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.

**Approaches to Treatment: Family Therapy**

**Presenter:** Willard Fewer  
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**Session Goals**

- Participants will learn of typical issues experienced by differing types of families that are raising one or more children living with an FASD.
- Participants will learn of some types of interventions, offered at the family level, that can make a difference for these families.
- Participants will learn of the value of helping a family to develop a realistic, sense of hope for their future and specifically for their child.

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**Types of Families Affected by FASD and Issues Affecting These Families**

- Biological Parent(s) and Child(ren)
- Adoptive Families
- Foster Families
- Grandparents Raising Their FASD Affected Grandchildren
Biological Parent(s) and Child(ren)
- Feelings connected to having hurt their child(ren) in utero
- Current addictions or struggles to stay clean and sober
- Difficulty trusting professionals (who may have apprehended the children earlier)

Biological Parent(s) and Child(ren)
- Own mental health difficulties (possibly including undiagnosed FASD themselves)
- The challenges of raising children with neurological, physical, and mental health challenges – with the need to interact with a variety of professionals on the child’s behalf

Adoptive Families
- Grief/anger when it is apparent that the child brings long-term challenges to the family (v. “Love will overcome all”) and is not the child dreamed of
- Challenges of managing the multitude of appointments with professionals
- Feeling judged as a “not good enough” parent
Foster Families
- Constant vigil
- Effects on marriages
- Child management
- Parental issues
- Interactions with professional community
- Emancipation concerns
- Medical implications

(from Morrissette, 2001)

Grandparents Raising Their FASD Affected Grandchildren
- Fatigue
- Resentment toward own child who is not assuming parenting responsibilities/ guilt feelings about “failing” as a parent
- Most of the previously mentioned challenges

Family Interventions That Help
- Education and Training about FASD
- Good Health Care for the Child
- Respite for Caregivers and Siblings
  - Therapy
- Repair Work and Strengthening of Relationships
- Reduce “Expressed Emotion”
- Create a “Holding Environment”
- Emotion Modulated and Worked with in Session
- A Sense of Hope for a More Positive Future
**Education and Training about FASD**

- Help the caregivers to understand the reason for misbehaviors
  - Poor executive functioning in their child
  - Reduce anger
  - Sense of defeat
  - Demoralization

**Good Health Care for the Child (Physical and Mental)**

- Avoid pessimistic messages but give realistic prognoses that helps all to have hope ("a pervasive therapeutic nihilism" O’Malley, 2008)
- Team approach: caregivers/psychiatrist/child therapist/family therapist/case worker (not adversarial)
- Be mindful of avoiding an overwhelming number and frequency of appointments

**Respite for Caregivers and Siblings**

- Regular
- Scheduled and “prn”
- Capable substitute care providers
- Positive experience for child as well as for parents
**Therapy**

To assist individuals with their individual mental health conditions
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Compassion fatigue

To assist caregivers to use more effective behavior management strategies with the affected child

**Repair Work and Strengthening of Relationships within the Family**

- Caregiver couple relationship
- Parent-child relationships
- Sibling relationships (peer or adult sibs)

**Reduce “Expressed Emotion”**

- Work with family members on self-control, better executive functioning in caregivers and in child
- Stress and executive functioning capability are related inversely
- Stress is “contagious”
Create a “Holding Environment”

- A time and place where affect and behavior can be contained, so
- Family members feel safe enough to work on the tough issues, and
- Are able to learn and practice better ways or relating, and
- Get support for their efforts to do better as people and as a family

Emotion Modulated and Worked with in Session

- Create a sense of order
- Support for difficult feelings
- Work on regulation of self
- Learn to choose a helpful way of responding to others when they are “not at their best”

Relationships Repaired and Rebuilt

- Express and let go of old pain
- Accept and give support from others in the family
- Interpret misbehavior more realistically
  - Impulsive or “thoughtless” rather than assume it is a personal comment
Help Grow a Sense of Hope for a More Positive Future

- For the family and for the individuals
- Notice small steps toward healing/growth
- Realistic expectations for progress
- On-going connection as a possibility

Summary

Reference

- Contact Information
- Source Material
Contact Information

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Source Material

  http://nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR6-2/morrissette.html  

Source Material

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!