

# People with FASD are People FIRST: Building Relationships

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# What are we going to explore?

- What are relationships?
- Why are they important?
- Why are they important for people with FASD?
- What do they have to do with our roles as parents, caregivers, or professionals supporting someone with FASD? ('She gets me!')
- How do we build effective relationships with individuals with FASD?

# People First Language

- People First: a respectful concept from the broader disAbility community.
- Watching our language when speaking about FASD? Modeling for others? Respectfully challenging others?
- Do words matter that much?

# What is a relationship?

- Relationships are an abstract concept.
- BUT, relationships are built on concrete actions.
- Relationships occur when there is a connection, interaction, association or kinship between people. Often there is an emotional aspect to relationships.

# Building Block: Concrete Actions

- Our relationships with individuals with FASD may be more successful if we focus on concrete action versus talking about abstract ideas.
- Abstract ideas help us to understand FASD.
- Concrete action helps us build connection to people with FASD.

# ‘Just give me the strategies to work with FASD’

- All people are complex.
- People with FASD are people first. They arrive as infants with a personality, a genetic makeup, with potential for strengths and skills.
- They happen to have been exposed to alcohol in utero, which has added another layer of complexity to their makeup.

# Relationships and FASD Strategies

- Strategies are utilized in the context of relationships.
- Strategies without relationship are usually less effective, or cannot be utilized at all.
- Without relationship the individual with FASD may not engage with you.

# Attachment and FASD

- What is attachment and why does it exist?
- How can this help keep my child/youth safe?
- But can people with FASD attach?
- Perseverative attachment; placement moves.
- Components of FASD that may interfere with attachment.
- Early attachment becomes the foundation of our perception of relationships in our lives.

# Relationships and FASD: What do we need to consider?

- Person's lived experiences: years of being misunderstood? Chronic 'failure'? Layers of loss and grief? Trauma?
- *LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE* – keep it simple, keep it concrete, pause and wait, and *listen to person's feedback*.
- ABSTRACT concepts.
- Difficulty with seeing the big picture of actions and consequences.
- Sensory issues.

# Who Has a Relationship with People with FASD?

- Parents and caregivers
- Day care and youth care workers
- Teachers and school personnel
- Neighbours and community members
- Businesses
- Health care professionals
- Social services professionals

# Building Relationships

- Complex and somewhat abstract
- Concrete action – building blocks
- May change over time – *balancing the fit of* expectations as children grow older.
- Building blocks intersect with one another

# Building blocks for relationships with people with FASD

- People first – who is this person in front of me, what matters to them, what are they good at?
- What do they need from me right now?
- Promises and commitments; time frames.
- Grief and disappointments – trust

# Key Moments regarding Attachment

- When child or person is:
  - Ill
  - Frightened
  - Upset
  - Stressed
- Stress reactions occur more quickly and more often in people with FASD. (e.g. hungry and sick dog).

# Building Blocks: Safety

- ‘Secure base’ – attachment theory
- Establishing safety
- Safety for you and others with FASD
- Useful concept to teach regarding limit setting and boundaries.

# Building Blocks: Understanding Other's Perspective

- What is FASD? How does it affect people? How does it affect this *specific* person with FASD?
- How does this person with FASD see and understand the world around him or her?

# Building Blocks: Check our own Ego at the Door

- People with FASD may struggle with understanding our perspective.
- Don't take this personally.
- Be concrete in explaining your perspective if need be.
- Avoid lengthy attempts to have them understand your point of view.
- *Use your support system for the understanding and support you need.*

# Building Blocks: Beware Emotional Sponges

- Alternately people with FASD may be ‘emotional sponges’ (Nathan Ory)
- They may be so empathetic they become overwhelmed and flooded by other’s emotions.
- Stay calm. Manage emotional reactions away from individual. Utilize your support system for debriefing, and emotional support for yourself.

# Building Blocks: Respect

- Respect of person with FASD at all times.
- Respect – an abstract concept.
- Teach respect as concrete actions and by example.
- Respect of person with FASD even when they are not respecting you.
- Being respectful of the privacy of a person with FASD.
- Modeling boundaries, and concrete strategies.

# Building Blocks: Trust

- Developing trust – may be a one-way street.
- Being predictable – increases trustworthiness.
- Trust may be hard to build, but easy to lose.
- Vulnerability: when someone trusts strangers.
- When you can't trust – hurt feelings.

# Building Blocks: Choices and Self-determination

- Choices
- Practice with ‘forced choices’ when younger.
- Self-determination
- ‘Giving up control to get control’ (Jan Lutke)
- Making choices concrete for people with FASD.
- Going along for the ride with someone with FASD, even when you disagree with them.

# Human Desire for Relationships

- Children with FASD without friends.
- Adolescence – normative desire for friends.
- Young adulthood – normative desire for intimate partners.
- Good friends, ‘bad’ friends.
- When ‘friends’ are victimizing individuals with FASD.

# FASD Strategies without Relationship

May lead to:

- Conflict
- Person with FASD refusing to engage, refusing to accept assistance, leaving or running away.
- Power and control issues.
- Power struggles may erupt.
- Further damage to relationships.

# FASD Strategies WITH a Good Relationship

- Lead to:
- Trust
- Engagement
- Acceptance of assistance when needed
- Requests for help
- Improved quality of life for everyone.

# Questions?



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