

Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association Inc CONCRETE THINKING

Concrete thinking in its most literal form would be thinking about the material that gets poured into formwork to make house pads, but to people with 'concrete thinking' it illustrates the nature of their thoughts when discussing idiom, metaphor, euphemism or abstract concepts. The idea of "concrete" stands for literal, right now, and immediate, and yet a person who sees the world only in concrete terms would likely have difficulty understanding the abstract nature of its definition.¹

People with FASD are concrete thinkers; they are not flexible thinkers. They struggle with language and concepts. "It's not uncommon for a child with FASD to have difficulty with idiom and sayings easily understood by others. One young woman with FASD was told, 'Don't come home after dark,' so she stayed out on the porch all night."² This is an example of a person with FASD trying to do the right thing but because of the injury to her brain was unable to be sufficiently flexible to see that the instruction meant something different to what she imagined.

Idiom also should not be used around people with FASD. For instance if you tell them to ".....put their best foot forward....," they will be thinking of feet and what they look like rather than doing their best. Raining cats and dogs is a concept that will confuse and overwhelm people with FASD if they are expected to understand its meaning and act appropriately.



Left: Put your best foot forward see through the eyes of a person with FASD



Right: It's raining cats and dogs seen through the eyes of a person with FASD

Flexible thinking is a product of Executive Function. Functions of the prefrontal cortex include impulse-control, judgement, focus, and flexible thinking. Children with these strengths will listen in class when there are distractions, will take the time to look for right answers beyond first-glance answers, and will get their school work done when they'd rather be playing video games. They're better able to take their other talents and strengths, build on them, apply them intentionally, and use them in working toward their goals.³ Conversely, children who have damaged executive functioning such as those with FASD, will have difficulty filtering out distractions, will not be able to fight their impulses, will make poor decisions, and will be concrete thinkers.

Be aware of what you are saying – all the time. Understand that if they are doing something that you have expressly told them not to – go back over your instruction and see if their inflexible mind has translated what you said literally. Did you ask them to put their best foot forward, or did you tell them to do their best? Which instruction will get you the result you are after?

Provided by the Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association as a community service

¹ <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-concrete-thinking.htm>

² Dr Aduato <http://www.theuniversityhospital.com/healthlink/archives/articles/fas.html>

³ <http://notjustcute.com/2011/11/02/want-to-give-your-kids-an-advantage-build-executive-functions/>