

Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association Inc FASD AND EDUCATION

Teaching Students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Personal Skills

Students with FASD have fewer inner resources for coping with the normal stresses and pressures of everyday living. At school, they may become frustrated by being unable to do what the teacher expects. Students with FASD are often eager to learn. Teachers must adapt the learning environment in order to meet the students' needs and to prevent the students from feeling frustration because they cannot meet the expectations of the teacher. It is helpful to think of the student with FASD as someone who is blind. You wouldn't yell at a blind student because they were not reading what was on the blackboard just because they had eyes and you wanted them to read. It must be understood that the environment and people around the student with FASD must change because the student with FASD is metaphorically blind. They have a brain-based disability.

They may be easily overwhelmed by too much noise, too much activity, and too much stress. The response to pressure can take a range of forms: crying, withdrawal, acting out, disruptiveness and refusals. Sometimes after a day at school, they release their frustration at home. Challenging behaviours can be interpreted as a form of frustration.

A child may knock over his or her desk. The behaviour may be saying: 'I do not know what to do. I do not know how to do it. The pressure is too great, I cannot handle it!' That is the time to back off and look at what the student needs from you as the teacher.

Often students with FASD have more difficulty than most adapting to simple changes, such as changes in the physical environment (eg the location of desks), in the daily routine, or in the transitions of the day. They may be most comfortable with structure and routine and become anxious and upset in new situations — even ones most children find exciting or fun¹.

They have trouble making choices. Their behaviour may become inflexible or perverse when under stress. They get stuck on an activity and when the teacher tries to move them on to something else, they resist or have an outburst. When a teacher tries to get them to hurry up, they often shut down and refuse to cooperate. The best approach is to anticipate problems. Give the student time and ensure there is a transition process in place.

The environment must be changed for people with FASD just as the environment is changed for people with a wheelchair. It is crucial to make the connection between people with a visible disability and people with FASD — largely an invisible disability.

There are three areas which, when managed for the student with FASD will create a much more appropriate environment for the child with FASD and will not harm or make life difficult for those students without FASD:

1. Structure and routine
3. Transitions
2. Environment
4. Knowledge

1. Structure and routine

Structure and routine are two of the most important aspects of working with children with FASD. If you can provide them with a consistent, predictable environment where they are aware of the subject or activity which will be coming up next, and when the next break will occur. If this is the same every day, then behaviour will improve.

¹ <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/fas/perskil.htm> accessed on the 26th February 2015

3. Transitions

At the same time that structure and routine are put in place, transitional strategies are also commenced, the child with FASD will be much happier in the classroom. To alert the child with FASD to the next or upcoming activity or by advising them of the end of the current activity, you can use any number of things:

- a. music
- b. a bell
- c. anything else that is used consistently to alert the student that something is coming to an end and another thing is about to begin

2. Environment

The environment is also a pivotal factor for a student with FASD. Areas where children with FASD sit should not be cluttered. Put things away after use - don't leave play things lying around. Don't place posters on the wall and ensure the room is free from clutter. Bedrooms and other areas at home can be set out in a similar way. Place mats on the floor where the children are supposed to sit or stand so they are aware of their personal space and the personal space of other students. Cover areas up with sheets if not used to reduce the sensory input

4. Knowledge

The more the teacher understands this condition, the easier it will be for him or her to integrate strategies, interventions or accommodations into the lives of her students. At the time of writing 2012, many medical practitioners are unaware of the details of the condition and the needs of parents, carers, teachers and other people dealing closely with a child with FASD. Research the Internet. The following sites are particularly informative about teaching students with FASD.

- [Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association](#)
- [Teaching Students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder – Alberta Education, Canada](#)
- [Teaching Students with FASD – British Columbia, Canada](#)
- [Teaching Students with FASD - NOFAS](#)
- [Educating Students With Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Or Fetal Alcohol Effects](#)
- [Understanding FASD – for Educators](#)
- [FASD Information for Educators – Southern California](#)
- [Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association](#)

Positive feedback should occur three times as frequently as negative feedback

Classroom Strategies²

Classroom rules should be limited in number (usually five or less) and stated in positive terms. Once the rules have been developed and taught, they should be applied consistently. Most students, and especially those who are alcohol-affected, will perform better in classrooms that are structured, predictable, and consistent.

A reinforcer is an object or event that is given to the student for performing a desirable behaviour. Reinforcers need to be chosen carefully to ensure they can be delivered with relatively little effort or planning. Teachers need to have a wide variety of reinforcers available because they will not all work equally well with each student. A good way to choose reinforcers is to involve the student in the selection process. As the student's behaviour improves, the teacher should gradually move away from external rewards and replace them with intrinsic rewards. A list of possible positive consequences is included at the end of this section. Consequences may not always work with alcohol-affected students. However, their use is appropriate in specific situations. All of the students will face consequences in their daily lives as adults. Therefore, they will need to learn to deal with the consequences in the same way that other students do. The consequences should be carefully selected, pre-determined, consistently applied, and used expeditiously.

Self-Calming Procedures

When students who are alcohol-affected become disruptive or overstimulated in the classroom, the teacher may need to provide a space for them to calm down. This space can be selected by the student and might include a carrel, special corner of the room, or an area removed from the general classroom. The students will need to be told when they need to move to their calming space. These placements should be short in duration [5-10 minutes]. At the end of the calming time, the teacher should welcome the student back to the main classroom area. The calming space might receive a special name [eg Student office, Sharon's space]. For younger students the area should be in the classroom; for older students an area outside the classroom

² Adapted from information accessed on the 7th February 2013 at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/fas/pdf/5.pdf>

may be considered [eg the school lounge, resource area, or guidance room]. This area should contain items to help the student calm down, such as calming music. The main benefit of a calming area is that the students can use the space and time to regain control. As much as possible, students should be encouraged to enter their calming space on their own.

Resolving Behavioural Incidents

Teachers and administrators are often called upon to resolve behavioural incidents involving students who are alcohol-affected. The following suggestions may be useful to reduce the escalation of behavioural incidents. Review the incident as soon as possible. Try to deal with the incident as quickly as possible once the student has calmed down. Actively listen. Take time for the student to tell you his or her side of the story. Paraphrase and use eye contact to demonstrate that you are listening. Note that students who are alcohol-affected may shut down when confronted by an authority figure. Sometimes, a walk around the school with the student can help him or her to relax and begin talking. The teacher or administrator may encourage the student to draw his or her story. Use non-threatening questions. Ask questions that focus on 'how' and 'what' instead of 'why'.

*Is it unfair to treat students differently?
No. It is unprofessional to treat them the same.*

Students who are alcohol-affected may not remember, understand, or be able to articulate what happened, or may have acted impulsively. Open-ended questions may be most useful. Questions should be asked in a calm, quiet tone using slow, short, concise phrases. A simple problem-solving procedure using graphics or pictures may be helpful. Try not to blame. Focus on teaching the right behaviour or a replacement behaviour. For example, ask 'How can we avoid this problem the next time?' or 'What behaviour would have worked better than hitting?' Consider using role-play, modelling, and rehearsing to teach a new behaviour. Present new ideas in a concrete way, one at a time. Remember that ideas may need to be reinforced and re-taught several times.

Show personal interest in the student. End the review of the incident with a positive comment or a personal question. Follow up with the student and other classroom teachers in order to reinforce the new skill that is desired.

Student-Specific Interventions

The strategies below should be student specific and include a specific strategy for evaluation.

Classroom Settings

Strategies for Easing Frustration with Directions

- use concrete language [stay away from generalisations]
- keep directions short and to the point
- rephrase instructions, breaking them down into small steps
- use visual cues
- use pictures to illustrate steps in a process
- use sign prompts [eg red traffic light or stop sign]
- print task-related steps on a chart using short, concise sentences

Strategies for Handling Outbursts and Tantrums

- anticipate and identify warning signs
- remove students from the classroom
- debrief the student after the incident – focus on what could have been done differently
- teach the correct behaviour [don't blame]
- teach a routine for preventing an outburst
- invite the student to help solve future problems
- avoid power struggles and put-downs
- determine the cause of the outburst

Positive Classroom Discipline

Teachers need to build a classroom environment where positive interactions are the norm and punitive consequences are minimised. Research indicates that coercive or punitive environments actually promote antisocial behaviour.

Additional reading

<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/fas/pdf/5.pdf>

http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthchild/fasd/fasdeducators_en.pdf

<http://www.fl DOE.org/ese/pdf/fetalco.pdf>

http://www.motherisk.org/documents/FAS11/09_Gal-Koren_Dorothy-Schwab_FACE-2011.pdf

Additional Strategies

- Provide one instruction at a time until the student can remember two instructions; provide two instructions at a time until the student can remember three; and build up the amount from there.
- Provide opportunities for the student to practice oral direction and |or instruction, ie in each classroom, write what is going to happen each day |in each lesson, on the board.
- When the student appears to have learned a rote-skill, continue practising and aim for over-learning
- Help the student recognise when and how to apply and generalise a skill to a new situation by employing something that has been learned over time and space
- Concepts presented in a concrete fashion [ie with examples] will be easier to learn and retain than abstract concepts
- Concepts are easier to learn and retain when they are presented in a familiar context or in a context in which the skill will be used
- Concepts paired with a visual representation may be easier to learn and retain
- Learning through art and music activities may use the student's strengths and is often an area where a student with FASD will shine
- Aspects of memory that involve paying attention can be enhanced through memory games and teaching memory strategies
- Provide practice in sequencing events, such as creating a photo story
- Assess the student's learning more frequently, and on shorter units of work, than for other students; then continue to reinforce the concepts
- Use recognition questions rather than open-ended ones
- Use language that is familiar to the student
- Use cuing [ie hinting] or prompting to help the student recall details
- Teach the students strategies for remembering [eg make a list; note on a calendar]to the extent that they can manage the strategies at their own level of development.
- Develop a system with the parents or guardians regarding homework. For example, use a school |home book for assignments; make sure the student has written assignments down accurately
- Have the student hand in homework immediately on arriving at school in the morning
- Give feedback to students so that they can get some insight into their behaviour and how it affects themselves and other learners
- Use one workbook or three-ring binder, with separate colour coded duo tangs and colour coding for subject areas
- When giving verbal instruction, write down the main points on an overhead or on a board
- Be aware that negative behaviour may be a symptom of unmet needs
- Include the student as often as possible in the process of developing solutions to problems
- Play turn-taking games - pass an object around and when a student has the object it is that student's turn
- Set limits and consistently follow them - don't debate or argue over classroom rules or infractions of those rules
- Encourage the student to use positive self-talk. 'I can do this. I am able to pay attention right now. I can figure this out.'
- Develop a plan with the student, which can be followed when the student is feeling overwhelmed by people, sound, light, movement, things
- Develop with the student an entrance and exit routine for the day, or for each class
- Encourage and permit the student to lead in child |young adult play on a regular basis
- Encourage the child to 'help' as a valued member of the classroom.
- Encourage decision making by giving the student choices and allowing the student to carry through with the choices they make
- Use a variety of art forms as a means of communication regarding emotion, self-esteem, body image³

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

³ <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/fas/socskil2.htm> accessed on the 26th February 2015