

8 Magic Keys to Supporting Individuals with FASD

While there is no recommended “cookbook approach” to working with individuals with FASD there are strategies that work, based on the following guidelines:

Concrete – Individuals with FASD do well when people talk in concrete terms; do not use words with double meanings, or idioms. Because their social-emotional understanding is far below their chronological age, it helps to “think younger” when providing assistance and giving instructions.

Consistency – Because of the difficulty individuals with FASD experience trying to generalize learning from one situation to another, they do best in an environment with few changes. This includes language. For example, teachers and parents can coordinate with each other to use the same words for key phrases and oral directions.

Repetition – Individuals with FASD have chronic short-term memory problems; they forget things they want to remember as well as information that has been learned and retained for a period of time. In order for something to make it to long-term memory, it may simply need to be re-taught and re-taught.

Routine – Stable routines that don’t change from day to day will make it easier for individuals with FASD to know what to expect next and decrease their anxiety, enabling them to learn.

Simplicity – Remember to Keep it Short and Sweet (KISS method). Individuals with FASD are easily over-stimulated, leading to “shutdown” at which point no more information can be assimilated. Therefore, a simple environment is the foundation for an effective school program.

Specific – Say exactly what you mean. Remember that individuals with FASD have difficulty with abstractions, generalization, and not being able to “fill in the blanks” when given a direction. Tell them step by step what to do, developing appropriate habit patterns.

Structure – Structure is the “glue” that makes the world make sense for an individual with FASD. If this glue is taken away, the walls fall down! An individual with an FASD achieves and is successful because their world provides the appropriate structure as permanent foundation.

Supervision – Because of their cognitive challenges, individuals with FASD bring a naiveté to daily life situations. They need constant supervision, as with much younger children, to develop habit patterns of appropriate behaviour.

Not Working?

When a situation with an individual with FASD is confusing and the intervention is not working, then:

Stop Action!

Observe.

Listen carefully to find out where he or she is stuck.

Ask: What is hard? What would help?

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