

TEACHING THEM ABOUT FASD Part 2

I received a call from the mother of a 15-year-old girl whom they were concerned about. The mother described the young lady as being friendly, sweet, usually well-mannered, doing well enough in school, can be helpful, but sometimes extremely spacey. She is liked by most kids and adults. She has been learning to do chores around the house for several years.

One of their daughter's chores was the upstairs hallway. One Saturday morning, about six months ago, the mother told her that the hallway needed attention. The daughter should vacuum and mop it. A little later mom saw the girl playing and asked her if she had done the hallway. The girl assured her that she had. Mom checked it and then called the girl upstairs. As the two of them stood looking at the hallway, Mom once again asked her if she had vacuumed and mopped the hall. Once again the girl assured her that she had. Mom pointed out some very large dust bunnies, a couple pieces of paper, and a shirt laying in the hall. The girl started to tear up. Mom gently asked her why she was starting to cry and added, "I'm not yelling at you." The daughter replied, "It is as if you don't believe me." After mom and dad talked about what had happened, they gently asked their daughter to do the hallway again.

The parents believed that their daughter honestly thought she done the hall. They realized it would be wrong of them to accuse her of having not done it. They felt they should not judge her heart. If this happens again, which they knew it would, they would just gently ask her to do what needed to be done. They decided they needed to take the same approach when dealing with other areas of her life. They also decided they needed to talk to her teacher, for this had been an area of contention in class.

During the next few months when a chore was not done well enough, the parents would simply ask her to fix it. During this time the parents talked about their daughters need to understand that this was part of her Fetal Alcohol. They knew this was going to be tough. Their daughter did not want to talk about FASD.

A few days ago their daughter was supposed to clean the two bathrooms. After the daughter said she had cleaned the bathroom, she went with her mom and dad to look at the first bathroom. While standing there the mother asked their daughter if she had cleaned the bathroom. She said she had. The bathroom floor had paper on it and was dirty. The sink was dirty and the wastebasket was missing. They then went downstairs to check out the second bathroom. It was even worse. The wastebasket was overflowing, the floor had obviously not been done, and the mirror had toothpaste on it in large smudges. The father asked if she cleaned this bathroom. The daughter said she had. The parents then gently asked her to clean both bathrooms again and to let them know when she was finished so they could inspect them.

Two days later they asked me if I would talk to her about her having FASD. They told me that they had talked to her several times in the past but they did not feel she understood.

So I met with her. Because she knew me, it was easier. The first thing I had her do was fill out a “thinking page”. This is part of a cognitive thinking program that we wrote and use. (It is available for free on our website.) I like using it because it gives the child time to think about what happened and helps to create a safe nonthreatening dialogue.

After she filled it out we talked about what happened. She told me she just needed to pay better attention when she was doing her chores. She also knew she needed to not have a bad attitude when her mom was trying to talk to her about how she had done her work.

In the past it would’ve ended there. She was humble, sorry for not having done the job, and sorry for having had a little bit of an attitude with the mom. I took it even further. On the backside of the page I slowly wrote five words on the upper left hand side.

I wrote *liar, lazy, oppositional, stupid, and evil*. I then asked her if she was lying when she told her mom she had done the bathroom. She said “no.” I asked her if she was just being lazy when she cleaned the bathroom. I asked her if she was just being oppositional, which meant that she purposely was causing trouble. I asked her if she was just stupid; I immediately told her I did not think she was stupid. I then ask if she was just being evil. She said no to each of these. I asked her to tell me what was happening.

She said she was not paying attention and that she had a bad attitude. So I wrote those things in the top right-hand corner. Then in between the two columns, at the top, in the center of the page I wrote in large capital letters FASD. I told her that if she was not being a liar, lazy, oppositional, stupid, or evil that there had to be a reason. I went on to tell her that I thought that reason was FASD. I asked her if she knew what FASD meant. She did know and she knew how one gets it.

I told her that I knew she had a hard time admitting that she has Fetal Alcohol. She needed to recognize there was a problem. I asked her if she realized she had Fetal Alcohol. She said she did. I told her that that was good. She admitted she had a problem. I told her that was good, because if you cannot recognize that there is a problem you cannot work on finding a solution. If a person denies they have a problem and blames others, they cannot find a solution.

We talked about what a solution would look like:

- The first step is in admitting that one has organic brain damage.
- The next step is to admit there is a problem.
- The final is to seek a solution.

The daughter and I then talked about what she could do next:

- She could ask for help when things weren't going right.
- When someone was trying to help her she could have a good attitude and not make excuses.
- She could try harder.
- She could work on developing her executive functioning skills.

As we were finishing up, I told her there would be no consequences for the current problem. However, in a few days she would have to talk to me about this again.

It is so important that we try to help them to understand that they have FASD. If they can embrace that fact, it could make their lives so much easier.

I do not blame them for not wanting to talk about it. Truthfully, I don't like talking to them about it either. Deep in my heart though, I know I need to; therefore, I do.

At times I'm asked what a therapist can do to help these kids. One of the most important things is to help their client understand that they have organic brain damage, FASD.

Another thing a parent or professional can do is to teach their child or client about FASD. There is a "workbook" located free of charge on our website that you may find helpful. (www.hayskids.com) You can call me if you have questions about it. (218-376-4501 or 218-376-4650)

If you have comments or need help, please contact me.

John

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