

FASD in the New Zealand WORKPLACE



Recipe for Success

In your workplace add:

1 cup of education,

1 cup of structure and routine,

1 cup of practical, hands-on training and coaching

Add plenty of repetition and praise

1 good handful of supervision

Mix well with the spoon of understanding and tolerance

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What is FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is an umbrella term used to describe a range of physical and cognitive (learning and behavioural) deficits caused through pre-natal exposure to alcohol.

The physical features of FASD are often unnoticeable in adulthood. They include slow growth, small stature, small head size, wide set eyes, thin upper lip, flattened or smooth area between nose and upper lip (philtrum). It can also include heart and kidney defects, vision impairment and deformities in limbs.

Physical alterations are only present in a small percentage of the FASD population (estimated 10%). The organ most impacted by alcohol in utero is the brain as the brain is developing throughout entire gestation. This makes the cognitive, intellectual, learning and behavioural deficits the biggest challenge for those with FASD.

This challenge is also echoed for those working with someone with FASD – because it is a disability that is ‘unseen’ our expectations can be out of step with their capabilities.

Prevalence of FASD is unknown in New Zealand. However, international studies have indicated prevalence of 2%-5% of live births.

What can Employers Expect?

Typical Strengths

- ✚ Good verbal communication – often very chatty and engaging
- ✚ Loyal and friendly
- ✚ Generous and helpful
- ✚ Perseverance
- ✚ Creative – artistic, musical
- ✚ Practical aptitude
- ✚ Good with animals, young children and the elderly

Typical Challenges

- ✚ Memory difficulties
- ✚ Language processing/comprehension deficits
- ✚ Social difficulties and immaturity
- ✚ Easily over-whelmed or over-stimulated
- ✚ Poor impulse control and decision making skills
- ✚ Inability to understand abstract concepts – math, time, money
- ✚ Poor organisational skills and inability think too far ahead or understand consequences
- ✚ Easily distracted, short attention span
- ✚ Quickly frustrated with difficulty regulating emotions
- ✚ Fatigue
- ✚ Concrete thinkers. Take literal meaning.

What can Employers do to Help?

- ✚ Provide a structured work environment with very little changes day to day. Those with FASD can be inflexible in their thinking and they find it difficult to quickly adapt to change.
- ✚ Provide a position with routine. Same position, same task, same work colleagues every day.
- ✚ Keep instructions specific, simple and explain step by step. Do not give a string of instructions.
- ✚ Ensure training is hands-on. SHOW don't just tell. Use the TIPS teaching philosophy as a guide to coaching on the job:
 - **T**ell – explain what you want them to do
 - **I**llustrate – show them what you want them to do
 - **P**practice – let them practice the task in front of you
 - **S**upport – close supervision, check often to ensure their understanding
- ✚ Expect to have to repeat basic instructions often
- ✚ Provide visual cues to help them with task completion
- ✚ Help with time management by use of bells or buzzers for break start and stop times.
- ✚ Put with a 'work buddie' who can quietly give guidance in terms of social interactions and work place health and safety expectations. Avoid having them work alongside bad influences (they are vulnerable and easily led).
- ✚ Focus on strengths. Praise often.
- ✚ Allow flexibility in scheduling if signs of stress or fatigue are evident.
 - Part time hours may be more suitable especially in the beginning.
- ✚ Keep communications simple and concrete. Do not use phases or words with double meanings. For example; "the balls in your court"
- ✚ Limit choices and enforcing decision making from them.

The following is a list of differences detailing our experience with the education sector and workplace. It highlights the inflexibility of school and where some simple workplace accommodations have meant a measure of success for my own son.

Education Sector	Work Place
He needs to pay more attention to instructions	We have a board where we post all important daily information. We teach all our staff to refer to it every day. We are reminding him to check the board every day.
He needs to listen	We will put him with a work buddy who will be on hand to repeat instructions. We will make sure he is with someone who is patient.
He needs to be responsible for his own time management	We have set break times and a Team Co-ordinator who ensures everyone is back at work at the right time
He needs to form independent work habits and take responsibility for his own learning	We have a training co-ordinator who will work closely with him on the job (supported hands on learning). We use the TIPS method of training: Tell, Illustrate, Practice, Support
He needs to learn to transition well from class to class/subject to subject	We will have him repeat the same task until he is fully competent at it and before moving him on to more complex tasks. Repetitive and routine.
He is defiant and breaks the rules	We will ensure he is surrounded by a good team with good work ethic to ensure he is steered in the right direction.

Education Sector	Work Place
He needs to be socially isolated as he is a distraction to others	We encourage social interactions to build a sense of 'team'.
He has not fulfilled the criteria and will not get a certificate/award	We recognise outstanding performance of individuals but we also encourage and reward team effort.
He is too difficult to manage in the afternoons	We will trial him with full time hours and can scale that back if he becomes too fatigued.
He needs to start making choices for his own learning.	We will ensure a static work environment for him with set hours in the same department with the same colleagues. Choices to move to other departments will be limited.

Final Word:

Working and feeling useful and respected is an important part of life for everybody but perhaps more so for those with FASD. Too often these children are leaving school with no qualifications. They may not have been adequately supported in the education sector and leave with a real sense of failure that can spin them into anti-social and criminal behaviour.

If you can believe and focus on their strengths, understand and accommodate their deficits, then you could help restore some of their self-esteem and alter their life outcome.

If you can, it is also helpful to keep in touch with family/caregivers so that small problems do not become big problems. FASD is a spectrum and very individual. Ensure you get to know the person you employ.