

# Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

## What is FASD?

- FASD is a diagnostic term used to describe impacts on the brain and body of individuals prenatally exposed to alcohol. FASD is a life-long disability.
- Each individual with FASD is unique and has areas of both strengths and challenges.

## Support

- Individuals with FASD may experience some degree of challenges in their daily living, and in order to reach their full potential, may need support with:
  - Motor skills
  - Physical health
  - Emotional regulation
  - Social skills
  - Learning
  - Memory
  - Attention
  - Communication

The behaviour problems often associated with FASD are not a result of poor parenting. Brain impacts caused by prenatal alcohol exposure leads to changes in information processing. Memory concerns, reduced problem-solving abilities, sensory stimulation issues, and challenges understanding of reality often lead to behaviour problems.

## More Resources

- Check out fasdNL for:
  - Service provision and support
  - Training
  - Education, awareness and research
  - FASD work in Atlantic Canada
- External Resources
  - Me and My FASD (<https://fasd.me/>)

People might think there is no benefit to receiving an FASD diagnosis. However, a diagnosis provides an understanding of how to best support a child. The diagnostic process helps to develop strategies and interventions designed for the unique needs of the child and the family to help the child learn and reach their full potential.

# Parents & Caregivers Every Day Strategies

Tips and tricks for everyday use from parents and caregivers of individuals with FASD. Each individual impacted by FASD has unique strengths and challenges; find what works best and stick with it.

## On Memory

“Keep a calendar of important events and provide lots of reminders.”

## General Tips for All Ages

- Praise!
- Assign simple tasks
- Reinforce we are all different
- Support them in trying new things
- Focus on their strengths
- Speak on their accomplishments

## Self-Confidence

## Memory & Learning

- Seek educational assessments to determine abilities and possible accommodations
- Present information in multiple formats (visually, in writing, using words, etc.)
- Routine and repetition
- Go at their pace and adjust your expectations to their abilities

## Making Friends

- Remind them of social expectations and rules
- Limit media that demonstrates poor friendships or social skills
- Start a conversation or make a connection for them

## Abstract Concepts

- Separate and define fact vs. fiction
- Avoid abstract words/phrases
- Use known reference points
  - 1 recess length
- Repetition
- Reinforce new concepts in everyday life with examples
- Make learning fun with games

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# Parents & Caregivers

## Every Day Strategies

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### On Managing Irritability

"I give my child up to 5 baths a day because he loves water."

## Infants & Toddlers

### Waking Up

- Try a gentle, quiet wakeup routine
  - Cuddling, quiet music, dim lights, etc.
- Allow extra time for gentle wake-ups
- Identify something fun to do BEFORE falling asleep and have a key object or phrase attached to that activity to remind them about when waking up. For example, a stuffed toy will be waiting to sing to you in the morning.

### Falling Asleep

- Use calming strategies like back rubs, singing songs, and telling stories
- Keep a consistent schedule and routine
- Play background noise
  - Rain, waves, white/brown noise, or a heartbeat while sleeping

### Irritability

- Provide reassurance and extra time spent doing activities they enjoy
- Avoid setting any precedents for activities you don't want to allow repeatedly, such as permission to open the car window.

### On Memory

"Grocery shopping - I tell the child 4 or 5 things that we need and repeat them to her a few times, usually in a sing-song voice, and then I ask her to remind me what we still need."

# Parents & Caregivers

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### On Building Confidence

“PRAISE, PRAISE and more PRAISE!”

## Preschoolers

### Toilet Training

- Accept they'll be ready in their own time
- Be consistent with toilet time and give a small reward for successes
- Try reading picture books to increase comfort on the toilet
- Have lots of underwear and be willing to try despite accidents

### Falling Asleep

- Give gentle back, neck and head rubs
  - Be consistent and have a bedtime routine
  - Very little, if any, stimuli in the room
    - No toys, blackout blinds, quiet room
  - Try melatonin or magnesium
- For bad dreams:*
- Use a dream catcher
  - Explain that your brain plays at night, and bad dreams are just pretend

### Attention Span

- High focus activities should be done in visually boring places to avoid distraction
  - Get dressed in the washroom so toys aren't a distraction
- Provide one instruction/step at a time to avoid frustration
  - Add visual instructions/picture-based flow charts

### On Routines

“For home routines, I made up a poster with pictures and arrows, showing how the morning goes. There is a picture of him with pictures of his clothes and arrows from his clothes to him. Then there is a picture of his lunch and folder going into his backpack. Then a picture of us getting into the car. I also have an evening set of these posters.”

## Language

### Spelling and Letters

- Practice spelling verbally to minimize the challenges of coordinating fine motor skills
- Make letter associations everywhere
  - In nature, food, pictures, etc.

### Speaking

- Keep conversations going
  - Repeat, rephrase, demonstrate correct sentence structure
- Sing questions to encourage talking
- Play repeating games

## Irritability

- Suggesting rest, a snack, or something to drink
- Remind them we all have times we are not happy but try our best to talk about issues or be better towards the others in our family.

## On Stealing

“Most of our kids do not steal. They take things because possession is too abstract...reminding them that if it is not theirs, then it belongs to someone else.”

## Impulse Control, Alcohol, & Confabulation

- Try not get angry or distraught when they repeatedly do things you've asked them not to do
- Stay calm and loving and redirect their behaviour
- Reinforce they always have to ask if they can look at something that is not theirs
- Don't have alcohol easily accessible in the house. If you do, keep it locked up
- If they are lying, remind them that what they are saying isn't true

## Writing

- Print individual letters and numbers
- Get them to copy the alphabet
- Start with stringing letters together
- Print words for practice
- Then string sentences together
- Work on capitalization and grammar after a firm understanding of letters and words is established.

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## On Fine Motor Skills

“Getting him to print using different tools, i.e., chalk on a sidewalk, finger paint on paper, a stick in the sand.”

## School Age Children

### Managing Money

- Take small steps for responsibility
  - Small allowance, lunch money, get them to use your card for groceries, etc.
- If using bank accounts, have two bank accounts
  - One account for saving, one for everyday use

### Stealing

- Teach the concrete notion that everything has a home (lives somewhere), and they need to go back or remain in their home
- Keep cash out of your wallet to minimize opportunity/impulse
- Confront them if you know they are stealing and explain why the behaviour is not acceptable

### Confabulation

- Confront and question carefully, directly and keep it simple
- Try restating your desired expectation (i.e. don't hit your sister), instead of trying to get them to admit they are wrong

### On Preservation

“We have only recently developed preservation problems. The only thing I have found that can break the hold of some thoughts is to scoop her up in my arms and swing her around till she giggles. At first, she is reluctant to let go, but it does not take long to change her thoughts.”



## School Age Children

### Attention Span

- Focus on strengths and things of interest
- Focus on one thing at a time; keep it simple
- Gradually increase the time spent starting at 1 minute and going to +10 minutes
- Repeat yourself to bring them back into focus
  - “No, X, you’re not hearing me.” “What I want to know what’s happening right now?” “What’s going on right now?” “No, no X, what’s happening for you right now?”

### Falling Asleep

- Do what makes them comfortable
  - Have comfort objects like a blanket, stuffed toy, etc.
- Establish and maintain a bedtime routine
- They may require further comfort following stressful situations
  - Co-sleeping following nightmares

### On Sensory Integration

Having the fan of the car on or the window of the car open, even when not weather appropriate.

### Language

- Read stories, listen to books on tape, and then watch the correlating movie
- Consistently touch base with teachers and administrators
- Speech-language/speech therapy classes can be a huge help
- Use time in the car for small chunks of work
  - Bored in the car = more likely to participate
  - Not facing each other feels more collaborative than confrontational

### Sexual Activity & Alcohol

- Don’t have alcohol easily accessible in the house. If you do, keep it locked up
- Educate on sexual activity, puberty, reproductive health, and consent
- Explore contraception methods and discuss benefits/risks

# Parents & Caregivers

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### On Attention Span

"Only ask her to do things that take limited time (15 minutes)"

## Adolecents

### Reading

- Read aloud often and buy books that are of interest and use simple wording.
- Seek out extra school support
  - Meet with resource people often to keep up to date with assignments, etc.
- Have a teen read "younger" books daily to younger kids
- Add a library visit to your weekly routine

### Confabulation, Stealing & Sexual Activity

- Identify feelings around the time of an incident
  - Anxiety, gratification, past issues that continue to replay, etc.
- "In response to an appeal to precedent (i.e., child saying "You let me" .), after which a refusal would produce an outburst, I would say, "That was a mistake". I'd wish I learnt this earlier"
- Educate on sexual activity, puberty, reproductive health, and consent.

### Waking from Sleep

- Try different alarms
  - Vibrating alarm, music, repeating noise, increasing volume, recorded phrase
- Physical stimulation
  - Scratch back or head, lightly shake their shoulder, etc.

### Managing Money

"Our teen had no concept of money management; spends freely and impulsively. So, I got a joint account and discussed every purchase to a "need vs. want". This has greatly reduced impulse buying."

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### On Self Confidence

“He has an amazing visual memory. I make a big fuss over this skill every time he uses it”

## Adults

### Waking from Sleep

- Set several alarms
- Explain the reason for waking up
  - “You wanted to go to the movies, and it is one hour before you want to go..”
- Ask if they want a few more minutes and repeat

### On Confabulation

“I would prepare him for my question, and then I would ask for the truth; then, I would leave it for a day or so and ask again; then, I would ask if he is lying. Sometimes it would take weeks before he admitted it was a lie. I never gave him a reason to think I would get mad. I just wanted the truth.”

### Getting a Job

- Focus on special interests and strengths
- Explore different hobbies and skills as potentials for job opportunities
- Work with them on interview skills
  - Practice interviews to help them prepare
- Spend time exploring different types of jobs
  - Independent, remote, team based, customer facing, being creative, etc.

### On Memory

“Keep a calendar on the wall in the kitchen with all appointments or important info. Each day needs a lot of space. He checks the calendar daily. Print notes (i.e. for tasks) with bullets beside each point to check off when it is completed.”

## Adults

### Managing Money

- Arranging for rent to be paid directly
- Explain the complexity and benefits of applying for disability benefits
- Have a support person, if possible
- Learn budgeting skills; money used for housing, public transit, weekend spending, groceries, etc.

### Irritability

- Stay calm and revisit issues when you are both feeling better
- A preventative strategy is avoiding setting any precedents for activities that may be recurring

### On Getting a Job

“My son likes food, so I signed him up for a kid's cooking school at a major grocery store. Now he works at a bakery.”

### Living Independently

- Try to develop habits in place of internal motivation, if lacking
- Placing the bed and box spring directly on the floor so that items can't accumulate underneath may be helpful
- Using see-through plastic bins or open hanging storage units so seeing their clothes is easier
- Buying "non-break" dishes and other household items

### On Reading Comprehension

“I pay for my son's cell phone plan, and he uses the internet to talk to friends. I always give him spelling or decode words (in syllables) for him immediately when asked, so he doesn't get frustrated. Now he is reading and writing [and] has learned to spell words and decode many words and is much more receptive to communicating in print.”