



## Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association Inc

### Why early intervention is critical

#### Sources

PARENTING CHILDREN AFFECTED BY FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME: A GUIDE FOR DAILY LIVING. 2ND EDITION, REVISED AND EXPANDED (NATIONAL). Copyright © 1998 by the Society of Special Needs Adoptive Parents (SNAP).

Keleinfeld, J., Morse, B., & Wescott, S. Fantastic Antone grows up. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2000.

## FASD Strategies

Don't assume that even if a child KNOWS the rules that they UNDERSTAND the rules.

In order to understand how alcohol-affected youths see their world and then to help us change their behavior there are several techniques that we can utilize:

- Observe the troublesome situations carefully to understand the nature of the problem
- We need to interpret their responses correctly, to understand what seems like deliberate misconduct or attention seeking may actually be neurologically based problems with memory or comprehension. At this point we can teach habit patterns of appropriate behavior by using role-playing or other concrete techniques
- We can reduce frustration and misbehaviour by using multi-sensory tools like music, drama, visual symbols, and computers to make learning not only fun but also effective for students who might otherwise find it impossible to understand.

## Effective communication

Communicating with a child, alcohol affected or not, requires good communication techniques that must be suited to your child's individual personality. Certain techniques may be effective for one child and not another. A series of trial and error will help you, the parent, identify what specific techniques are best for you and your child. Below are some tips to remember when communicating:

- Begin all conversations with the child's name and make good eye contact
- Realize that words or expressions may have more than one meaning. Understand that children with FASD are often very literal in their understanding
- Speak slowly and pause between sentences to allow for processing
- Gentle reminders help produce a positive result

## Mealtime

Eating problems are common for alcohol-affected children. Anticipate that mealtimes could be a problem and be flexible in your expectations.

- Allow ample time to eat
- A child with FASD may eat slowly because of poor muscle control or poor swallowing reflex. Accept that FASD children may be sloppy eaters
- Work on one kind of table manner at a time. Integrate a new manner only when the previous one has been successfully used for some time
- Avoid fast food restaurants at peak times when eating out

## Hygiene

Not all hygiene strategies will work for all people and it will take trial and error to determine what works for your family. What is critical, is routine, repetition, organizational structure, and being willing to try new ways of handling hygiene training. Be creative!

## Hygiene supplies

- Keep supplies like shampoo, body wash, combs, and toothpaste in a storage container. Place the container in a specific location
- Let the child help choose the supplies. This increases the enjoyment of using one's own items
- Colour code items such as towels, toothbrush, and comb, and the storage container for quick identification

## Hygiene routine

- At an early age, begin a routine of daily bathing and shampoo. By establishing a routine, the individual does not have to remember when the last shampoo occurred or determine if a bath is needed
- If overly long showers are a problem, put a timer in the shower that shuts it off. If overfilling the tub is a problem, use indelible ink to draw a line on the bathtub to prevent the child from overfilling the bath
- Keep the hot water tank temperature down or invest in a scald-guard faucet. This is essential for children who do not have a normal sense of pain and temperature
- Keep a daily task checklist. It can be in the form of a chart card file, or whatever works best for the individual. The checklist can combine pictures and words and include the specific time for each task

- Begin the routine of using deodorant at an early age. Using deodorant at an early age will pay off because by the time the child needs it, they will have become used to it
- Role model shaving, with an electric razor. Long before it is time for the individual to shave. When it is time to learn to shave, pick an electric razor that best suits the individual and encourage the use of pre-shave lotion. As with bathing, encourage daily shaving to establish a routine

## Grooming

- When individuals are old enough, begin teaching combing and styling their own hair
- Have family members' role model taking care of grooming needs in view of the individual and talk about how important and enjoyable grooming is
- When in school, include activities related to hygiene on your child's daily plan, such as learning to check one's hair and face in the mirror when in the bathroom and washing hands at each visit
- People with FASD often do become engrossed in what they are doing and do not think about consequences, such as someone seeing them unclothed. Though it is difficult to instill a sense of modesty, we can teach skills that will protect their modest
- From an early age, make it an after-shower routine that people in the family dressing the bathroom into street clothes or nightclothes. When not taking a shower the routine is to dress in the bedroom. Establishing this routine from toddlerhood may help. If the toddler years are far behind you, try to encourage this routine now
- Post a homemade STOP sign on the bathroom door that lists the crucial items that must be done before leaving the room. Try to establish a routine of checking that list (flush the toilet, turn off the water, get dressed, and so on)
- Develop a concise easy-to-understand explanation of modesty and discuss it as needed, starting with every shower. You will need it less often over time

## Clothing

- Devise organizational techniques for hanging and storing clothing. Place picture codes on dresser drawers or use under the bed storage drawers or coloured boxes for keeping items together. Hang coordinated outfits together on combination hangers
- For winter climates, pin a hand drawn thermometer beside the door (inside) with a red line drawn on it at the temperature for which heavy clothing must be worn
- Role model checking for spills and taking notice of clothing wear and tear. If a spill occurs, teach individuals how to tend to it with spotting solution or dabbing with water. Encourage individuals to monitor the condition of their clothing
- Role model sorting laundry and using the laundry machines

## Puberty

Puberty is a life-marker for entering a new stage of life, a new maturity, a growing up and growing away from dependence on parents. People with FASD undergo all of the same difficult changes, but their developmental and behavioural disabilities can cause even more complications

- Whether puberty occurs early or not, talk to your child about body changes casually, incorporating discussions into everyday life. When puberty approaches, talk about the changes before they occur. If you see sign of early puberty, seek information and medical advice
- Get materials on puberty for young people with mental retardation
- Mothers or sisters may be able to talk about their own menstruation cycle and care in a natural way before the daughter's cycle begins
- Establish a schedule for changing pads if remembering is a problem. Maintain this schedule whether or not a change is needed

## School

### **CLUSTER CLASSES AND LOCKERS**

- Request that your child's classes and lockers be grouped as close together as possible, even if it means selecting different classes

### **MAP YOUR CHILD'S ROUTES**

- Request a map of the school and a copy of the class schedule before school starts. With your child, develop a simple map showing the route to each class and highlight the office, bathrooms, stairways, cafeteria and so on, Then practice, practice, practice. Make certain that your child has at least one copy of the map and schedule before leaving for school, and always keep an extra set at school

### **FIND A "TRAVEL TRAINER"**

- If the school cannot provide someone to help your child learn his or her way around the school, find someone who can. Possible sources include: a college student who is studying to be a teacher, whose assignments may include working one-on-one with a school age student, or someone from a special needs support group in a church or local community. Perhaps some young person outside the immediate family will help foster independence and yet not draw attention to your child. Work out a plan for changing from assisted movement to moving around alone

### **FIND A CLASS WHERE YOUR CHILD HAS STRENGTH TO PROVIDE RELIEF FROM STRESS**

- Make sure that your child takes at least one class in an area of personal strength to relieve some stress during the day, such as an art class

### **Law & Rule-Breaking Issues**

Parents need to be prepared to pick up the pieces if their teenager breaks some rule or law. First, realize the trouble is not always a reflection on you, the parent. There is no way to rehearse and practice appropriate behaviors for the many situations that can arise or anticipate what can happen. Be gentle with yourself, and don't wallow in guilt should your child run afoul of society's laws and rules.

### **Don't try to do it alone**

Find someone who will provide support and friendship and act as an advocate should you need to appear in court, talk to a probation officer, discuss the situations with an attorney and so on.

### **Be ready to educate those in the legal system**

When they understand that FASD is not an excuse but a reason for a young person's behavior, they will be more likely to focus on ways to prevent the behavior in the future rather than on punishment.

### **Keep notes, reports, professional observations, and other materials that identify the problem as ongoing, as something that has been addressed by many people, including the parents, over a long period.**

Emphasizing that the behavior is not new can help parents deal with guilt. Proper documentation demonstrates that the behavior is not spontaneous or due to peer pressure, and that parents have not denied or ignored this challenge but have sought help and guidance when facing the issue.

### **Familiarize yourself with the literature and other materials that address the constellation of problems associated with FASD as well as any research on the subject.**

This will foster an understanding of the reasons for what seems like antisocial behavior, and it can spur finding professional help to avoid or alleviate a recurrence.