



FASD: Questions and Answers



How do I explain to my other children, the behaviour of a sibling who has FASD and the challenges the whole family will experience?

by Anita Grosse

What we now know about FASD includes the basic facts that it is a form of brain damage, and the child will not grow out of it. The challenging behaviours we sometimes see are in large part due to the differences in how the FASD brain works. Mom and Dad are not to blame. The school is not to blame. The child is not to blame.

The question of how to interpret such complex issues to the rest of the family is anything but simple. It is also very important. We as parents and caregivers are the ones who do the actual teaching of the most important skills in life: how to care about each other, how to love, and how to recognize and accept in each other our own unique differences. It is in this context that teaching about FASD can most easily be accomplished.

While there is no right or wrong age to begin this teaching, it is important to realize that if other family members, however young or old, are being affected by behaviours, **that** is the time to start.

Teaching such important concepts requires two steps:

1. We need to think about what it actually is that we want our children to know.
2. We need to find ways to teach appropriately to the age and comprehension level of our kids.

1. What does our family need to know?

That everyone is special in different ways.

That some of us are really good at certain things like sports, music...

That some of us have things that are harder for us like sports, music...

That your brother or sister has some special problems with...

That we are a family and we care about each other.

That keeping everyone safe is important.

That keeping you and your sibling safe is mommy and daddy's job.

You can help by telling your sibling when something isn't safe, telling mommy or daddy...

That it is no one's fault that your brother or sister has these problems.

That any problem we have we can solve together.

That sometimes it will be hard, we can talk about that and help each other.

That sometimes you might feel like we let your brother or sister "get away with" more than you. We can talk about that. We don't love her or him more than you, but we do sometimes have to do things differently so she or he can understand.

2. Teach according to the comprehension level of your children.

For example, a preschool child can understand: "your brother has special problems" "his brain does not work like yours" "we love him" "we need to help him" "we all want to be safe."

As children get older they will better understand difference, and will

question "Why?" Beginning answers can be simple: "your brother's problems happened to him when growing in mother's tummy. It is not his fault. No one is to blame."

By the time siblings are in their teens, children can understand more complete explanations of FASD.

"Any problem we have we can solve together."

In giving such a short answer to such an impor-

tant question I don't want to give the impression that I think this is simple or easy. It isn't. Every family is unique and asking this question is the first step in finding the answers you need. Thanks for listening.

Anita Grosse is a social worker with the Kinsmen Children's Centre. We thank her for sharing her wisdom and expertise.

Thank you to SFASN Board members Shelley Kolisnek, Kim Skidmore, and Jo Male for your response to the call for questions. If other readers are interested in posing a question for response in the fall edition of *Living with FASD*, please contact us using the contact information on page 12.

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