TIPS

For Teachers

FASD IN THE CLASSROOM

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a disability that can occur in children, youth, and adults when alcohol is consumed during pregnancy. It is a lifelong, brain-based, and often invisible disability.

Primary disabilities are caused directly by exposure to alcohol during pregnancy. There is a wide variety of primary disabilities. They are organized under the following four categories: physical, cognitive, behavioural, and sensory. For most individuals, FASD is a disability that is hidden from others. Because we cannot see the physical changes to the brain or the changes in brain functioning, FASD is called an invisible disability. What is most problematic is that the invisibility of FASD creates a barrier to acceptance and understanding. As a result, people with FASD do not get the support they need.

When learning about the risks of alcohol use and FASD most people want to know what the scope of the problem is. They want to know the rates of FASD. We do not have national statistics on the rates of FASD in Canada although the Public Health Agency of Canada suggests that 9 in 1000 births are affected. Another way to understand this is that up to 300,000 people are living with FASD in our country. What we do know for sure is that FASD can affect anyone. FASD can occur in families from any culture, ethnicity, or socio-economic background. During your career as an educator, you may teach students who are diagnosed with FASD and many who will not be formally diagnosed. Developing an understanding of FASD will help you recognize the diverse needs of all your students.

FASD is a unique disability that affects everyone differently. Each individual with FASD is born with a unique set of primary disabilities and characteristics. While there are some common disabilities that are described in this resource, it is important to understand that every child with FASD will have different needs. A strategy that works for one child may not be the best fit for another. As educators, the first step to supporting students with FASD is to learn about the disability and the potential impact it can have on those affected. Then get to know each child's unique needs.

The behaviours that result from FASD can be challenging but they are often misinterpreted. Behaviours are not intentional, they are generally a direct result of the disability and a poor fit between the child's abilities and the environment they are in. It is important to create opportunities for success in the classroom by keeping the child's needs and abilities in mind. The following pages are tips and strategies that can be implemented to help adapt the classroom to fit the common needs of children with FASD. More information and resources are availabe from the FASD Network.

Often the best way to support children and adults with FASD is to adapt our way of thinking, to understand that they have a disability that will require thinking outside of the box to make the necessary accommodations they need to succeed in school.

TIPS TO HELP WITH ENVIRONMENT

Some children with FASD are very sensitive to touch, movement, light, or sound. Because of the way their brains work, children with FASD may be so focused on what they hear, see, or feel on their skin that they can't focus on other things. When children have heightened senses, they may need to shut down or they might act out. This can be very hard to cope with in the classroom.

- Create a positive emotional atmosphere around the student.
- Allow fidget toys when a student needs to be listening or sitting still.
- The use of things like sunglasses and headphones can help the student tune out overwhelming sensory input.
- Have a separate quiet place for when the student needs to calm down.
- Try to reduce the activity/noise when the student needs to focus.
- Keep the room arrangement simple and easy to navigate. Visuals can be used as concrete reminders as to where things belong.
    - Visual stimuli on the walls may be distracting. Try using removable sheets that can be taken down when needed or curtains to cover shelves and book cases.
- Allow the student to take body breaks when needed such as walks down the hall, running errands for the classroom, stretching, etc.
- Try to find out what the child is reacting to so that you can avoid what's causing him or her trouble. Gym class can cause overstimulation with all the lights, noise and movement. If possible, allow the children to work on something in the classroom during gym.
- Knowing how to dress for the weather is a skill we acquire through our senses but because individuals living with FASD often have sensory processing issues, their senses can be unreliable. Help the student get ready for recess to ensure they are dressed appropriately for the weather.
- Try to develop individualized programs keeping the students' skills in mind.

Example:
The student has trouble focusing when it is time for individual reading. He is fidgeting and distracting the other students.

How you can help:
Have a quiet place for the student to read with little distractions; a tent may work in the classroom. This also may be a good time for a body break if supervision is available.

TIPS FOR BEHAVIOURS

It is important to remember that if a child has FASD she has a disability. Behaviours she exhibits are quite often a result of the disability and her environment. The child's behaviours are not intentional. She is not doing things to purposely make you mad or frustrated; her behaviours are a direct result of the prenatal alcohol exposure and often become a way of communicating.

Research on FASD has found learning and behavioural differences between people with FASD and others in relation to their developmental age. Dysmaturity is when someone's developmental age is younger than his or her physical age, so they act and think younger than they are. Most of us expect children to develop and grow according to an accepted chronological schedule. Unfortunately for children with FASD these assumptions about development create a poor fit between abilities and the expectations placed upon them.

- Adjust your expectations for the child's developmental level.
- Shifting our perceptions from the child "won't do something" to the child "can't do something" makes an incredible difference.
  - Making accommodations is supporting an individual, not enabling or excusing behaviours.
- Provide immediate feedback and recognition. Encouraging words work well to reinforce positive behaviours.
- Depersonalize behaviours, think of them as symptoms of the disability.
- Explore the factors that may be causing behaviours – what was going on when certain behaviours have happened and what the common occurrence has been.
- Look at behaviours as an attempt at communication. Are they expressing fatigue? Fear? Failure?
- Discuss behaviours with the student, ask what he was feeling/experiencing at the time.
- Instead of trying to change the individual, change elements of their environment including physical elements affecting their senses, as well as the attitudes, expectations, and assumptions of the systems around them.
- Use strength-based approaches such as implementing different learning styles and kinds of intelligence (visual, auditory, hands-on, etc.) based on the child's strengths.
- Traditional behaviour management techniques (such as token rewards) may not work.
- Maintain consistent and firm rules with no exceptions.

TIPS FOR BEHAVIOURS

Examining the link between the primary disabilities caused by FASD, the expectations of most environments, and how we interpret the behaviours that are a direct result of the poor fit between individuals and their environments can allow us to think outside of the box to create accommodations that prevent challenging behaviours.

Our expectations	Characteristics of FASD	Resulting behaviours	Interpretation of behaviours	What we usually do	Accommodations
Think fast, timed tests, finish tasks in time allotted	Slow cognitive pace	Anxiety, frustration, tantrums	Avoidant, not trying, holding others up on purpose	Take away privileges, shame, ridicule	Give time, slow down, reduce work load, accept slow pace
Follow the rules, learn inferentially, 'get it' by watching	Difficulty generalizing, gets the piece not the picture	Fear, frustration, anger	Willful, on purpose, intentional, he knew what the rule was	Punish	Accept the need to re-teach concepts in different settings
Act your age, be responsible and appropriate	Dysmaturity: Devel-opmentally younger than their age	Lonely, isolated, depressed	Poor social skills, acting like a baby, inappropriate	Teach age-based skills, punish behaviours	Think younger, base expectations on developmental age
Pay attention, sit still, ignore distractions	Sensory issues: over stimulated, over-whelmed, easily dis-tracted	Agitation, anger, overactive, anxiety, avoidance, tantrums	Not trying, off task, undisciplined, ADD	Punish, more work, medicate, no recess	Evaluate environment, adjust accordingly, provide breaks
Learn the first time, remember from day to day	Memory problems, "on days and off days"	Anxiety, fear, no confidence, eroded esteem	Doesn't care, lazy, needs to try harder	Punish, ground, shame	Recognize and allow for variability, prevent anxiety
Think ahead, plan, set goals, rein in impulses	Impulsive, inability to predict outcomes, acts fast but thinks slowly	Avoidance, defiance	Willful, disobedient, inappropriate, doesn't care	Punish	Prevent problems, build on strengths, use visual cues
Stop what you're doing when you're told, transition easily	Rigid, perseverative, difficulty stopping or changing activities	Resistance, anger, big tantrums	Controlling, wants all the power, bossy, oppositional	Interrupt, assert control, require transitions	Adjust workload to achieve closure, pro-vide adequate time

chart adapted from FASCETS, DV Malbin, www.fascets.org

TIPS TO HELP WITH MEMORY

One way FASD can impact cognitive functioning is memory impairment. In the classroom you may see these memory difficulties when a student is unable to do a task they've done several times before, when easily predictable things like the class schedule are repeatedly forgotten, or when a child seems to have a good understanding of a concept but is unable to recall it during testing. Finding ways to aid their memory or accommodate their deficits will allow the student to learn in a way that suits them.

- Repeat, repeat, repeat. Routine, repetition, and consistency can be effective strategies for addressing memory issues.
- Give the student time to process and retrieve information – slow down when speaking.
- Don't assume the student will remember. Do not put unreasonable expectations on them.
- Prioritize information that the student needs to be able to recall without visual reminders. For example, prioritize their phone number over multiplication tables.
- Do not ask the student to repeat what you told them; ask them to either show you, draw it for you, or explain it in their own words.
    - Say the most important word last when giving direction.
- Assess what they know, not their memory. Test them as they learn as opposed to during an exam.
    - The student may do better with multiple choice questions.
    - Never put a time limit on a test.
- Use notes or pictures as reminders – try using a series of both if that is more helpful.
    - Use agendas, cell phones, planners or any other item the student is comfortable with.
- Use visual charts and reminders to teach rules.
    - Re-teach rules in different settings, such as no running in the classroom and in the computer room.

Example:
The student is having trouble with multiplication tables. When the EA walks her through the assignment, she gets it – but then come test time, she is lost.

How you can help:
Does she need to memorize multiplication tables? Math is a very abstract concept for individuals living with FASD; they may never memorize things like multiplication tables. Can you print out their multiplication tables and let them have a copy on their desks? Can you teach them a life skill such as using a calculator to solve the problem?

TIPS FOR REPETITION

Repetition can be very important when teaching students who live with FASD. It can take a lot of repetition for a lesson, routine, or rule to become part of the student's long-term memory. Each day will be different, with a student being able to easily recall things one day and not at all the next. So it is very important to have patience and use gentle reminders when needed.

- Repeat rules and routines daily in various ways – written, verbal, pictures and actions.
- Re-teach concepts using consistent wording. For example, use "small letters" or "lower case" but don't interchange the terms.
- Re-teach concepts and rules in different environments and settings.
- Use repetition initially to teach new skills, then continue to use repetition to support the maintenance of the new skills.
- Use a step-by-step approach, repeating each step as needed.
    - Repeat steps in the same sequence.
- Use repetition with patience and understanding.
- Try to keep the student's routine as consistent as possible.
- Be consistent with visual, verbal or physical cues. Ensure all staff are using the same strategies.
    - Make sure that the entire school team has consistent expectations of the student's academic and behavioural abilities.
- Use language that is consistent for the student at school and at home. For example, a jacket is called a jacket at both home and school; it should never be called something different such as a coat.
- Provide consistent support people from year to year whenever possible.

TIPS ON ROUTINE & STRUCTURE

Routines will help a child learn good habits and bring stability. Visual aids that show routines are very helpful. A chart with pictures of what a child needs to do can help the child see the steps needed to complete an activity.

- Try to use the same schedule each day so that the student can predict activities.
    - Create as much predictability as possible so there is no room for anxiety.
    - Keep routines simple and basic. Develop routines that build on the student's strengths.
- Allow the student to have visual schedules, rules and routines on his or her desk.
    - Post separate morning and afternoon schedules. Colour code subjects and activities.
- Set up the day so the student can be successful. Allocate enough time for activities to be completed.
- Plan a resource period, or one-on-one time, for the student to complete homework during the school day.
- Teach the steps of a task in the same order every time
- Give the student as much advance notice as possible when routines change.
    - Make necessary changes to routine in the afternoon instead of in the morning so that the entire day is not disrupted.
- Out of school activities should be planned on consistent days with visual reminders.
- Build structured free time into their schedules.
    - Allow the student to make choices but ensure the options are structured.

Example:
The students are all allowed 20 minutes of free play during their one-hour gym class. The student living with FASD seems to take this time to harass the other students.

How you can help:
Give the student structured options during the free time. Create stations that the student can choose from. Keep the options to a maximum of 2 or 3 so that the student doesn't get overwhelmed by the choices.

TIPS ON TRANSITIONING

Transitions can be large and small events, such as coming back from recess or graduating. Transitions can require a high level of executive functioning and flexibility. People with FASD can be 'thrown off track' when transitioning from one task to another as they may require more time to process information and complete tasks, which can result in behaviours such as frustration and defiance.

- Give cues and prompts before transitions.
- Show the student what activity they will be doing.
- Use a visual timer that counts down.
- Use visual or verbal prompts to indicate transitions.
- Adjust workloads so tasks can be completed before transitioning to a new activity.
- Make the schedule predictable so transitions can be anticipated.
- Ensure the schedule for each day is posted in a visible spot.
- If there is a change, take the time to explain what is happening and then proceed.
- Try practising transitions with the student.
- Break changes into small steps. For example, "First you need to put away your book." "Okay, now let's go get your jacket for recess." "Good, here are your mittens." A long list of things to do is very confusing for children and teens with FASD.
- Perseveration can occur during transitions between tasks. This is when the child is unable to let go of an idea or topic.
  - A child could be perseverating because the next task is too difficult, you can try to get them an easier task.

Example:
The student consistently has meltdowns at the end of math class when he is told to put his assignment away and prepare for the next subject.

How you can help:
The student has a slow processing pace and is unable to finish all the questions on his assignment during the allotted class time but the instruction at the beginning of class is to complete every question. He is constantly feeling frustrated that he is unable to follow instructions because he's being interrupted while he's still working on it. Try giving the student less questions to complete or allow him to continue working on the assignment until he's finished, this should help avoid perseveration and feelings of frustration.

TIPS ON COMMUNICATION

Because of the primary disabilities, communication can sometimes be a struggle for individuals living with FASD. A lack of comprehension can be caused by a variety of primary disabilities such as poor receptive language skills, confabulation, dysmaturity, sensory disabilities and a lack of understanding of cause and effect. If you try to ensure communication is understood, consistent, and done in a way that supports the child, you will have more success with communicating.

- Be concrete and use plain language (limiting unnecessary words like adjectives and descriptors).
- Stop during communication to check for comprehension. Ask the student to explain things in their own words rather than repeat the instructions back to you.
- Use the student's name and maintain eye contact while giving instructions.
- Remember that individuals living with FASD struggle to understand abstract concepts like jokes and figurative language. For example, "keep your shirt on."
- Avoid intonations and verbal tones that are attached to abstract meaning, indivudals with FASD may not pick up on the hidden meaning behind a change in pitch or intonation.
- When possible, use real objects and examples relating to the lesson being taught, such as real money, or real clocks.
- Picture dictionaries can help develop vocabularies.
- Social stories can help students understand abstract concepts or situations.
- Provide hands-on learning to help the student understand what is being taught.
- Use words or statements that are specific to the desired behaviour you wish to achieve. For example, say "walk" instead of "don't run."
- Allow extra response time. An individual with FASD is a "ten-second child in a one-second world."
- Support your instructions by providing a visual representation. You may wish to provide a step-by-step breakdown of the activity.
- Know their levels of expressive and receptive language and teach to that.
- Open ended questions can seem abstract to an individual with FASD. Asking questions about the specific information you want may be a better strategy. For example, instead of asking 'how was recess?' try 'what games did you play at recess?'

TIPS ON CAUSE & EFFECT

FASD significantly impairs information processing. This is one of the most difficult characteristics of FASD, since processing information impacts so many aspects of our daily lives. Cause and effect is the ability to translate information into an appropriate action, or judge the link between action and consequence. An understanding of cause and effect is also impacted by an individual's limited ability to generalize information learned from one situation and apply it to another.

Individuals with FASD often have difficulty predicting long-term consequences, or being able to see how the consequences of one situation are related to the outcomes of another. This is why individuals with FASD may repeatedly make the same mistakes or get in trouble for the same reasons.

- Say exactly what you mean in fewer words so your message is better understood.
- Use a calm, clear voice. Messages can be lost when given in a highly emotional or excited tone.
- Keep language consistent.
- Have fewer, or if possible, remove distractions when a student needs to be listening.
- Map out decision-making so the student has a concrete visual to represent the proper path and consequences of each path.
- Help the student to problem solve, go through things such as, "What was the effect of your actions? What else could you have done? What else could you do next time?" Try writing it down so they can follow the conversation.
- Create visual reminders of expectations and outcomes.
- Use social stories to describe possible effects of actions and inactions.
- Make them accountable for the decisions they make. Remind them of the consequences that they had to experience for past decisions.
- Understanding cause and effect may take teaching over and over again in all situations.

TIPS ON OWNERSHIP

Ownership is an abstract concept that can be difficult for children and adults with FASD to understand. There are many factors that can make individuals with FASD struggle with the concept of ownership, they may be 'living in the moment,' they might not remember that there are consequences for taking things, or, if no one is around, it can be difficult to understand that an object belongs to someone else. Deficits in an individual's impulse control can lead to many circumstances of 'stealing,' it is possible that they do not intend to steal an object, they simply see something they like so they pick it up with no thought about who it may belong to or what they actually plan to do with the object.

It can be hard to know what to do when an individual with FASD takes something that belongs to someone else, are they intentionally stealing or do they even understanding that taking the object was stealing? Each case will be different but ownership is a concept that may need to be repeatedly taught.

- Write names on items and colour code items.
- Do not leave things out in the open. Cover cupboards and shelving when possible.
- Practise borrowing – have a student borrow your pen and return it. Lead by example as well and borrow their pen and return it.
- Establish and implement appropriate consequences for taking other people's items. Ensure this is done in a timely manner.
- Avoid situations where the student has not been able to control their impulses in the past. Try to use it as a teachable moment and be sure to explain why avoiding these situations can help them.
- Model impulse control out loud.
- If the child takes something that is not hers, ask her how she would feel if her favourite toy or shoes were stolen. Help her to understand that no one likes to have their things stolen.

Example:
The student is constantly taking things off of your desk. She says she just wanted to borrow it but it never gets returned to your desk.

How you can help
Place a specific coloured dot such as red, on all of the items that you would like returned to your desk. Place a piece of red paper on the front of your desk. Each time the student borrows something remind her that she needs to return the red-dotted item to the red desk. If she forgets, walk her through the rules again and have her practise returning objects. You can also colour-coordinate her items and practise borrowing from the student to help teach ownership.

TIPS ON CONSEQUENCES

When we take a moment to think about classic discipline strategies, we can see how most of them may not work for children with a brain-based disability like FASD. For approaches such as time-outs, taking privileges away, or detention to be effective the child must remember what they did to get in trouble, understand the cause and effect of their actions and generalize an understanding that the consequence will happen again if they repeat their behavior. These types of punishments or consequences require a level of executive functioning that may not be possible at the child's developmental level.

These strategies are, of course, not wrong they just may not be a good fit for the child. For some children these consequences will teach them the intended life lessons and skills, for others, you may have to think outside of the box. Here are some tips to consider:

- Use one, well-understood consequence for all misbehaviours. Try to make the consequence concrete and easy to understand.
  - If a technique is not working, change what you are doing.
  - Adapt consequences to fit the child's developmental age.
- Make consequences as immediate as possible, if not, the student might not remember or understand why they are being penalized.
- Clearly state expectations and explain the reasons for the consequences.
- Don't debate or negotiate the rules or consequences.
- Follow through with what you say.
- Try using rewards to teach good behaviour instead of punishments (emotional rewards can work well).
- Rules should state the behaviour you want to see rather than "don't do that." For example, "walk in the hallway," instead of "don't run in the hallway."
- Instead of time-outs or detentions, have a quiet place where child can think about his actions. Try:
  - Green Card - Warning. Return when ready.
  - Yellow Card - Return when given permission.
  - Blue Card - Write about action and develop plan to prevent it in the future.
  - Red Card - Give them a fitting consequence for their actions.

TIPS ON CONFABULATION

Children may story-tell, over and over again, about many things. They aren't doing it intentionally; they may be having trouble with short-term memory, so they are filling in the blanks. They may be trying to please you by telling you what they think you want to hear. They may be having trouble thinking in a logical way, and because of the way their brains work, they might really believe that what they are telling you is the truth. Confabulation is the term used for when individuals with FASD "fill in the blanks" of stories with whatever makes their experience make sense to them. Sometimes confabulation can be misunderstood as lying, but often this exaggeration makes sense or becomes true in the moment to those who are saying it.

Confronting a person about a story can lead to a blow-up. If they are approached without negativity, accepted, and not confronted or rejected, some individuals with FASD are able to recognize or end a confabulated story.

- It can be hard to tell the difference between lying and confabulating. Try to rememer that lying has an intent, confabulation does not.
- Help the student to recall the real story by asking her to describe what took place, rather then interpret events.
- Avoid asking questions you already know the answer to.
- Ask short questions to elicit definite answers.
- If confabulations are not serious or indicating danger, allow the student to engage you in the story.
- Use the student's confabulations as social stories to teach lessons.
- Ask the student to retell the story in a different setting or to draw it for you.
- Always ensure questioning is respectful and understanding to maintain the student's dignity

Example:
You overhear the student telling his friends how he smokes cigarettes at recess by the monkey bars. You know this isn't true because all the teachers rave about how good a climber he is, and when you are on supervision you've had to ask him many times to come down from the monkey bars and go inside.

How you can help:
Encourage his good behaviours. Talk about how fantastic he is at climbing on the monkey bars. Use the confabulation as a social story. For example: "one time I had a student that smoked and none of the others kids wanted to play with him because he smelled funny."

TIPS TO HELP WITH SOCIAL SKILLS

It can be hard for children with FASD to get along with others their own age. Children with FASD tend to have the social skills of children much younger than their peers. To cope with daily life, children with FASD need to use a lot of energy focusing on themselves which can sometimes lead them to miss the subtle messages and habits of friendship. For example, they may not wait their turn or they may stand too close to others and get into their personal space.

It can be very lonely and frustrating when other children don't want to play with them. This puts them in danger of being taken advantage of or bullied by others.

- Build on strengths and interests that can engage the student in social activities – sports, art, etc.
- Adjust expectations to fit the student's developmental age vs. his or her chronological age.
- Help to identify positive friends and healthy relationships.
- Engage the student in one-on-one or individual sports and activities – group and team settings are sometimes difficult for individuals with FASD.
- Teach relationship repair.
- Help the student to identify social cues and the emotions related to those cues – crossed arms, no eye contact, backing away from someone.
- Allow for mentors when possible.
- Keep an eye on the student when he plays with others. This way you can explain why things may have gone wrong and how he might want to act the next time to get along better with his friends.

Example:
The other students get mad when the individual is on their team for kick ball. They call him No Kick Rick which then makes him mad and he runs away.

How you can help:
Choose activities that are still group sports but focus more on an individual's skills. Dodge ball is a good example. This way, if the individual is tagged out, the attention is not focused on just him. You can also build off his strengths. If he is a really good runner, have him play outfield. He can play for both teams instead of switching to bat.

TIPS ON STRENGTH-BASED APPROACHES

When supporting a child or youth living with FASD, it is crucial to take a strength-based approach. A strength-based approach not only draws on the strengths of the individual but on also the strengths of her support system – family, service providers, community and friends. Every child is unique and will have a particular set of gifts. It is also important to remember that success looks different for everyone and the length of success may be shorter, but every individual has the right to know his or her strengths and to be as successful as possible.

Strength-based approaches shift our understanding away from conventional practices and encourage us to think outside the box.

- Use an individual's strengths to accommodate his or her deficits and help set them up for success.
- Individuals living with FASD can have tremendous strengths. They can be creative, happy, eager to please, tell amazing stories, be good with smaller children, etc.
- People with FASD are willing and able to learn strategies that match learning styles and build on strengths rather than deficits.
- Use strength-based approaches such as implementing different learning styles and kinds of intelligence (visual, auditory, hands-on, etc.) based on the child's strengths.
- Ask the student's caregiver where they have succeeded in the past. What has worked well? What is he or she good at?
- If possible, involve the student in the decision-making process when trying to determine how best to support them. Individuals with FASD know what has worked for them in the past and what hasn't.

Example:
You have a student that has a really hard time doing tests, but when you ask her a question in class ,she always knows the answer.

How you can help:
Try having the tests read to her and have her verbalize her answers. She may not be good at reading and writing, but using her great verbal skills to her advantage can help her succeed in class.

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