

TIPS

For Employment



FASD
NETWORK

SCHEDULES AND TRANSITIONS

Most employers assume that an individual with a disability will require a flexible work schedule. However, this may not be true of an individual with FASD. Most people with FASD require structure, routine and repetition to be successful and master a task, and the same is true of their work schedule. Creating a schedule that embodies the principles of how to learn and become great at one's job will not only help the employee but the employer as well.

- It is important to find a routine in how shifts are scheduled. Before you begin to advocate for a set schedule, first find out at what time of day the individual functions best. Is it early afternoon? Evenings? This will be important to understanding what shifts your client should have in order to be successful. You can also advocate for regular days.
- Don't forget, getting to work requires practise – try mapping out a 'route to work' poster.
- Finding out about the client's transportation needs can be a big factor in whether a job will be a successful fit or not. Check the bus routes or how long it takes to walk to work. Also, check what time a parent or friend can help drive the individual to work. Routine shifts will not work out if the individual needs to wait for a ride from someone who gets off work at 5:00 p.m., when the individual needs to be at work at 5 p.m.
- See how the work schedule is posted. Is it online, emailed, posted at work? Request that the schedule be emailed to yourself or the individual. If this is not possible, see if a printout can be given to the client to take home or be shared with support workers and job coaches.
- After a client has been away sick or on vacation, it's very important to carefully transition him or her back to work. This may look like shorter shifts, reiterating previous training and even a performance review. Understanding that memory function can be disrupted by having some time away is important, because job performance may not be at the same level when the person returns from a week or two away.
- A schedule may also have to be accommodated if a management change occurs. Some individuals become as familiar with people as they do the task they complete at work. When an interruption in management occurs it can make the individual uncomfortable or confused. Therefore, they may require a shortened shift as not to become mentally fatigued.
- When a job becomes comfortable and little-to-no advocating seems necessary, job coaches, employment specialists, parents and support workers can begin to step back. However, a level of interdependence should still be available to the individual if help is required through a management transition, new schedule due to health concerns, family changes or a change in work performance. Many individuals with FASD require some support to maintain a job. The more quickly we recognize the need for help, the more likely we are to help the individual remain happy and helpful in his or her current job.
- Make yourself available to the employer for questions or concerns.
- Check in regularly if case supervisors have changed or management has turned over.

BREAKS

- To eliminate the problem of poor time management at work, employees can purchase or be provided with a stopwatch.
- Depending on the employee's preference and strengths, either the employer or the employee can set the stopwatch for the amount of time the employee has for a break. If this process begins to single out one or two employees, recommend that they have a watch or phone that can be used as a timer.
- Because breaks can be a quick 15 minute paid break or a 30 minute unpaid lunch or dinner break, understanding what type of break you are taking and how long it lasts can become very abstract concepts and confusing for individuals living with FASD.
- Practice using the stopwatch at home and school. It may become a tool the individual really enjoys.
- Having a watch should always be considered one of the number one time management strategies. Having a watch that incorporates a timer can make this strategy even more effective.
- See what other time management skills can be developed by using a stopwatch.
- Restaurants have come up with the buzzing timer for restaurant guests to hold while waiting for a table. This theory is great to use in the workplace for employees that take longer breaks than they are allotted or return to their shift before their scheduled break is over.

CONTACT PERSON

Striking the perfect balance at work can create longstanding, competent employees that will care for a company as if it is their own. One way to strike this balance is to “check in” with your employee or find a co-worker that they are comfortable checking in with.

- A simple check-in at the beginning of a shift can tell a lot about how the person will perform that day.
- If check ins go well and an employee responds well to the employer’s interest in their well being, a line of communication is established and might be used when the employee is struggling later.
- When check-ins are not going well, it is important for employers to recognize how outside factors may be affecting the client. It could be that the bus never coming on time is causing stress, or that the employee is getting bullied in the lunchroom.
- Instead of asking for an emergency contact when employees fill out a hire package, ask for the name of a contact person for potential check-ins and problem solving. This process is for employees that have FASD and who self identify during the hiring or training process. The person with FASD must also understand they are giving the employer the right to contact someone about the employee’s job performance.
- When an employee who you have spent time, money, and energy training begins to show poor job performance or is unhappy, it is important to not quit on them. Inform their contact person of your concerns about the employee’s job performance and why you think his or her performance has changed. Find out what the contact person can do outside of work to help support the employee to improve job performance .

A contact person can be:

- A parent or sibling involved in the employee’s life.
- A mentor who works with the employee on a weekly basis.
- A support worker who helps to case manage the employee’s concerns.
- An employment specialist who is better able to understand the stresses of work while living with a disability.

JOB EXPECTATIONS

Understanding a task and being able to complete it over and over again takes a healthy working memory. Unfortunately, individuals with FASD can struggle with various elements of short-term and long-term memory. Finding strategies to compensate for or accommodate an individual's poor working memory can often open doors in areas otherwise unavailable to those clients with FASD.

- Make sure the individual can write things down during training. That way, he or she has a paper copy to refer to when his or her memory is unreliable.
- Provide employees with a list of what they are responsible for completing each day. Some employers may think an employee is being lazy; however, the employee may not remember all of the tasks to complete.
- Reminders can be done without any negative connotations, if they are done correctly. Treating an individual with FASD with respect should be a priority; remember that the mistakes he or she makes may be due to their disability rather than unwillingness.
- When a job expectation has not been met, try showing the employee how to complete the task again rather than telling him or her how to do it.
- Be patient. Taking more time to learn something and truly understand it may help with employee retention. The strengths and skills an individual with FASD brings to the table are worth waiting for.
- Laminate task lists that remain a constant throughout every workday. This will benefit all employees.
- When employees are not the right fit for the jobs they are in, consider moving them to where their strengths are better suited.
- If an employee can not fit within the company even after making the proper accommodations, consider writing him or her a letter of recommendation that highlights the skills the individual showed and the patience he or she demonstrated throughout the process.

MASTERY

A workplace is often most rewarding when we feel challenged and excited about our work. Creating a challenge that an employee will be able to master is the trick to creating a successful work environment not only for the employee, but for the employer as well.

- Investigating an employee's strengths and weaknesses is usually the best place to start, through a past performance evaluation or by paying close attention to some of the details on a resume.
- Once an employee's strengths have been established, it is time to develop a workload they can master. This will entail training an employee and working with him or her until 90% mastery is achieved (or the concept of doing something perfectly nine times out of ten). This will be the perfect workload.
- Allow for the employee to work in a position he or she has mastered until he or she becomes bored, or asks for a transfer. There's no need to have further challenge in a job unless the employee asks for more responsibility.
- Individuals with FASD deserve to reach their full potential, but it is not for you or me to decide what that potential is. By working to accommodate strengths and allowing 90% mastery, we give the opportunity for self-confidence and fulfillment in the workplace.
- Employers should use an employee's strengths as an asset. Finding what a person is good at will only help productivity and employee morale.
 - For example: On resumes, be specific about the individual's skill set. Allow the employer to see what the individual is good at and what he or she may prefer to stay away from.
- Share some information about FASD with employers. This may help them tailor their training or develop a work routine that works well for the individual.

TRAINING AND ONGOING TRAINING

With proper training and supervision, employees living with FASD can become long-term assets that contribute to the success of a business. Training through instruction will always remain a great place to start. However, without further instruction, employees with FASD may struggle to recall and interpret these directions on their own.

- Be sure to include demonstrations, videos, practise times, reading materials and a pen and paper so the employee may make notes or have notes provided. Allow the employee to practise as much as he or she likes before completing a task on his or her own.
- Becoming good at one's job is a daily process and any changes that are made require training and practise. Often a job can change when a new menu item is introduced, different inventory is carried by the store or technologies change. Be sure to offer training opportunities that address these changes as it will decrease the likelihood of mistakes being made or questions not being asked.
- Offering training or retraining during quarterly intervals or semi-annually helps ensure that employees are maintaining job standards and being used to their full potential.
- Providing employees with constant feedback on progress helps to guide results in the right direction. Without proper supervision, employees have more opportunities to make mistakes and become confused.
- Proper supervision involves great leadership, respect and integrity. Critiquing an employee's job performance can be difficult on both the supervisor and worker. Maintaining the employee's dignity and self-confidence throughout the critique will improve his or her ability to complete their job.
- Having behaviour to model in the workplace should come from a supervisor. Employees will be watching to see how supervisors talk to customers and how they treat other employees.
- Have a training manual for employees to follow. Knowing what comes next and what is expected will help to resolve any stress or anxiety about the job.
- Training should not happen overnight. Invest in good training to create great employees.
- Allow for feedback from employees about what could be helpful in the training process. Look for areas where employees struggle and consider providing more training in that area.
- Share your experiences of learning and training with the individual being trained. It will help the individual with FASD relate to you and foster a healthy training relationship.

PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS

Personal expectations will be implied and also provided by the workplace. An implied expectation may be that the employee be showered and fed before arriving to work. An explicit expectation may be that an employee show up in uniform with hair tied back and black shoes on.

- Help the employee by making these expectations clear and concrete.
- Encourage support persons or contact persons to help the employee fulfill these expectations before arriving at work.
- Charts can be provided to employees to be used in their homes, in the break room or on their phones. Simple written reminders can go a long way, although verbal reminders and prompting will most likely still need to take place.
- Have employees write out their own charts and tape them to the front door.
- Have a chart laminated so expectations can be written in or checked off with dry erase markers.
 - For example: have columns for remembering backpacks, bringing lunches and packing agendas.
- Having a list can be empowering for an individual with FASD. It is making the list where complications may occur.

NUTRITION

Nutrition can be as important if not more important for those individuals living with FASD. Having enough to eat and eating at the right times can substantially influence how the remainder of the day will be. Sometimes due to poor problem-solving and sensory issues, individuals with FASD are unaware of how to fix a nutrition problem or are unaware that the problem has occurred.

- Be very careful to introduce foods that will keep the individual full for long periods of time. Hunger can cause poor performance at work and school, especially for individuals with FASD.
- In general, some individuals will require some level of help with things like grocery shopping and cleaning out the fridge after things have spoiled or have gone unused for long periods of time. However, creating a system of easy maintenance may save an individual from going to work with only a bag of chips or can of pop.
- Organizing a fridge with labels or compartments will help when it comes to eating healthier meals that can sustain an individual through a day at school or work.
- Paper bags work great for labelling, while clear bags may be better for visual learning.
- Snacks should be healthy and available at any time, night or day
- Preparing healthy meals can be difficult. Try writing out instructions for cooking and cleaning up afterwards, to be posted on the wall.
- Nutrition all starts at the grocery store; accompany an individual if he or she struggles to make healthy food choices.
- Have a back up plan for when an individual forgets his or her lunch.
- Having a checklist at the door to remind an individual to bring a lunch is important.

There are a lot of techniques on how to stay full and what foods help the brain process better. Visiting a nutritionist with the individual may help provide some specific recommend nutritional adjustments that will go a long way. Below are a few general tips.

- Add granola into your yogurt so you don't get hungry as fast.
- Have a big breakfast and a smaller dinner.
- Eat five small meals a day.
- Make sure healthy snacks are always available.
- Drinking eight glasses of water helps the body stay healthy and feel full.
- Limit caffeine intake, especially in the evenings.
- Try eating items that have an expiry date within this year.
- Try to include all 4 food groups in each meal.
- Have dessert with lunch instead of dinner.

ADVOCATING

Knowing how to advocate for oneself can be one of the most valuable strategies available to individuals with FASD. However, advocating can be a tiresome process and negative emotions can still surface, so it is important to teach how to advocate effectively.

- Individuals with FASD can learn their own style of advocating by learning more about their disability and how it affects them.
- It is important that individuals have a forum to talk about their disability in whatever positive or negative format they need at that time. This process allows individuals to assess their feelings and gain the understanding needed to speak on their own behalf.
- Finding the proper comfort point in speaking about one's own disability and its effects will take time and practice.
- Check in with organizations that support individuals with FASD. See if they have a library, DVD collection or assortment of tools to help teach advocacy.
- Practise advocating where it is safe. See if your support worker can put together a group of parents and professionals to practise with.
- Learn from the individual with FASD. Always advocate in a way that supports dignity and respect.
- Check out resources that teach advocacy skills. Learning additional skills is always beneficial.
- Some resources are available to help families and support workers guide the process of self-advocacy, such as booklets that encourage individuals to describe themselves – what they are good at and what they struggle with.

CLOSET ORGANIZATION

Having an organized closet may seem like a very simple strategy. However, being able to grab your work uniform or work outfit without any hesitation can save many missed bus rides, late starts at work, and reprimands for having the wrong uniform on.

- This strategy often works best when an individual has a designated uniform that he or she must wear when at work. In essence, having a uniform creates a sort of structure and routine for an individual.
- Jobs that do not require a uniform can often cause a more complicated “getting ready” process. If a favorite shirt goes missing, the individual’s process and routine will be thrown off and work performance may suffer.
- If a uniform is appointed, be sure to ask for several and, if necessary, purchase several. By having more than one uniform the individual will not have to face issues around not having a clean uniform every day.
- If multiple uniforms are not available, work with the individual to schedule routine laundry days. Break down the steps in doing laundry.
- Make sure uniforms hold their own spot in the closet away from other clothes. Hanging them up will allow the individual a full view of the uniform. In the drawer they may just assume it is there and in the morning be shocked to find it’s still in the dirty clothes bin.
- If a uniform is not mandatory, create a uniform for the person. If black pants are expected or acceptable, choose three of the same pair and make sure they are very comfortable. Different coloured shirts are fine, but choose all the same style, and have at least a week’s worth available. If an individual decides to wear something outside this “made up” uniform that is fine. On odd mornings when they are struggling with what to wear, they will always have the basics to fall back on.
- Simply use the closet for whatever season we are in and the drawer for whatever season has passed. This will help the individual to dress for the appropriate season.

MAPPING OUT THE ROUTE TO WORK

Regardless of what form of transportation an individual uses to get to work, it is very important he or she feels confident in the process and has a plan for arriving on time and without too much stress. Having a plan for transportation can often help save an individual with FASD from losing a job or having to explain the disability over and over again.

- If individuals have someone driving them to work, like a parent or a friend, help them understand the importance of memorizing the route. By memorizing the route, they become able to instruct other people who may end up driving them, like an aunt, friend, cab driver, etc. Don't forget this will take time and require patience and repetition from whoever is providing transportation.
- If individuals take the bus, make sure they have a well-mapped-out route that you practise with them until they have it memorized. Use the bus route map and place your own landmarks on the map as you ride the bus.
- Be sure to "check in" to see how the individual is doing riding the bus. Ride with him or her once a month to be sure that he or she is using socially appropriate behaviors, and still following the same route.
- Practise asking the bus driver questions about the route with individuals. When a detour arises it can cause a great deal of anxiety, but if individuals have met the bus driver and feel comfortable asking questions, they may be able to solve the problem on their own.
- If the individual walks to work, be sure to map out the route even if it seems simple. Teach the individual what areas to avoid if walking at night, and what to say if approached by someone unknown. Walk the route with the him or her a few times to see what obstacles may occur.
- If the individual rides a bike to work, make sure he or she knows how to lock it up. Losing a bike may mean losing a job.
- Share your clients' bus route or walking path with their friends and family to see who will help them ride the bus or walk to work on occasion.
- Don't be shy to correct poor social behaviours on the bus or in public, but always remember to use respect and dignity while doing it.
- Once you have been successful with a client riding the bus, it is important to remember that success takes maintenance. You will have to be sure to check in and see how they are doing.

TIPS ON LANGUAGE

- Remember individuals living with FASD struggle to understand abstract concepts like jokes and figurative language. For example, “Keep your shirt on.”
- When possible, use real objects and examples relating to the lesson being taught – real money, real clocks, real life.
- Provide hands on learning to help the student understand what is being taught.
- Practice reading together.
- Use words or statements that are specific to the desired behaviour you wish to achieve. For example, “walk” instead of “don’t run.”
- Consequences need to be concrete and directly related to the undesirable behaviour. Practice modeling the appropriate behaviour.
- Avoid intonations and verbal tones that are attached to abstract meaning as individuals with an FASD may not pick up on the hidden meaning behind a change in pitch or intonation.
- Allow extra time for them to respond to a question. Individuals with FASD need this extra time to process the question being asked, process an answer, and then respond.
- Support your instructions by providing a visual representation. You may wish to provide a step-by-step breakdown of the activity for complex tasks.

Example:

- An employee living with FASD is frustrated and you tell him, “Don’t blow a gasket.” After this the individual appears to become even more frustrated.

How you can help:

- Try not to use slang when talking to individuals living with FASD. If an individual is already frustrated and then you tell him or her something he/she doesn’t fully comprehend, it can just make the situation more frustrating. Instead you could say, “stay calm” and offer some assistance.

FASD NETWORK OF SASKATCHEWAN

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