.
- I'm a Curious Advocate for Early Childhood.



Agenda:

1. What's a food allergy?
2. What's unique about early childhood?
3. Food Allergy & Parents
4. Food Allergy & Early Childhood Professionals
5. What matters and why?
6. Q&A



What's a food allergy?

Food Allergy: An immune system allergic reaction (IgE mediated) that occurs soon after eating a certain food. Reactions can range from mild to severe and potentially life-threatening.

Anaphylaxis: A severe, potentially life-threatening allergic reaction that typically occurs within seconds or minutes of exposure to an allergen.

To Prevent: Stay away from the allergic food.



“Understanding food allergy education needs in early childhood schools”

Fierstein, J., Chadha, A., Valaika, S., Gupta, R. (2020). “Understanding food allergy education needs in early childhood schools,” *Annals of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology*, 124.

1

Our Research

In 2018 we surveyed parents of young children & Early Childhood providers across the state of Illinois to understand the food allergy education needs.

2

Our Findings

The majority of providers work with children with food allergies but there is a need for more education on management.

3

Our Work

Three (3) videos were created to address the food allergy education needs.



Pause & Reflect:

- Type into the Q&A the first word that comes to mind.

**What is it like to be a child (under 6 yrs)
with a food allergy?**

Is the word you entered what you, as an adult, think it's like?

OR

what it is truly like for the child?



What's unique about early childhood?

Consider the 5 Goals of the Preschool years:

1 Self esteem &
Competence

2 Relationships
with Adults

3 Relationships
with Peers

4 Consider the
perspective of
others

5 Negotiate &
apply rules



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We surveyed parents of children with and without food allergies, to understand the food allergy education needs of parents.

Who did we receive more responses from?

- Parents of children with food allergies
- Parents of children without food allergies



Food Allergy & Parents

What we learned from the survey...

- 75% of those who completed the survey were parents of children without food allergy.
- They know food allergies are real and serious – 75% said their child has a friend with a food allergy.
- Parents of children without food allergies want food allergy knowledge also. They are willing to watch videos and learn.



video **1**

for
Parents
“Parent-to-Parent”



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video link goes here

Parents help Parents!

- Share the child's Emergency Action Plan & medications with any adults caring for the child.
- Talk to the parent BEFORE a playdate or party.
- Reassure and be a positive food allergy role model for ALL children: use simple, concrete language.
- Make it easy for everyone: bring snacks when possible and offer to read food labels.



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We surveyed Early Childhood professionals.

How many EC providers believe they are unprepared to administer epinephrine?

- a) 23%
- b) 95%
- c) 38%
- d) 10%



Food Allergy & Early Childhood Professionals

What we learned from the survey...

- 69% were formally trained in food allergies; however 38% believed they are unprepared to administer epinephrine even though they were trained.
- 62% were unfamiliar with Emergency Action Plan related terms (ie. Body System – “for mild symptoms from ***more than one system*** area” ..., or “for mild symptoms from ***a single system***” area...)



Food Allergy & Early Childhood Professionals

What we learned from the survey...

- 1 in 4 providers witnessed an allergic reaction at the early childhood center.
 - More than 25% were unfamiliar with the Emergency Action Plan.
- Less than half were comfortable identifying allergy-friendly food labels.
- 47% wanted to know *how to talk* with children about food allergies.



video 2

for
Early Childhood
Professionals



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Parents help Providers!

- Be proactive: Request a meeting with the provider BEFORE your child's first day to discuss the child's Emergency Action Plan.
- Be organized: Have medication with you at all times & keep track of epinephrine expiration dates.
- Be helpful: Read food labels & bring special snacks if needed.
- Be careful: Hand sanitizers are not soap; soap removes allergens!
- Be an advocate: Share your food allergy knowledge with providers.
- Reassure the child: Use simple, concrete language.



Be a positive food allergy role model!

#1 Self esteem & Competence

What matters

Healthy attachments and confidence to take initiative is the work of young children. Children need to feel capable and competent.

Why

Sets the stage for lifelong feelings, emotions and behaviors in dealing with food allergies.

How

Adults need to prepare the environment so there are safe places to explore in their quest for independence.

Example

“LOOK what I see!
I see your hands are washed and the table is clean. The room is ready for playtime!”



Be a positive food allergy role model!

#2 Relationships with Adults

What matters

Children need relationships with adults that are respectful and trusting. Children need to feel safe with the adults caring for them.

Why

Children with food allergies depend on adults to be ready.

How

When children see adults reading food labels and being careful, they learn that adults (other than their parents) take their food allergies seriously and can be trusted.

Example

“STOP, let me LOOK and see if this food would be good for your body. I always need to read the food label.”



Be a positive food allergy role model!

#3 Relationships with Peers

What matters

They are ready for social interaction beyond their parents and providers.
Children are learning how to get-along with other children and peers.

Why

Children with food allergies may not understand why *they* can't eat food their friend is eating.

How

Adults need to model how children *can* get along and avoid “feeling bad” for having a food allergy.

Example

“Do you see other children eating something different? That food makes their bodies feel good but it would make your body feel sick.”



Be a positive food allergy role model!

#4 Consider the Perspective of Others

What matters

Recognizing the thoughts and feelings of others is emerging during these early years. They do this more often around age 5.

Why

Children *without* food allergies may not understand why *their friend* has a “special” snack or food.

How

Adults need to recognize and acknowledge when children are observing others and model how to consider the perspective of others.

Example

You’re right! Some people need special food for their body to feel good. BUT look, your bodies can both have the same drink!”



Be a positive food allergy role model!

#5 Negotiate and Apply Rules

What matters

They seek independence in their curiosity yet require consistent and vigilant adult supervision.

Why

Children can quickly put something in their mouth. Children may want to share food as a sign of friendship.

How

Adults need to safely store medicine near yet out of reach of children. Consistent use of the message: STOP, LOOK, ASK, GO will make it part of the snack/meal routine.

Example

We worked together! You STOPPED, LOOKED & ASKED if this snack is ok. I read the food label & know this food is ok. Yes, you can GO eat this snack!"



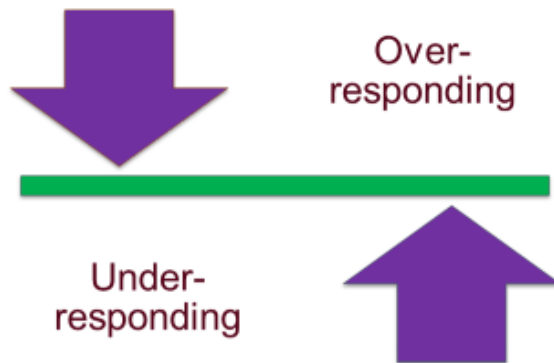
Remember this?

What is it like to be a child (under 6 yrs)
with a food allergy?



You worry AND you manage

Finding the Balance



What can parents & providers both do?

- Remember you are a positive role model for ALL children.
- Reduce fear by using age-appropriate language and hand signs that ALL children can understand and practice.
- Children benefit from repetition and a consistent snack/meal time message: STOP, LOOK, ASK, GO.



Next Steps:

Videos

The videos from today's webinar and other resources will soon be available on the FARE & CFAAR websites.

Training

CFAAR has a partnership with FARE. Plans are being discussed to develop a professional development training course for Early Childhood professionals.

Inclusion

The videos are also available in Spanish utilizing the closed caption option with the hope to reach more people who live and work with young children.



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Q & A

Time for Questions & Answers!

