**Module 4D: Using a sensory profile to personalise a learner with autism’s learning experience in the classroom.**

**Taste Sensory Issues: Positive and Protective Strategies**

Learners with autism can have particular needs in terms of food. Meal times can be the source of distress and anxiety. It’s not uncommon for children to have quite a restricted diet because they can only tolerate certain tastes or textures. Certain shape or colour foods might also be upsetting. They may also like certain foods/drinks way too much and this can lead to health risks. Some learners with autism will display ‘pica’ behaviour which means eating non-food items.

Potential problems might be: -

• stress during mealtimes

• not eating or drinking

• tricky foods that are hard to manipulate/eat

• food getting on hands or clothes and causing anxiety

• forgetting to bring or losing their special foods

• being made to feel odd by other learners

• staff insisting that they eat ‘the same things as everyone else’

• eating/drinking too much

• putting harmful things in the mouth or eating non-food items

**Protective and positive strategies include**

• quieter space to eat

• allow to enter the dinner hall before or after peers to avoid queuing and crowds

• reminders to ensure they don’t forget/lose their lunchbox

• experiment in a safe setting with different and new foods - explore choices

• respect their choices

• prevent teasing

• monitor food and liquid intake

• close observation during unstructured times