

Tips for Justice Professionals

Interacting with Individuals who have FASD



FASD is a leading developmental disability in Canada. Adverse outcomes can develop as a result of having FASD, which can lead to early or continued contact with the justice system.



Diagnostic Barriers

Getting a diagnosis can be a lengthy process. Supports may not be accessible until a diagnosis is received, creating barriers.

If you suspect your client may have FASD, try to refer them to get them diagnosed. If they are waiting on a diagnosis, it is not harmful to interact as if they have FASD, using strategies presented here.



Communication

Use simple, specific words with visual cues, and repetition to signify importance. Try to match your word choice and speaking pace to theirs. Avoid technical jargon and acronyms.

Use simple examples and ask clients to paraphrase, instead of just asking if they understand.



FASD-Informed Training (FASD)

FASD is a brain-based disability that may affect executive functioning and behaviours in ways that can overlap with characteristics of criminality.

It is understandable that professionals may not know how to best interact with individuals with FASD, which is why FASD training for justice professionals can help to provide a more equitable service.



Support

Individuals with FASD have wide-ranging abilities. Whenever possible, work with a support person or family member to find ways to best interact and work with an individual who has FASD.



Transitions

Individuals with FASD may need extra support and guidance during transitional periods (incarceration to community, and vice versa, youth to adulthood, etc.).

These are developmentally difficult times, which can lead to struggles for individuals with FASD. Learning through dialogue, feedback and modelling/demonstrating concepts can hugely benefit individuals who are transitioning into new stages of life.



Behaviours & Perceptions

FASD can cause sensory processing difficulties (sound, touch, movement, and reactivity), memory issues, and difficulty understanding, which may lead to repeated breaches. This can seem like willful misconduct, as it may be for someone without FASD, but this behaviour is likely attributed to their FASD diagnosis.

The perception of FASD-related behaviours can negatively affect justice outcomes. This is why FASD-informed training and responses are so important in justice-related fields.



Estimates suggest 1,500,000 individuals in Canada have FASD, though rates are expected to be higher among certain groups, including among those impacted by the legal system.



Individualized, Strengths-Based, Trauma-Informed Care

While many care and support services focus on a generalized model, individuals with FASD will likely require an adapted, strengths-based, harm-reduction approach, in order to best fit their needs, which will likely vary person to person.

It is important to determine and assess an individual's needs upon entry to the justice system or contact with yourself, in order to provide the best possible opportunity for rehabilitation, desistance, and progress.



Resources for Professionals

1. fasdNL offers customized, FASD-specific training for justice/legal professionals across Canada. Email contact@fasdnl.ca to request training and/or other resource material you may avail of. For more information about resources available in each Atlantic province visit www.fasdNL.ca/resources.
2. Want your voice to be heard? Participate in our needs assessment research across Atlantic Canada. Visit www.fasdNL.ca/research for more information.

Check out our full "Tips for Legal/Justice Professionals" resource by scanning below!

