



# Information Bites...

**Bite sized chunks of information for families  
that include a member with a disability**

**Helpful Strategies When Raising a Child with FASD**

## Changing Expectations

FASD is known as an invisible disability. All too often, children affected by FASD have been mistakenly labeled as lazy, stupid, bad, willful or manipulative. We can't see the damage that prenatal exposure to alcohol has on a child's brain, but it's there and it's what can cause unintentional negative behaviours. These behaviours are not deliberate, so we need to change our expectations about what is realistic for a child affected by FASD.

## Common Results of Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol on the Brain

- significant memory problems
- gaps in thinking
- processes information at a slower pace
- impulsiveness
- respond differently to things that happen around them
- challenges in managing free time
- difficulty weighing and evaluating
- difficulty managing time, money and schedules
- mental development below actual age
- easily distracted

## Defensive Behaviours

Defensive behaviours are normal responses to chronic pain, failure and frustration. These behaviours may be caused by the results of prenatal exposure to alcohol (above). The most common include:

- fatigue and frustration
- anxiety
- anger and aggression
- withdrawing and avoidance
- isolation
- opposition and defiance
- exaggerate their greatness
- depression and other mental health concerns
- poor self esteem

## Creating Success

All children with FASD benefit from structure, routine and consistency. Structure can help eliminate the confusion and frustration your child may feel which leads to unwanted behaviour. A routine can help your child predict what will happen next and helps tasks or activities become habit, so he or she doesn't have to rely on their memory. People with FASD tend to have chronic short term memory problems. In order for something to make it to long term memory, or become habit, it must be taught over and over again. It is important to consistently use the same words when giving directions, correcting behaviour, or making plans with your child.

## **Building on Gifts**

Many children with FASD have unique gifts and abilities. These may include being artistic, musical, creative, outgoing, curious and driven. Focusing on what comes naturally to your child works best. Ask yourself: What are my child's strengths? What challenges does my child face in managing aspects in life? What works for my child? Success is built on staying curious about your child, knowing each other and building a relationship of trust.

## **Discipline**

Children with FASD have difficulty learning from their mistakes. Most of their mistakes are because of impulsive behaviour, or not understanding social expectations. As discipline is a complicated area of parenting a child with FASD, set firm rules and remind your child of them (ex. post on the wall). When the rules are broken make the consequence fit the "crime" and carry out the consequence immediately. Such as, a garbage can is kicked over; your child will have to clean it up directly.

If you remain calm and speak quietly when reviewing inappropriate behaviour, your child has the opportunity to follow this lead and remain calm. Then when reviewing what proper behaviour is your child will be in a better position to learn.

Children with FASD often have a memory deficit, so if you ask your child leading questions you may get a "confabulation". A "confabulation" means that your child knows you expect an answer, but can't provide one, so he/she invents a memory to replace what they can't retrieve. As honesty is an abstract concept your child doesn't connect the "confabulation" as being dishonest (lying). Don't expect your child to remember the event or the sequence of events.

## **Educating Yourself**

Historically, many adults with FASD have not had appropriate understanding or supports throughout their lives. This may be due to a lack of access to responsive and informed professionals in their communities. The key difference between success and failure is the presence of appropriate accommodations (modifications) to help your child to live successfully in the community.

Crafting successful supports for our children requires a clear and compassionate understanding that FASD is a brain-based physical perceptions disability. We can widen our range of options and interventions when we shift our understanding from "my child wont" to "my child can't". When we do this, our children's frustration is reduced and their chance for success improves. Educating yourself about FASD and finding support will better your family life and increase your child's chance for reaching success in life.



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