



FASD Network News

FASD SUPPORT NETWORK
OF SASKATCHEWAN INC.

December 2008 - Issue 21

A Note to our Readers

Hello Friends,

At the FASD Support Network, we are always on the lookout for topics for the Network News. In every issue we try to include information that is fresh and interesting and most importantly, helpful. Often, it is you, our readers that give us our ideas. When we chat with you on our toll free support line, share emails or meet at community events you tell us what is on your mind. That helps us to know how we can help you.

One of the issues that worries parents and caregivers is the danger of computer use. You are asking questions like: How can I keep my child safe when online?

What do other parents do? What are the real risks? How much computer use is too much? In this issue we have tackled this tough topic, hoping it will be helpful and knowing that that this is just a beginning.

On another note, on behalf of the Network, I would like to wish a warm welcome to our two new staff members Jessica Kaban and Lynette Janzen. Both joined us this fall and have been busy with a variety of office activities. We are thrilled to have both on the Network team!

Beverly

Did you know?

FASD: Linking Brain Function with Behaviours with Diane Malbin

Date: February 9th - 13th, 2009
 Location: February 9th Basic Training in Regina, SK
 February 10th Basic Training in Saskatoon, SK
 February 11th - 13th Intensive Training in Saskatoon, SK
 Email: fasdoffice@sasktel.net Phone: (306) 975 - 0896

The 3rd International Conference on FASD Integrated Research, Policy and Promising Practice Around the World: A Catalyst for Change

Date: March 11 - 14, 2009
 Location: Victoria Conference Centre, Victoria, British Columbia
 Website: <http://www.interprofessional.ubc.ca/FASD09.htm>
 E-mail: ipad@interchange.ubc.ca

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HOW TO CONTACT US

FASD Support Network of Saskatchewan

510 Cynthia Street
 Saskatoon, SK S7L 7K7
 Toll Free: 1-866-673-3276

Angela Schmolke

Executive Director
 306-975-0884
fasdnetwork@sasktel.net
www.skfasnetwork.ca

Jessica Kaban

Communications/Project Coordinator
 306-975-0806
fasdcommunications@sasktel.net



Online Safety: What are the Risks?

Living in an On-Line World

Computers are an important part of our everyday lives. We rely on them to find out what is going on in the world around us, to communicate with friends and family and to explore new ideas and information. Starting at a young age, computers and 'the web' become a magical place of discovery. While computers can be a great tool for learning and a time saver for us all, parents and caregivers also need to be aware of the dangers of computer use.



Those in the circle of support for youth or adults affected by FASD might find that they are at greater risk for dangerous computer use. Because of injury to the brain, people with FASD can be easily influenced by others, may struggle to understand boundaries or might make impulsive decisions. Poor judgment and struggles with sorting through the social cues received through the computer screen can also cause problems. For these reasons, and more, online risks may be intensified for individuals with FASD and their families.

Online Risks & Dangers

While there are lots of risks and dangers that we should all be aware of as we 'log on' each day, the list below identifies a few that might be especially troublesome for someone with FASD.

Being online for long amounts of time

A person affected by FASD might become easily addicted to online games, online chatting, or seeing stimulating images. As the July issue of the Network News outlined, this kind of sensory excitement can cause a youth or adult with FASD to feel overwhelmed or anxious.

Talking to strangers online

Things like email, chatrooms, and Facebook (a social networking site where you create a profile including pictures and personal information, collect 'friends' and message each other back and forth) are ways to connect with others.

Unfortunately, the connections are often made with strangers. For someone with FASD who may struggle to build positive and healthy relationships with others, meeting people online can feel great. But these types of unsupervised relationships can be dangerous and in this way the computer can be a dangerous place.

Seeing violent or sexual pictures, videos or images online Violent and sexual content are all too easy to find

online. Some websites teach people how to do dangerous things—like learning to send threatening letters or learning how to build bombs.

Sharing personal information like names, addresses, photos, and even private financial information

An individual with FASD may be taken advantage of when they are convinced to give out their credit card or banking information online. They may sign up for expensive services or buy things that they can't afford.

Of course, we are all at risk when we spend time on the internet. But for an individual affected by FASD, online dangers like these can become much more serious more quickly.

The issues covered in this article simply scratch the surface of this huge topic. Families and individuals with FASD will have different experiences and different worries. But, the next article offers up some strategies that might help your family manage the risks you may be experiencing.

More Information

Check out the following Canadian sites for more information about online risks:

- Visit www.cybertip.ca
- Visit www.media-awareness.ca



What You Can Do to Protect Your Family

Learning more about some of the possible risks of internet and computer use is a good first step. The next step is knowing what to do about those risks. How do you keep a youth or adult out of harm's way when it seems like danger lurks at every turn? Knowing what to do and knowing which strategies to use is a more complex part of the journey that will likely be different for everyone. Keep in mind your son's or daughter's unique qualities and challenges. You will need to find strategies that are a good fit. Methods that work for some families might just complicate and frustrate other families.

To get you started on this task, we have offered a few ideas. You will probably think of more as you go along.

Supervision

Computers are not all bad. Many people with FASD successfully use computers to have fun, gain employment skills or learn new things. Often, the key to successful and safe computer use is **supervision**. It can be hard to know how much supervision is needed. For example, it may be necessary to only allow internet use when you are right there to carefully monitor the activity. Or, it might be enough just to be nearby while the computer is being used. It is almost always best to avoid long periods of unsupervised time. It only takes a few minutes for violent or sexual images to 'pop-up',



games to be downloaded or for online chatting to lead to an unsafe situation.

Timed Use

We all know how easily the minutes can slip away as we stroll through cyberspace.

Try using a **kitchen timer** to manage the amount of time your son or daughter spends online. The ringing of a timer gives an audio signal to end the activity. If this causes conflict, try thinking of a different and interesting activity or item to do next as a way to redirect their attention.



Online Rules



A short list of clearly stated rules might be useful. If it helps, the list can include

visual cues and pictures. Try **posting the list** next to the computer and reviewing it routinely before using the internet. This is a good strategy for those who benefit from structure and visual reminders.

Internet Contract

Some parents have found that having their child agree to certain rules by signing an "internet contract" is a creative strategy that works. The contract might have statements like:

I will not...

- ✓ *give out my name, telephone number or address online*
- ✓ *use the computer after 11:00pm*
- ✓ *visit the websites listed below...*

While a written contract can be a useful tool, it can also be asking far too much of someone with a brain injury. Tools like the **internet contract** however, can be changed to work for your family.

Parental Controls & Filtering Devices

Setting parental controls is a good way to keep in check the content and activities of your home computer. The **parental controls** let you:

- restrict specific websites
- set the time of day the internet is permitted to be in use
- monitor the types of online games permitted

There are also **filtering devices** (software that you can download or buy) that can block unsafe websites, images and even text.

Hopefully some of these suggestions will be useful to your family. Routinely talking with your daughter or son and looking for ways to encourage a healthy and balanced life can protect against online dangers and everyday dangers.

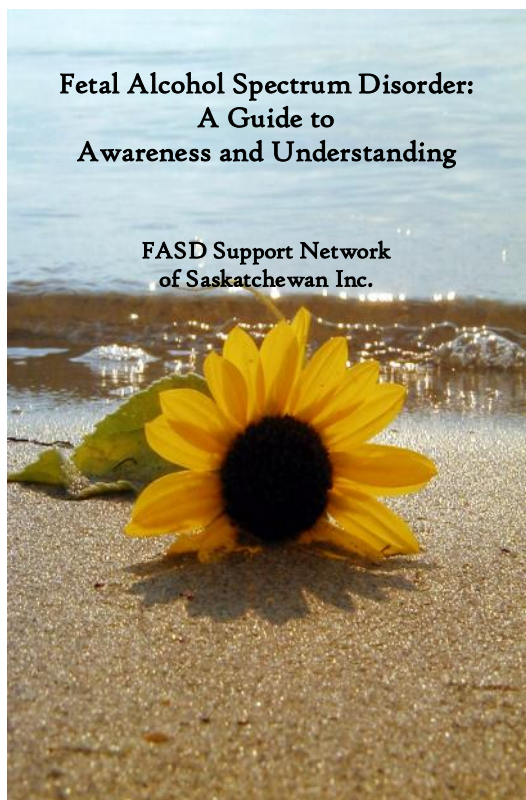
More Information

To make changes to the Parental Controls on your home computer go to the Control Panel on your Start Menu and select Parental Controls to get started.

When thinking about strategies, you can check out our FASD Tip #20. The 8 Magic Keys are always helpful when trying to know how to help someone with FASD.



Order FASD: A Guide to Awareness and Understanding



This Guide is a great tool for parents, caregivers, family members, professionals, frontline workers and members of the general public. It will give you a lot of basic information about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and some helpful strategies and tips. We hope that you will order a copy for yourself and perhaps additional copies for people in your son's or daughter's life who might find it useful (ie: teachers, coaches, employers). It is our hope that by increasing awareness and understanding of FASD we will help to improve the lives of individuals and families living with FASD.

To order your copy of this Guide, please complete the order form below and return it to the Network. We will send you up to five copies of *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: A Guide to Awareness and Understanding* free of charge. You will be invoiced in the amount of \$1 for each copy over the first five ordered.

Name: _____

Organization Name (if applicable): _____

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Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Who shall we bill any shipping/handling costs to? _____

Please send completed order form by email, mail or fax to:

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