Students with FASD

Simple strategies for behavioral and academic success

Deb Evensen, MA
Children with FASD are:

the educational system’s

*Canaries in the Mine*
What currently happens to most students with FASD?

• Early Childhood - when they do/perform the best they’re going to do in our system

• Elementary Grades - we start to see problems

• Middle/Junior High - they start to fall through the cracks

• High School - we lose most of them
The Edge of the Cliff...
2-5% of all children in the US have a FASD
-Dr. Phillip May 2011
“This of the unjustness of having an affliction where you appear to understand more than you do.”

Stuart Whitley
Minister of Health & Social Service
Yukon Territory, Canada
Prenatal Exposure to alcohol causes the brain to actually be “built” differently ...
Lamination of Brain

- From 6 weeks of gestation on
- The way cells go together to form the brain
- The most important part of brain development is how the brain is organized: brain stem-midbrain-limbic-cortex
Corpus Callosum Abnormalities

- Mattson et al., 1994; Mattson & Riley, 1995; Riley et al., 1995
And to add to the Problem:

- Many children who were prenatally exposed to alcohol also suffer through Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)
What Are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

Child Abuse

• Sexual
• Physical
• Psychological/emotional

Childhood Neglect

• Physical
• Emotional

HANDOUT: ACEs questionnaire
When Stress Becomes Toxic It Disrupts

The Architecture of a Child's Developing Brain

- Brain circuitry for dealing with stress is very sensitive during fetal and early childhood periods
- Excessive stress programs the brain and stress hormones to over-react to stress

Scientific American, September 1992
Problems Processing Information and “Ongoing Information”

- Input
- Integration
- Memory
- Output
For a student with FASD, inconsistency of performance *is* normal ...
Information Processing Deficits

Means Difficulty with:

• Abstract reasoning
• Generalization skills
• Memory
• Time
• Anxiety and frustration
• Socialization and skills of independence
Brain damage that affects impulse control and judgment ...
Information Processing deficits *may look like oppositional behavior* when not recognized and understood.
“Cartoon Brains”

Kee Warner
A Simple Cartoon Comparison of Brain Activity Levels

Student with FASD

Student with FASD
Teacher giving an instruction.
Hearing the Instruction
Sorting the words

Calculating
Processing Words
Repeating the Instruction

\[
\frac{3}{+5} = ?
\]
Counting on Fingers

Writing
Another Repetition

\[
\begin{align*}
3 + 5 & = ? \\
\end{align*}
\]
Finding numbers

Resting
Picking up pencil
Searching Memory
Another Repetition

\[
\frac{3}{+5} = ?
\]
Possible Repetition of All above steps
Calculating
Writing
Slowly Returning to Resting
Good work, Dan. Good work, Linda.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
3 \\
+5 \\
\hline
=8
\end{array}
\]

Whew!
Reality

Why is a typical school day or job training day such a struggle for individuals with FASD?
• Because the school day is based on Learning Theory and Learning Theory assumes that students can process information in a consistent manner.

• But students with FASD don’t process information in a consistent manner...
Learning Theory

Assumes that the Student is capable of:

- Learning a rule or principle
- Understanding the underlying concepts of that principle
- Remembering these concepts
- Generalizing this learning to many different situations
What Happens When... Learning Theory runs into FASD?
Alcohol Chicks Fail Detour Learning Test

Food

Light

Control chick

Alcohol chick
By not paying attention to the specific brain-based differences in individuals with FASD; our educational, social service, mental health, and legal systems are trafficking in children with FASD.

--Sue Hemple
“For adults with FAS, 80% are unable to live independently -- regardless of IQ. ”

-Streissguth et al.
What are We Ignoring?

16 years

Developmental Age vs. Chronological Age

< 8 years
STUDY: Comparison of Social Problem-Solving Ability
by Ed Riley and Sarah Mattson

- Children with FAS
- Children with same IQ (no FAS)
- Control group (normal children)
Social Abilities Assessment

• *Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales*
• *Parent Version*
• “VABS-II”
• *Administered by school psychologist*
Vineland Scores

Social/Emotional Age vs. Age

Normal IQ
Low IQ
FAS

----- Chronological Age -----
Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale II
Behavioral Expectations of Children with FASD

Chronological Age-Appropriate vs. Developmental Age-Appropriate
- Evensen & Malbin
Chronological Age Expectations:
Typical 5-year old...

- Go to school
- Follow 2-3 instructions
- Interactive, cooperative play
- Share
- Take turns
Developmental Age with FASD: 5-years going on 2-years...

- Take naps
- Help mommy
- Follow one instruction
- Parallel play
- Active
- My way or no way!
Chronological Age Expectations: Typical 18-year old...

• On the verge of independence
• Maintain a job and graduate from school
• Have a plan for their life
• Budget their own money
• Organize
• Accomplish tasks independently at home, school, and job
Developmental Age With FASD: 18-years Going on 9-years...

- Needs structure and guidance
- Limited choices of activities
- In the “here and now,” very little future projection
- Giggles, curiosity, frustration
- Gets an allowance
- Gets organized with help of adults
- Boundary issues. Just learning...
Adolescents w/FASD = Stretch Toddlers
We have to get children with FASD to their mid 20’s instead of just 18 years old

WHY??
THE BRAIN’S CEO

Frontal Cortex

- Impulse control
- Judgment
- Problem solving
- Emotional processing & self-control
- Language
- Organization & planning
- Motivation
- Goal setting behaviors

UW Extension, 2006
25+ instead of 18
Avoid the Cliff!
Ask 4 Thoughtful Questions

1. What is my student/client’s Developmental Age?

2. Would this behavior be more normal/typical if that was his/her actual Chronological Age?

3. What is it that the person does not understand?

4. How can we help develop appropriate Habit Patterns of Behavior with or without current deeper understanding?
8 Magic Keys
8 Magic Keys

1. Concrete
2. Consistency
3. Repetition
4. Routine
5. Simplicity
6. Specific
7. Structure
8. Supervision

* Master Key
* Master Key

Trusting Relationship  (Sister Suzette)
True Story

Tlingit Indian baby born near Hoonah, Alaska

– Mother late stage alcoholic
– Many episodes of abuse and neglect in early years
– His plight was neither caught by OCS nor the school system
– Rendered him basically homeless at the age of 11 in Juneau, Alaska
So.. What happened to our little Tlingit baby boy?

meet Morgan Fawcett
Vision for the future