



FASD: Questions and Answers



Q. I have heard that children with a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder often experience sensory integration problems. What does this mean and how do I know if my child might be having this problem?

Response By Lisa Brownstone

A. The five senses all work together to give us an accurate picture of our environment, who we are, and how we move and act. When the senses work well together (and this is often automatic) it is called sensory integration. We need to integrate all our senses for the complex learning and behaviours that are part of our lives.

For some people, sensory integration does not automatically evolve. The process of integrating sensory information becomes disordered, leading to problems in learning, behaviour and development. This is called sensory integration dysfunction.

Some signs of sensory integration problems are:

- Overly sensitive, or under sensitive, to touch, movement, sights or sounds
- Physical clumsiness or apparent carelessness
- Difficulty making transitions from one situation to another
- Delays in speech, language or motor skills

Sensory integration dysfunction can be hard to pick up. The following example shows the soft signs that were picked up by one family. The baby did not like being touched for any length of time, touch had to be firm, as opposed to soft touch or stroking. When she began eating solids, she separated out her food, and did not like certain textures, or food with much spice. She was always cold.

Once the family becomes concerned, sensory integration dysfunction must be assessed, and properly evaluated by an occupational therapist. Sometimes other therapists also provide evaluations. The evaluation should consist of a thorough history, standardized testing and structured observations of the responses to sensory stimulation and balance, posture, coordination and eye movements. The results will be analyzed and the therapist will guide the child through a series of therapeutic activities. Depending on the child, results can be dramatic and well worth the attempt.

For further information please contact Sensory Integration International at info@sensoryint.com, or write to Sensory Integration International at: P.O. Box 5339, Torrance, CA. 90510-5339.

The Saskatchewan Fetal Alcohol Support Network would like to extend our gratitude to Lisa Brownstone for her response to this question. Lisa is trained as an occupational therapist and has a wealth of professional and personal experience. She recently completed a Housing Feasibility Study for People with FASD. A copy of the final report can be obtained through the Network office or is available by contacting Lisa through email: lbrownstone@sasktel.net.

Did You Know?

The Network has a Tip for Parents and Caregivers titled: How you can Help a Child with FASD Learn to Cope with their Senses
For a copy visit our website at www.skfasnetwork.ca

Disclaimer: *Living with FASD* offers this question and answer column as general information. It is not intended as a substitute for professional advice on medical, behavioural, educational, or legal matters. The responses, when not reprinted from acknowledged sources, are provided by members of the Saskatchewan Fetal Alcohol Support Network and are the opinions of those members based on their experiences as parents and caregivers of people with FASD. If you have a question, contact the Network office; see contact information on page 12.

Live your questions now, and perhaps even without knowing it, you will live along some distant day into your answers.

Rainer Maria Rilke German lyric poet (1875 - 1926)

