



FASD Network News

FASD SUPPORT NETWORK
OF SASKATCHEWAN INC.

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A Note to our Readers

Hello Friends,

When out on a walk the other night, I felt a distinct chill in the air that seemed to hold a promise of winter, yet the Canada geese remain on the river. I suppose they must know what they are doing so I will just enjoy them and not worry about their decision to linger on.

This fall the Network has successfully hosted a couple of major events. We held a conference in partnership with the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute in September. We were pleased to have over 250 participants and many high quality local and national speakers.

In November, we held our 3rd Annual Parent Retreat. What a remarkable event! Along with our board members, staff of the Network hosted 85 parents and grandparents from across the province. Guest speakers were Wendy Edey, of the Hope Foundation of Alberta, and Janet Christie, a parent from Victoria BC. Both shared their wisdom with our guests. I believe that each speaker broke into song at some point in her presentation. To top it off,

Wendy Edey led us all in a final sing-a-long that had us laughing pretty hard. How cool is that?

Unfortunately, we don't have much time to reflect on these events because there are more activities and events going on. As always, we welcome calls to our office. If you are seeking information, support or Network materials call our toll free line. We will be happy to hear from you.

Watch your inbox, mailbox or our website for registration information and details about upcoming training with guest presenter, Nathan Ory. With funding from Saskatchewan Health Cognitive Disability Strategy we are able to offer training at no cost to participants. Training will be held in Saskatoon Feb 8-9 and North Battleford Feb10-11th, 2010.

If you haven't visited our website for awhile, stop in. You can now download 10 archived issues of *Living with FASD*. This is a new addition to our site that I think you will find helpful.

Beverly

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Understanding Decision Making and FASD

by Beverly Palibroda

Decisions are hard. Who hasn't worried over a decision and felt stressed about what is right or what is wrong or made a big decision and then wondered if that was the best decision. Making a decision is a mental task that requires different cognitive processes. When we make a decision we weigh options, contemplate, predict outcomes, compare ideas and reflect on possibilities.

Parents, caregivers and support providers understand that decisions are hard for people with FASD. For children, youth and adults affected by prenatal alcohol exposure, the usual challenges of decision making are even harder because of complex brain differences. Everyday decisions that come up regularly can be just as confusing, time consuming, stressful and taxing as those big life-changing decisions that only come up once in awhile.

Because of brain differences, decisions are regularly made impulsively. Impulsive decisions are made without allowing enough time to truly consider or understand all the facts. Impulsive decisions can also be made when emotions are strong or excitement levels are high. Our brains do not work as well when in an excited state. This can result in a decision that is much different than a decision made in a calm state of mind.



It is common for individuals affected by FASD to have an impaired ability to predict outcomes or clearly understand the consequences of their decisions. Individuals are often naïve about the good or harm that can happen to oneself or others because of a decision they have made. It can seem to others that decisions do not make sense or are made in a selfish or thoughtless way. That is usually not the intention at all. In reality, the individual lacks the ability to predict what might happen or to connect that specific decision with a final outcome.

Still other decisions are made to gain the acceptance of friends, teachers, employers or a partner. Decisions are often made based on what others want rather than what an individual wants for herself or himself. This can lead to feelings of resentment or anger.

Sometimes inaction takes over and it appears that a decision has been made. What is sometimes really happening is that an individual has shut down or avoided making a decision

because the situation was too confusing. When feeling overwhelmed by a decision it is sometimes easier to avoid it and hope it goes away. This probably sounds familiar to many people.

Good decision making will likely be a life-long challenge for individuals with FASD. Ideally, individuals will have the aid of trusted parents, caregivers, support providers, extended family members and professionals to help them make decisions throughout their life.



The process of helping an individual make decisions is often called **supported decision making**. Supported decision making involves shared effort with an individual and strives for a level of interdependence. The purpose is not to gain control over another person, but to help that person to be as successful as possible within acceptable safe and healthy boundaries. Supported decision making is a tool to help vulnerable individuals express their needs and act on their ideas.



Some Tips to Help with Decisions

by Beverly Palibroda

Because we know that individuals affected by prenatal alcohol exposure often have trouble making decisions, it is logical for parents and support providers to gain practical skills that can help individuals to make decisions. Here are a few ideas...

First, it is important to accept that making decisions is something an individual will probably need help with for life. So, don't get frustrated when you are continually required to help. That is just how things are.

Remind yourself that some days decisions may come more easily than others and some days an individual will need more support than other days.

Begin to offer support with decision making early and often. Starting early makes it easier for a child to accept help with problem solving or making choices as she ages into the teen and adult years. Getting help often with decisions reinforces that this is an accepted way of doing things.

Talk about how everyone needs help with decisions. Try to seek out times where you can model asking for and receiving help with one of your decisions. Point out times when you or others seek the support of an elder, spiritual leader, counselor, healthcare provider, friend or relative.

It is also wise to teach that everyone makes mistakes or sometimes makes poorer choices. This is a risk of making decisions.

Model a calm and steady presence when poor decisions or mistakes are made. Strong emotion or heightened reactions are rarely helpful.



Decisions are hard mental work. Allow plenty of time for processing.

Noise and activity are distracting and make it harder to tackle decisions. Minimize all kinds of sensory input.

Keep in mind that you may need to help a child, youth or adult with the same kind of decision over and over again. They may not be able to take what was learned from one experience to another.

Do not overcomplicate or over-analyze a problem if that will only make it more confusing. Sometimes it is best to stick to the most basic information and use clear communication to come to a decision.

When good decisions are made, whether big or small, recognize and celebrate the good decision.

For some individuals, the help with decisions must be very immediate. If it happened yesterday it is over; if it will happen tomorrow, it needs to be talked about and decided tomorrow.

Multiple options and choices can be overwhelming. Present a choice between 2 options. Do not expect an individual to be able to generate a range of possible options on their own.

It can help to remind the individual, "I am helping you make this decision because I care about you. I want good things for you."

Good life skills, predictable routines and healthy daily habits take much of the guesswork out of life. Teach and build on these habits and routines.

Especially when faced with a serious safety, legal, moral or health issue, you might need to be very directive and state what a good decision would be. Encourage that good decision.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Network has two FASD Tips on decision making.

Tip #1 How you can help Children Make Decisions and Tip #5 Helping Teens and Adults with Decisions.

Contact us for a copy.





Membership Form

Please support the Network by filling out this form to become a member. Membership includes the Network's twice yearly publication *Living with FASD*, copies of Network materials including FASD Tips in pictorial and text format, receipt of our newsletter, *Network News*, four times each year plus notices of upcoming events and workshops.

- I wish to become a new member of the FASD Support Network of Saskatchewan for the 2010 year.
- I am renewing my membership with the FASD Support Network of Saskatchewan for the 2010 year.
- I am a parent or caregiver of an individual with FASD. I will have voting privileges.
- I am enclosing my \$15.00 membership fee.
- I am enclosing a donation in the amount of \$_____ (Charitable donation receipts will be issued on all donations over \$10.00)

Name: _____

Organization (if applicable) : _____

Address: _____

Town/City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Date Submitted: _____

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