

Fast Facts when Parenting or Caring for a Child Affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a set of brain differences which are caused by alcohol use during pregnancy. It is a lifelong disability. There are many simple ways you can help your child cope better on a daily basis.
- Children with FASD have many strengths and things they are good at. Help your child find those strengths and then spend time with them helping them to develop those strengths and feel success.
- All children are unique. Not all of these strategies may work with your child, but keep trying until you find the ones that do work best.
- Observe your child: their strengths, their sensitivities, their triggers. Learn from situations and apply what you have learned in the future (what results in a good outing vs. an outing when your child becomes over stimulated?).
- Modify the environment, not the child (lights, noises, dangerous objects, etc.).
- Repeating directions, instructions, and concepts is very important. It allows information to be stored in the habit area of the brain which may help your child remember this information easier.
- Don't ask your child "why" ("why did you pull the cat's tail?") because they probably don't know why. Why sounds like blame and can end up in conflict or storytelling.
- If your child does something you asked them not to, don't ask if they did it. Use simple statements: "Don't pull the cat's tail. We have talked about this. Go sit down please."
- Routine and consistency can help your child make sense of the world. When a routine is established and you stick to it, your child can function more efficiently. Learning and remembering comes in small steps. Guide your child through tasks in simple steps, one step at a time. This will increase the chance of success.

- Visual cues can be very effective in helping your child establish a daily routine and completing tasks. Below are some examples of ways to use visual cues:

-use picture cards that show the steps in completing a daily routine (for example: all the steps involved when brushing your teeth)

-using color coded binders in school can help keep your child organized and reduce visual clutter

-using a visual timer (like an egg timer) can help your child prepare to make a transition from one activity to another

-posting information that you want your child to remember close to them or where they need to complete a certain task (picture cards on the bathroom mirror which shows the steps to brushing their teeth) can help your child complete tasks successfully.

- Children with FASD can be impulsive and this can affect their relationships. For example, your child they may not wait their turn when playing with other children, or they may stand too close to their friends and get into their personal space.
- You can try to develop a few role playing scripts that can help your child learn about and practice having healthy relationships. An example of a role playing script is taking turns when talking: act out with your child how a conversation should work. When one person is talking, the other person is listening.
- There may be a difference between your child's actual age (chronological age) and the age they may act (developmental age). Children with FASD tend to have social skills of a child much younger than their peers. You will need to adjust your expectations of your child to fit the developmental age.
- As a parent you can help your child by avoiding situations where your child's lower maturity level makes it hard for them to feel good about the activity they are participating in (for example competitive sports). You can also supervise your child's social time, role play with your child how to act in certain social situations and make sure other parents understand your child's social needs.
- Your child may be able to repeat information back to you but that does not mean they really understand it. It is important to follow through and ensure they actually understand the information they are repeating to you. Visual learning (picture cards for examples) is generally more effective than oral learning.

- To ensure your child understands the information they are receiving you could encourage them to create a picture card series to show they understand the information you have discussed and know how to carry through on a task (i.e. how to take the bus to and from school; have the child draw out all necessary steps they have to follow to complete this task).
- Remember your child's senses may be affected. They may become overwhelmed if too much information or stimulus comes into their brain at once. You may see this as anger, frustration, outbursts or "melt downs." For example, taking your child to a crowded department store on Christmas Eve where there are many people, bright lights, loud music and a great deal of activity may over stimulate your child. If this happens you can help your child to decide about what is a safe place to calm down if they are becoming overwhelmed.
- Educate others in your child's life (family, friends, teachers, etc.) about your child's strengths and the areas that are difficult for them. Help them understand it is the environment that needs to be adapted not your child.
- Continue to educate yourself about FASD and the unique needs of your child so you become the expert on your child.
- Take care of yourself and get support from others. You need to have time for yourself and time to be supported by others so you don't become overwhelmed. Some ways to care for yourself includes self care activities, respite care for your child, enlisting support from family and friends, and taking some time alone to rest (even if it is just for a few minutes a day).
- Try to become involved a FASD support group so you can network and learn from others who truly understand your situation and your child's unique strengths and needs.
- For more information on the Parent Advisory Network in Manitoba please contact: (TBA)