



FASD Network News

FASD SUPPORT NETWORK
OF SASKATCHEWAN INC.

July 2009 - Issue 22

A Note to our Readers

Hello Friends,

It has been awhile since the Network has connected with the readers of the *Network News*. I can assure you that it feels good to send off this issue to our readers and to check this off my To Do list.

To begin this issue, I would like to share some updates from around the Network office. First, I offer sincere congratulations to Jessica Kaban, the newly appointed Executive Director of the Network. Members of the board of directors, along with the staff, are so happy that Jessica has accepted this position. We have already seen the results of her talents and we are confident that her energy and skills will continue to lead the Network in positive directions.

Among the most important activities of the Network is our delivery of educational materials, events and training throughout the province. Lynette Janzen, our capable and hardworking Events Coordinator, has been busy during the past year with such tasks. Lynette is currently planning and organizing a

number of events to take place in the coming months. We will keep you posted!

After spending much of the past year juggling two amazing jobs, I am happy to be back at the Network full-time. In the position of Communications Coordinator, I am privileged to have the opportunity to connect with folks through our written materials, email contact list and over the telephone.

As a final note, the Network recently held our Annual General Meeting. This was a great time for board and staff to not only review the year's accomplishments, but also to look to the future with a keen desire to learn how we can better meet the needs of individuals and families living with FASD.

From all of us at the Network, we wish you a wonderful summer and hope that you enjoy this issue of the *Network News*.

Beverly

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Social Skills and Individuals with FASD

by Beverly Palibroda

Parents and caregivers identify that children, youth and adults affected by FASD have trouble with things like making friends, getting along with others, understanding and expressing feelings, managing moods, solving problems calmly, cooperating or knowing how to act during family events, school activities or in a workplace.

All these areas of trouble relate to the development and use of **social skills**. All humans begin to learn social skills early in life and develop and use social skills for our entire lives. Generally, a range of social skills is gained by learning from others, by watching, interpreting social situations, linking our actions to the responses of those around us and remembering which social rules apply to which situation.

Social skills are learned in many environments. We gain skills in the family home, at school, in the community or in a workplace. Most people readily transfer what has been learned in one setting to another setting. This is often called **generalization**.

It is also important to remember that in addition to learning social skills from those around us and our environments, our social skills are influenced by individual temperament and cognitive and behavioural abilities and disabilities.



Because of brain differences of individuals with FASD, resulting from prenatal alcohol exposure, we see a range of cognitive and behavioural disabilities that can impair social skills and negatively influence quality of life. The ability to learn, remember, apply social skills accurately, consider actions and generalize skills to other situations or settings is impaired in individuals with FASD.

This does not mean that individuals with FASD are not social or do not want to use these skills. Everyone is unique; some individuals have well developed social skills. Sometimes an overly social nature can actually cause a different set of problems. Other individuals may have more struggles with social skills and may be seen as socially awkward.

Social skills are the tools of interpersonal situations and relationships. Well developed skills help individuals with FASD to have healthier and safer relationships, stronger connections with family and community and more friends. Simply put, individuals with better social skills are more

likable. It is easier to accept and be friends with someone who is able to take turns in conversation, not laugh when others feel embarrassed, sort out problems without yelling or offer a genuine thank you when help is received. Social graces make it easier to accept and cope with some of the struggles that may arise for individuals with FASD. These factors improve confidence, self-esteem and nurture a sense of belonging.

A variety of social skills can be taught, practiced and learned. It may take longer for children, youth and adults with FASD to learn these skills. Different ways of teaching the skills might be needed. But, it is advisable to help individuals gain these skills. The article on the next page offers some ideas about how to teach social skills.

CONSIDER THIS...

Individuals with poor social skills are often thought to be odd or are seen as social misfits. For this reason, they are stigmatized and excluded from activities. It is important for all of us to learn and use social skills, but it is also important to teach those who exclude or judge others they see as "different" to be more accepting and to respect each person's unique and distinct way of being in this world.



Some Tips for Teaching Social Skills

by Beverly Palibroda

Individuals with FASD are unique and each person will have her or his own preferred ways of learning. However, many children, youth and adults living with FASD tend to learn best by doing. This means that they understand concepts better when they can actively participate in the learning rather than just thinking about the task. Individuals with FASD are often described as **concrete** thinkers, meaning that when they can see, touch or hold an actual physical item they can think about and learn about that item better.

In contrast, **abstract** thinking is hard for individuals affected by FASD. Abstract concepts, are those ideas that must be understood intellectually. Abstract concepts relate to emotions, qualities or ideas rather than physical objects or activities. The range of behaviours we consider to be social skills is very abstract. You can not touch or hold politeness in your hand, yet we want to teach how to be polite. The idea of respect is very abstract and can not be easily described or explained but is vital to our relationships.

So, how then do we teach these important abstract skills? It is best to teach social skills with great care and intention and to begin the teaching as early as possible. It is good to use approaches that emphasize well planned instruction, active participation, interaction, back and forth discussion and lots of practice.

Approaches like **modeling** (displaying the skill through your own actions), **demonstrating** (showing what the skill looks like), **role playing** (taking on roles and acting out situations), **practicing** (offering many chances to try the skill) and **discussion, feedback and encouragement** seem to work best.

A good teaching pattern:

- Model
- Demonstrate
- Explain and discuss
- Practice
- Feedback and praise

Try to find times to encourage individuals to use the skill in a natural setting. Offer prompts and acknowledge the skill in a **genuine way**. Remember, you will likely need to repeat the teaching and practice the skill over and over again.

Tip: It might be a good idea to videotape practice sessions.

Photographs also help to teach about abstract ideas..



SOME IMPORTANT SOCIAL SKILLS

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| ✓ Being polite | ✓ Responding to feelings |
| ✓ Using manners | ✓ Using and understanding nonverbal language (eye contact, body language, tone, volume) |
| ✓ Offering an apology | ✓ How to disagree or say no |
| ✓ Asking for help | ✓ Cooperating |
| ✓ Using boundaries | ✓ Sharing |
| ✓ Showing respect | ✓ Giving a compliment |
| ✓ Being kind | ✓ Being honest |
| ✓ How to be assertive | ✓ Self disclosure-what to disclose about yourself and when |
| ✓ Expressing empathy | |
| ✓ Making conversation | |
| ✓ Listening | |
| ✓ Recognizing feelings | |



SAVE THE DATE

Mark your calendars!

This will be an exciting gathering for anyone interested in learning more about FASD.

- ✓ Parents
- ✓ Family members
- ✓ Service providers
- ✓ Professionals

FASD: Discovering, Connecting and Creating Change

September 24 - 25, 2009
Saskatoon Inn - Saskatoon, SK

Only 250 Spots Available, so Register Early!

Conference details will be available
in late June at:

www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca

and

www.skfasnetwork.ca

Partners

