



Yellowknife Association for Community Living

FASD

(Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder):

**A Practical Guide for
Employers**



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Prepared by:
Yellowknife Association for Community Living

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Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to help employers understand individuals affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and how to support them in the work environment.

Successful employment is affected by the individual's challenges and more importantly, strengths.

An individual affected by FASD can be an excellent employee. However, some of the common challenges of FASD can make it difficult for these individuals to meet the expectations of typical work environments. Both the employer and the individual need support and information to increase the chance for successful employment.



What is FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a set of physical, mental and neurobehavioral disorders which are a direct result of maternal alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

FASD is an umbrella term that encompasses three specific medical diagnoses:

- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS),
- Partial Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (pFAS)
- Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND).

FASD occurs in all races, countries, economic statuses, genders and ages.

People presenting physical symptoms are only the tip of the iceberg. Many people who are affected do not display physical characteristics at all, but still require additional structures and support to succeed.

Common Strengths of Individuals Affected by FASD

Their traits may include, but are not limited to:

- talkativeness
- curiosity
- love of animals
- generosity, helpfulness, nurturing ability
- bright in some areas of cognitive development
- loyalty, friendliness, affection, trust, gentleness



They may have skills and abilities in areas such as:

- art or music
- gardening
- mechanics
- construction



Common Characteristics of Individuals Affected by FASD

- learning and memory difficulties
- language processing difficulties
- behavioral problems
- sensory, hearing and vision deficits
- short attention span
- coordination and motor skill deficit
- easily overwhelmed and over stimulated
- difficulty in learning from consequences
- poor impulse control
- problem solving skills
- difficulty with abstract concepts (math, time, money)

These challenges often make it difficult for an individual to obtain and maintain employment without some accommodation from the employer.

Guiding Principles for Working with People Affected by FASD

- **Concrete:** do not use words with double meaning
- **Consistency:** environment with few changes
- **Repetition:** teaching things over and over
- **Routine:** stable routines that do not change from day to day
- **Simplicity:** simple environment is the foundation for effective learning
- **Specific:** step by step directions
- **Structure:** apply rules and reinforce them
- **Supervision:** consistent supervision for learning appropriate behavior
- **Anticipate** situations where he / she might have difficulty and rehearse

Remember, impulsiveness is a characteristic behavior of FASD

Changing Our Way of Thinking

There is a difference between:

giving up on a person

versus

**giving up on making a person do things
that he / she CANNOT do**

Shift from:

- traditional management styles
- applying consequences
- changing people

Shift to:

- recognizing brain differences
- finding solutions
- changing environments



Changing Our Expectations

- start by recognizing their needs
- stop thinking you are going to “fix” them!
- find their strengths and work with them to build on these strengths
- the person is not the problem, their behavior is
- start building a toolbox of strategies



Making Accommodation

- celebrate small successes
- look for opportunities to encourage
- keep things simple and consistent
- work with the person to find what support and structure they need
- look into options for resolving conflict that maintains the dignity of all
- allow for flexibility in scheduling when noticing signs of stress and fatigue

Frequently Asked Questions

Question

How does an employer determine the right position for someone with FASD?

Recommendation

An employer bases this decision after determining realistic duties and attainable goals for the person.

Question

Will the person be able to consistently come to work everyday and get to work on time?

Recommendation

A specific written routine is an important key. Whenever possible try to maintain the same hours and work days.

Question

Is there an easier way for someone with FASD to orientate and learn the job?

Recommendation

Find out how the person learns best. This can be visual, hands on, written or a combination of all three methods.

Question

How does the employer assess the amount of training a person needs?

Recommendation

Ask the individual about his / her comfort level and preferred pace. Be prepared to repeat parts of training that the person may have difficulty with.

Question

Will a person with FASD understand their job duties?

Recommendation

Have the person work in the same area, doing the same duties until he / she feels comfortable to expand tasks. Structure, routine and consistency are keys to success and will help the person understand and enjoy their duties.

Question

What are some basic tools to support a person with FASD in the workplace?

Recommendation

Daily task lists, day timers, calculators and 24 hour watches are tools that can be used in many work environments.

Question

What happens if the person continually performs the job incorrectly?

Recommendation

Designate a lead co-worker to assist with areas of difficulty. The person needs to know there is someone he / she can turn to for support.

Question

What can be done if a person with FASD wants to quit?

Recommendation

Suggest that the person speak to another person he / she trusts, such as a job coach or career counselor before quitting. Time and rethinking the issues may prevent a rushed decision and most problems can be solved. A vacation can give a break without ending employment.

The path to success may have many bumps and curves. With consistent effort, direction and support from the employer and co-workers, the individual will have a greater chance of being a valued employee and maintaining employment.



A successful employment story!

I am the owner of “Flowers by Manuela” and about a year ago I hired a person with FASD to work at my shop. As an employer I purposely looked past her disability and, like I would with any other employee, focused on her training, skills, experience, and interests. I am very pleased with her job performance. She has some really great qualities, including reliability and productivity. She is a very valuable employee in here. When I first hired her, I provided her with training and a supportive environment where she could succeed. This included clearly explaining each task, using easy to understand language, providing consistency in my own actions, and arranging flexible hours that work for both of us. I feel it’s important that potential employers, and the general community, understand that just because a person has a label, they also have abilities and CAN contribute.

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