

Strategies for Making Your Classroom FASD Friendly

Structure &

ROUTINE

Set a clear, **consistent** classroom **routine** and stick to it. There is comfort in expectability. For example, start every class by taking attendance, briefly review material covered in the last lesson, mention important due dates, and then begin class.

Try a **visual schedule** to enhance understanding of routines. See an example of a visual schedule on the last page.

Changes to routine should be **communicated** as soon as possible. Try to support students with unexpected changes.

Organization is important to structure. Keep your classroom organized and this will trickle down to your students.



Consistency & Repetition

Repeat tasks, instructions, and concepts to **reinforce learning** and important points. Repeat instructions often and in **different formats**, such as orally and visually. Many reminders or prompts may be needed - these can be auditory or visual, or both.

Be **consistent and specific** in providing directions and in learning methods and language used.

Strengths-Based Approach

Adopt an approach that builds on student strengths. Not all students are at the same developmental or maturity levels. Help students **identify and build on their strengths**. Ask the learner, or their caregiver, what would help them.

Give frequent, **positive feedback**. Praise steps towards goals, but also **accept/normalize mistakes**.

Specificity & Simplicity

Give **short, simple and specific** instructions. Using simplified language break tasks, rules, explanations and directions down into **manageable steps**.

Check out the guide to giving effective instructions, written by Chilcoat & Stahl (2010).

Checking for Understanding

Check for understanding by asking students to show you or **explain** it back to you **in their own words** or with drawings (descriptive feedback); avoid asking the student to repeat what you told them, as they may say yes even if they don't actually understand. Use **concrete, hands-on** learning methods or visuals to demonstrate instructions to enhance verbal explanations, or visual aids to reinforce expectations and rules, like a schedule, timer or "work" clock for time management.

Universal Design

Universal Design is creating an environment that can be **accessed**, understood and used to the fullest by **all people** regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. These strategies can support students as a whole, including those with FASD and other conditions. Here are some examples of how you can implement universal design in your classroom:

- Use graphic organizers
- Implement colour-coding systems
- Use pictures to correspond with key words/concepts
- Provide instructions in multiple formats (oral, visual, written, etc.)
- Use buddy supports/peer helpers
- Display and/or provide lists and information in bullet point form
- Explain connections and how concepts relate to prior knowledge or experiences
- Utilize different ways to teach/reinforce skills and concepts (such as through games or storytelling)
- Teach useful skills like how to study effectively and organizational skills
- Avoid strict time limits on tests (if possible)
- Allow access to noise-reducing headphones
- Avail of Technology- ex. allow students to record instructions to refer to later
- Limit distractions and avoid clutter (calm colours, minimal decorations, lighting adjusted to student needs, chair protectors to limit noise, music playing, etc.)
- Allow access to individualized supports (technology, flexible seating, space for private/quiet spaces, etc.)
- Ensure there is space for a quiet zone (separate room, preferential seating, etc.)
- Arrange furniture to allow good traffic flow; assigned seating is often useful and predictable
- Practice relaxation techniques regularly (like before a test/quiz)
- Use hand/arm signals to communicate transitions, like for quiet time, talking time, questions, etc.

Set "SMART" Goals

S Specific

Clearly define goals and identify who, what, when, where, which, and why the goals exist.

M Measurable

Establish concrete criteria for measurement that include clear parameters of expectations.

A Attainable

Goals should be achievable. Start by establishing baseline and build off of accomplishments in smaller increments.

R Realistic & Relevant

Goals should be realistic and relevant to the desired outcome. For example, if the goal is to learn multiplication by the end of the term, concentrate on learning one unit per week.

T Time-Bound

Stick to a specific timeframe that is clearly outlined and is proportionate to the goal, so it is tangible.

Expectations

Expectations must be realistic and attainable, just like goals; consider students' individual needs for life, social, and academic skills.

Specify what is to be expected of them and accomplishable for any given tasks.

Memory can be an issue for individuals with FASD, so do not assume the student will remember or place unreasonable expectations on them.

Alternatives to Traditional Teaching Methods

Create different **“zones”** in your classroom, each with its own purpose. For example, an activity zone, a reading zone, etc. Provide opportunities for small group and 1:1 learning. Some alternatives to traditional worksheets/tests/exams include:

- Dramatic plays
- Class discussion
- Hands-on experiments
- Cross-curricular integration
- Project-based and self-designed learning opportunities
- Field trips
- Guest speakers
- Oral retelling of stories

Reframe Behaviours "Can't" not "Won't"

Be mindful of the language you use to describe behaviours; shifting perception from the child **“won’t** do something” to **“can’t** do something” changes the way we approach working with students. Making accommodations supports the individual, and does not enable or excuse behaviours.

Provide **immediate feedback** and recognition, using encouraging words. Discuss behaviours with the student; ask what they are **feeling/experiencing**.

View **behaviours** as an attempt to **communicate**; are they expressing fatigue? Failure? Fear? Be aware that traditional behaviour management techniques may not work

- a. Teach “Stop. Think. Act”
- b. First ... then ...
- c. Encourage replacement behaviours

Explore Prevention Methods

Identify **triggers** and **warning signs** of behaviour and make a plan to **intervene** when you notice signs (restlessness, fidgeting, making noises, etc.). Liaising with caregivers can be helpful here.

Pre-Teach

Introducing new vocabulary before teaching a new concept can enhance learning. **Front-load instruction** (pre-teach) or introduce relevant vocabulary before beginning a new topic.

Liaising with Caregivers

Constant, increased or **responsive supervision** may be needed for individuals with FASD. Creating a **partnership with caregivers** (if they are receptive) to ensure that supervision is consistent in school and at home is imperative. Communication is key; understanding what communication skills students have and how to communicate with them can elicit positive outcomes. Students may respond better when they can communicate feelings and/or needs in the same manner at school and home.

Managing Outbursts, Frustration &

DEFIANCE

Address and **redirect behaviours** of concern with students **privately** and respectfully. Stay calm and provide space for the student to breathe and process their initial emotions.

Support the student; let them know you are **there to help** and **not to punish**. Instead of time-outs, detentions, or other punishments, allow the student space to think about and explore their actions and feelings. If the student is older, you might assign them a reflection or to work through their feelings and how they contributed to their actions.

Use a calm tone with **brief**, but **matter of fact** language/statements. Emotional regulation skills used in Dialectal Behavioural Therapy (DBT) can be helpful.

Make **direct consequences** as soon as possible to avoid the student forgetting why they are being penalized. For example, if the student made a mess, their consequence is that they have to clean it up, not miss recess (which is indirect to the behaviour). Keep in mind the **developmental age** of the individual, and adapt consequences to fit their executive functioning.

Use **appropriate re-direction**. Rules should **state the behaviour you want to see** rather than “don’t do that.” (ex. “Walk in the hallway” instead of “don’t run in the hallway”).

Building Community

Build **community** in your classroom through weekly talking circles or discussion activities with students.

Allow avenues to solve problems through **peer support**, discuss ideas, share feelings/thoughts, etc.



Additional Resources

fasdNL offers **IEP/ISSP meeting support** for families across Newfoundland and Labrador who have a child diagnosed with FASD. This service is intended to:

- 1) Support parents/caregivers in provide information about FASD to teaching and support staff, and
- 2) Suggest useful strategies for supporting the child with FASD in the classroom setting.

We also host **a free virtual support meeting** for parents and caregivers of individuals with confirmed or suspected FASD across Atlantic Canada. Meetings may relate to a specific topic (e.g., advocating and supporting your child at school) or a general question and answer format.

For advice on IEPs, more information, or to attend the monthly virtual support meeting, **email contact@fasdNL.ca**.

fasdNL has many other resources available on our website. Check it out at **www.fasdNL.ca**.