FASD and Practice: Issues for Probation Officers

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Date: February 3, 2010

What Is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder?

The Challenge of FASD

- Brain injury to the developing brain
- Caused by alcohol exposure in utero
- May look different in different individuals
- A “consistent pattern of inconsistencies”
How Is It Diagnosed?

- Team diagnosis
- Three key areas
  - Growth
  - Face
  - Brain

How Is It Diagnosed?: Face

- Microcephaly
- Short palpebral fissures
- Flat midface
- Indistinct philtrum
- Thin upper lip
- Prominent bridge
- Micrognathia
- Large ear
- Short nose
How Is It Diagnosed?

- **Face and Growth:**
  - Are not necessary for an FASD diagnosis
  - May no longer be evident in adults

How Is It Diagnosed?: Brain

The Impact of Alcohol

- **Structures and function are affected at a basic level of development**
The Impact of Alcohol

The impact is compounded at higher levels of brain development:

- **Reptilian brain**
  - Basic survival and self-defense

- **Limbic brain**
  - Processing emotions
  - Critical to learning and memory

- **Neo-cortex**
  - Synthesis and complex thought

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The Impact of Alcohol

- Brain injury due to alcohol has a significant impact on day to day function
- FASD may often be an invisible disability
- We may therefore assume that behaviour is willful and defiant when it is not
What Might You See?

Memory Problems
- Stories that don’t make sense
- Vague details
- A lot of detail about irrelevant information
- Situationally specific learning

What Might You See?

Judgment and Reasoning Problems
- Rigid thinkers
- Naïve in social interactions
- Not learning from mistakes
- Missing the big picture
**What Might You See?**

Intelligence
- Could be anything!
- May not be related to function
- Can't apply what they know in a meaningful way

**What Might You See?**

Level of Function
- Childlike
- Vulnerable - often the scapegoat
- They just don't “get it”
- Secondary disabilities

**What Can You Do?**

- What Can You Do?
- Strategies
What Can You Do?

- What you do best - advocate for your client
- Watch for flags even in the absence of a diagnosis
- If some flags are present, respond to the needs identified

What Can You Do?

Recognize difficulties and know they:

- Function best within a well-controlled setting
- Are most successful in an environment that provides predictability and accountability
- Require ongoing support throughout adulthood
- Need to be connected with social supports that provide coaching, redirection, and supervision
- May not have the skills to live successfully on their own

Strategies

- You can be the information hub
  - Help coordinate resources
- With conversation allow extra time for responses
- Use simple, short directives when speaking
- Be very concrete and very specific when given instructions
- Do not over-schedule their days but keep time productive
Strategies

- When a response is given, stories may be fabricated due to your expectations and wanting to please. Simplify
- Assist with (or arrange for assistance with) applications, forms, money management
- Less reliance on verbal exchanges
- Use and advocate for visual learning by using
  - Models
  - Pictures graphs
  - Written checklists

What Can You Do?

Ask yourself:

- Does this individual have the ability to comply?
- Could instructions be rephrased for better understanding?
- Should the task be broken down into more manageable, concrete steps?
- Will what I am requesting result in success for this individual?

What Can You Do?

Conditions on Probation Order:

- Review conditions each and every appointment
- If possible, have a caregiver/partner present. Encourage communication with “external brain” if available
- Encourage individual to involve network of family and friends in assisting to keep conditions
What Can You Do?

Understanding Conditions:
- Explain each condition
- When asking if they understand, they will say yes, but not necessarily comprehend
- Use concrete examples that will help give a visual of the expectations
- Repeat as necessary

What Can You Do?

No contact:
- No contact means no contact
- Each appointment, review list of individuals to remind of what no contact means and who it is referring to

Keep the Peace/Good Behaviour:
- Ask what that means to them and wait for an answer
- Be specific about expectations

What Can You Do?

Appear as required:
- Talk about going to
  - Court
  - Additional appointments
  - Probation appointments
  - Attending school
- Enlist families or others in helping to ensure appointments are kept
- Make appointments same day of each week, same time of day, if possible
What Can You Do?

Curfew:
- Keep it simple
- Same time every night
- All curfew times and appointments should be written in pocket size format

Paradigm Shift

We must move from viewing the individual as failing if she/he does not do well in a system, to viewing the system as not providing what the individual needs in order to succeed.

Reference

- Contact Information
Contact Information

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For Information on Upcoming Sessions in the Series:
www.fasd-cmc.alberta.ca

Please Take the Time to Fill Out the On-Line Evaluation

Thank You!