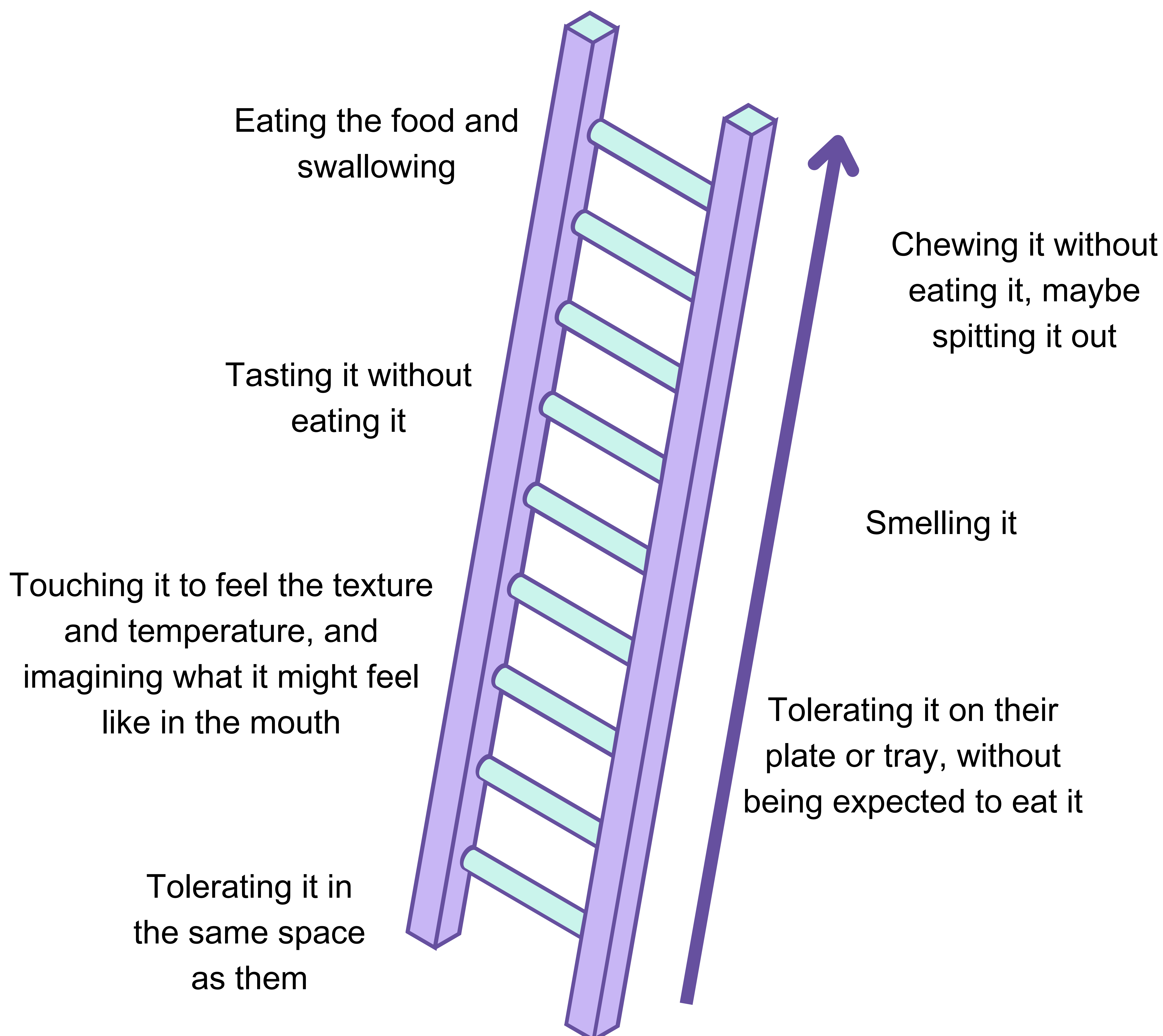


Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

Building Up Tolerance

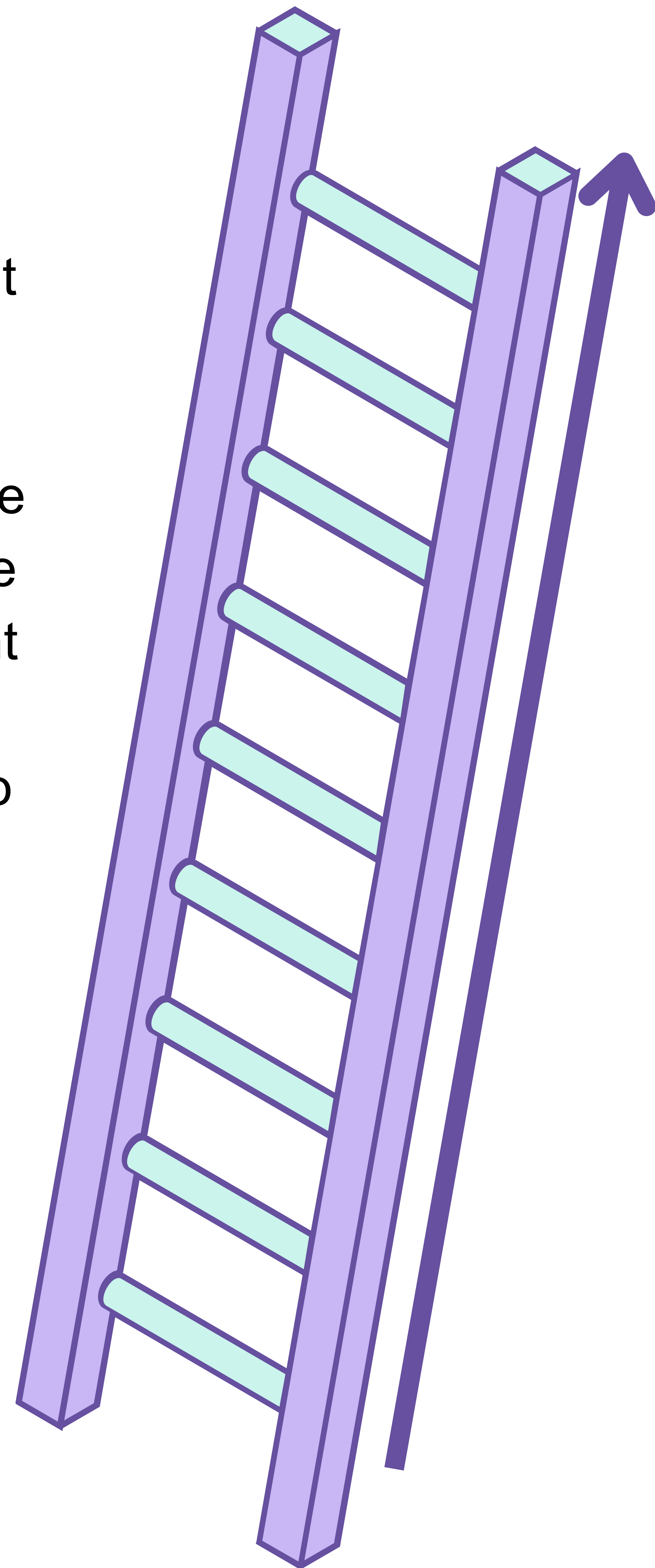
Sometimes children need more time and several experiences to 'get used' to new foods before they will try them. Eating and swallowing a food can be the last 'rung' on a ladder of smaller, gradual stages that a child may need to go through before they accept a new food. The steps on the ladder before eating something can be:



It is important to remember that we wouldn't expect a child to jump from the bottom to the top of a ladder, so we also may not expect them to swallow a food on their first time experiencing it. They may need to work through all of or some of the 'rungs' of the ladder first.

As adults, we have lots of experience trying different foods and developing preferences. We also learn about foods as we try new ones, which we can do by comparing foods with one another e.g. trying another flavour of yoghurt, but having other yoghurts to compare this to that you've tried before, and knowing that they're usually cold and might contain fruit pieces. Adults might compare features like colour, temperature, texture, smell, taste, look. Children also need the opportunity to do this.

Adults can also ask questions about foods in order to learn about them, and this can be compared to what they know and like/ dislike already. Children may not always be able to do this, so they need opportunities to ask questions and learn through exploration e.g. looking, touching, smelling, tasting- before they may be interested in and feel safe to eat and swallow the food.



These stages may take a while, and if meals are not presented on a regular basis this may take longer. It is important that a child is given some safe foods also as they may be hungry but be feeling overwhelmed by new food on their plate.

Tips and Recommendations- for older children

- Make meal plans a little more limited initially, to enable your child to build up tolerance to a range of foods. Consider a weekly meal plan so they see the same foods coming round again and again. This can be extended as they build tolerance as they will start to be less wary of new foods, as they can compare textures and the way food looks (e.g. this is pasta like we had with the tomato sauce except it has a cream sauce like we had with the fish pie).
- Always make sure that there is a safe food available at mealtimes to reduce anxiety and keep them at the table for longer.
- Try serving food from the middle of the table - this will enable your child to learn more about how the food looks and feels as they puts it on their plate. It will also mean they can be in control of how much they put on their plate.
- Try not to comment on what has or hasn't been eaten. If they eat something new, comment in a way that it doesn't highlight your child e.g. "I just had some of that Shepherd's pie too, it was really tasty".
- Set boundaries at mealtimes so that everyone takes a little bit of everything but do not expect/ ask your child to eat new things initially.
- If they are keen to leave the table, try to extend the time they are there by asking them to serve you some more food.
- As a family, feel any new foods so that your child builds tolerance. It may be that any food they puts on their plate that they do not want to eat, the family feels with their fingers to build up the stages of tolerance.
- Engage in messy play activities with your child- these should be done outside of mealtimes and there should be no expectation for your child to eat the food, only experience it. Please see our other leaflet called 'Messy Food Play'.

Tips and Recommendations- for younger children

- Try to focus on mealtimes being positive and something that your child enjoys, rather than being too concerned about the volume they are eating.
- Give your child time to explore a new food, it may be that they will not accept eating it until they have been given the opportunity several times - make sure that new foods are presented regularly so they can work through the above stages of acceptance on the ladder.
- Try to ignore any perceived negative behaviour e.g. throwing food on the floor. At this age, this is just a phase that helps children feel their food whilst not ready to accept eating it.
- Try not to focus on your child too much at mealtimes. Sit together but do not focus on how much they are eating, rather whether they are enjoying the mealtime experience.
- Try to keep mealtimes to a maximum 30 minutes to ensure they remain positive (this may need to be shorter for some children). If they are hungry, it is likely they will eat during that time, otherwise, clear things away and be reassured that they will probably eat more at the next meal.
- Encourage your child to feel their food as much as possible and avoid wiping their hands and face until the meal is finished. Touching and playing with food will help to increase tolerance in the longer term
- Keeping a diary of how your child reacts to new foods and how many times they have had it may be useful to track progress.
- Engage in messy play activities with your child- these should be done outside of mealtimes and there should be no expectation for your child to eat the food, only experience it. Please see our other leaflet called 'Messy Food Play'.