

FASD and Practice: Issues for Probation Officers

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The FASD Learning Series is part of the Alberta government's commitment to programs and services for people affected by FASD and those who support them.

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?

- How Is It Diagnosed?
- The Impact of Alcohol

How Is It Diagnosed?

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

How Is It Diagnosed?: Face

microcephaly

short palpebral fissures

flat midface

inclined philtrum

thin upper lip

epicanthic folds

low nasal bridge

minor ear anomalies

short nose

micrognathia

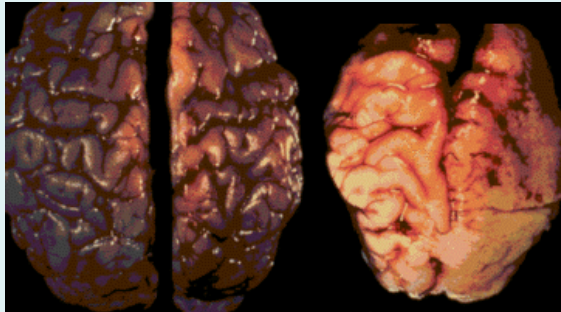
How Is It Diagnosed?

➤ **Face and Growth:**

- Are not necessary for an FASD diagnosis
- May no longer be evident in adults



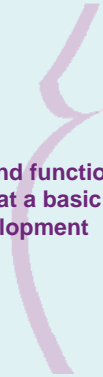
How Is It Diagnosed?: Brain



The Impact of Alcohol



- Structures and function are affected at a basic level of development



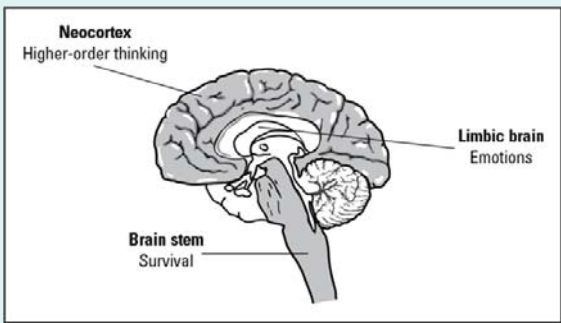
The Impact of Alcohol

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

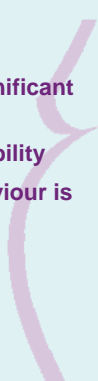


The Impact of Alcohol



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?

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?

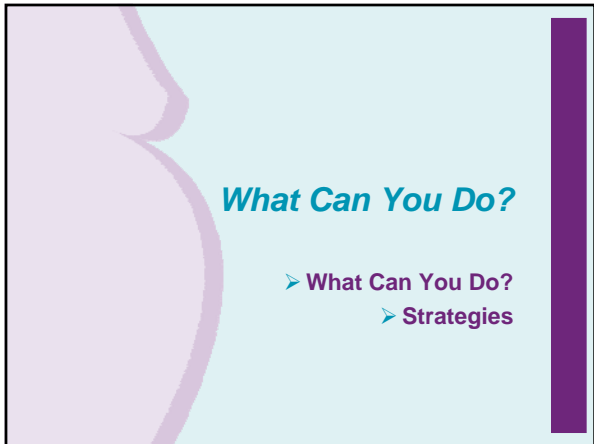
Level of Function

- 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.

Dan Dubovsky

Reference

- **Contact Information**

Contact Information

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**For Information on Upcoming
Sessions in the Series:
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**Please Take the Time to Fill Out
the On-Line Evaluation**

Thank You!
