

Important Areas for Persons with FASD to Understand

Persons with FASD need to understand and practice the following. Both the parents and professionals need to teach these to the persons with FASD.

1. Recognize and accept that you have organic brain damage. This does not mean you are a bad person and it does not mean you have to have a bad life. It probably means your life will look different than you think it should, but it can be a good life. Different does not mean bad. Different is necessary for you to be successful. If you cannot admit that you have a problem, if you blame everyone else when something goes wrong, then you cannot find solutions and move on. You need to make plans and concentrate on solutions and skills.

A simple formula: There are three things you must do when you have done something wrong or made a mistake. 1st–recognize that you did something wrong. 2nd–ask forgiveness. 3rd–make a plan how not to do it again, or to change the way you do it.

Learn about FASD. Study and do our workbook and “Pathways to Hope.” Use our website: www.hayskids.org. Study from other teachers also. You may need to hear an idea or strategy many times, from more than one person, before you can truly understand and use it.

2. You need to trust the correct people. These are usually people who have been there helping you for years. These are people who you know want to help you even when you disagree with them. They will help you accomplish your goals in life. These are not people who will help you to sneak, do things that are wrong or go against the people who help you to do good.

Just because a person seems nice or good to you does not mean that you can trust them. There are people who will try to trick you so that they can get you to do things they want you to do to, things that could get you in serious trouble. Ask the people who have been there for you what they think of someone before you decide if the new person is someone you can trust.

Usually you can trust your family; however, if your family is struggling with alcohol or drugs, sexuality, relationships, troubles with the law, and moral issues you need to find someone else to trust. This could be your minister, teacher, neighbor, or a professional who works with you.

3. Forgiveness - you need to forgive:
- those who do not understand your organic brain damage or that forget you will sometimes:
 - make bad choices - do things that you either do not want to do or know that you shouldn't –do not seem to learn from your mistakes

- get confused and upset
- seem to have a bad attitude or don't care and can even appear to be mean at times
- have a lack of drive or skills to carry out long term goals or even daily tasks
- those who shame you, blame you, or judge her heart

The people who are most likely to do this are family, teachers or bosses, friends, professionals serving you, and in general people who you come in contact with. In other words, everyone will do this at one time or another, even if they are someone that understands and you trust.

- yourself for doing the above items - do not use FASD as an excuse for your actions but rather understand it is often the reason. Then seek supports and make a plan which will help you to not do these things again. (Which is the reason for this teaching).
- your biological mother whose drinking caused you to have FASD. There can be many reasons – she did not know she was pregnant – she may have her own addictions - her doctor told her it was all right to drink – her own painful childhood or adult life – she may have been genetically predisposed to alcohol – I have never known of a mother who set out to hurt her unborn child. I do know she was trying to be a good mom. Sadly, she drank.

4. “Shut up and listen,” stop defending yourself. I use the word shut up on purpose, even though we're not allowed to use it in our home. I really want to emphasize that when someone is trying to talk to you or teach you something you must be quiet and listen. If you are defending your action and blaming others it not only upsets the person who is trying to talk to you but it does not allow you to hear and understand what they are trying to tell you.

Often times if a situation escalates and/or drags on, it is because you will not be quiet and listen. Instead you will either deny, try to explain yourself, or become confused. This does not make you a bad person but it does make it frustrating. Not only frustrating to you but also to the person who is trying to help you.

Fitting into the same category is learning the life skill of ignoring. You need to ignore when someone is trying to upset you, trying to get you to react, or trying to get you in trouble. They will often do this by looking at you the “wrong” way, saying something you do not like, and possibly even touching you. When you react by getting upset, they often feel they have won. They are wrong, but remember, if you react, you lose. Instead of reacting, just ignore it or tell your parents or supervisor.

5. Learning these next three life skills will really help you: asking for help, accepting help, and being nice. Accepting help is not a sign of weakness nor is it a disability; not accepting help is a sign of weakness and it will disable you.

One of the most important things we do in life, the thing that gives us purpose, is helping people. Do not fall into the trap that says you're stupid if you need help.

Everyone needs help. We go to the doctor to get help with the medical problem, we go to the store because we can't grow all of our own food, and at birth we are given parents to help us. When we're old, hopefully, our children we helped will help us. Ideally we will look at our job as helping people. I certainly look at my mechanic as someone who helps me.

You need to learn to ask for help. This is a sign of a healthy person. If I did not ask people to edit what I write you would not be able to understand it. I feel I have very important things to teach; however, I am not a gifted writer. So, I asked for help.

Asking for help tells others that you want to understand and/or do the right things. Then people will help you. Your life will go better if you learn this skill. It is not a sign of weakness. It certainly will be a strength.

6. I am now going to tell you some FASD statistics. I do not tell you these to discourage you or to make you feel bad. I tell them to you to let you know what you're up against and to encourage you to accept help and make strategies so that you do not become a victim to them.

80% of persons with FASD cannot keep a job. 70% will be locked up for alcohol drug rehab, mental health, or the number 1 reason is for committing a crime. (The biggest reason people commit crimes is because of their choice of friends.) 60% will have trouble finishing school. (I want to encourage you to keep trying to finish school. It can make your life easier.) Over 50% will do things sexually which can get them into legal trouble.

Who you choose for friends will be one of the most important decisions you will make. Friends are people who encourage you to do good. They're not people who encourage you to lie, to sneak, or do things you know you shouldn't. The choice of friends is the number 1 reason people drink, do drugs, and do things which could get them into trouble with the law. Even if you are not doing these things, if your friends are, you will be vulnerable to being accused. You will be judged by who your friends are.

Sexuality is an incredibly important subject. It has caused many emotional, physical, and legal problems for so many persons with FASD. You need to recognize your vulnerability in this area. You must be willing and open to discuss this topic with someone you trust. Poor judgment in this area can make permanent changes in your life, physically, emotionally, and/or legally. Often it impacts all three at once. It is best if you wait until you're happily married.

7. Wait until you have a feasible plan and are developmentally ready before making changes. This would be true for moving out, learning to drive, going on to school after high school, dating, and many other things.

With that said, you need to understand that sometimes lack of drive or motivation can be a problem for persons with FASD. This makes everything a lot trickier. It is extremely important at this point to work with people who have been there for you, who care about you, and who you truly can trust.

Just because you cannot do something now does not mean you will not be able to do it in the future. Many people in their late 20s to mid 30s have what we refer to as a developmental growth spurt. What this looks like and when it happens varies from person to person. Sometimes it means a person can now keep a job. It could mean they quit making bad choices and hanging out with the people who get them into trouble. Sometimes it means they quit using alcohol or drugs. It normally means the person is willing to ask for and accept help. If you work on this skill now, you will be on your way to a developmental growth spurt.

For some this developmental growth spurt comes sooner. There are things which you can do which may speed up the process. Things such as; what you eat, exercise, getting plenty of sleep, choice of friends, accepting help, learning both academic and life skills, doing things which improve your executive functioning skills, and having good values. You can also do things which slow down your developmental growth. These things include drinking or doing drugs, denying you have FASD, blaming others for anything that goes wrong, choosing the wrong friends, and not accepting help. The way you treat your body by what you eat, the amount of exercise and sleep you get will also affect your brain function and the developmental growth spurt.

You can learn more about these things on our website, www.hayskids.org. Go to the heading "for persons with".