NEAFAN
Northeast Alberta FASD Network

NEAFAN

Providing FASD Supports and Services for Northeast Alberta

FASD in the School Environment.

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www.neafan.ca

FASD IN EDUCATION

Creating an inclusive classroom where every student can thrive is an essential goal of modern education. However, for students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), traditional teaching methods often fall short in addressing their unique challenges. From difficulties with impulse control and memory retention to sensory sensitivities, these students require tailored support to fully engage in their learning environment.

Fortunately, educators can implement a variety of evidence-based strategies to help students with FASD succeed. This following compiles insights from multiple expert sources, offering practical, classroom-ready solutions to create structured, supportive, and adaptive learning spaces.

1. Strategies for Supporting Students with FASD

Students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) often struggle in traditional classroom settings due to cognitive challenges such as memory deficits, difficulties with impulse control, and sensory sensitivities. Educators may not always recognize how these challenges impact learning, leading to frustration for both teachers and students.

This article emphasizes the importance of relationship-building as a foundational approach. Students with FASD respond well to educators who provide consistent, structured environments with clear expectations. The use of specific and simple language helps reduce confusion, as students may struggle with abstract concepts and multi-step instructions.

Another major point is the need for flexibility in

teaching strategies. Traditional discipline methods that rely on cause-and-effect reasoning may not work well for students with FASD, as they often have difficulty linking actions with consequences. Instead, positive reinforcement, visual cues, and step-by-step instructions are more effective.

Additionally, the article suggests creating a sensory-friendly classroom by minimizing noise and visual distractions, offering quiet areas for breaks, and using fidget items to help with self-regulation.

By adapting teaching approaches and focusing on strengths rather than deficits, educators can help students with FASD succeed academically and socially. The article concludes that understanding and patience are key, and small adjustments in the classroom can make a significant difference in the learning experience for these students.

Small Environment Changes Can have a Big Impact Line

2. How to Create a Supportive Learning Environment for Primary-Aged Children with FASD

Students with FASD often face difficulties in attention, self-regulation, and memory, which can make it challenging for them to keep up with classroom routines. Without the right supports, they may become overwhelmed or disengaged, leading to behavioral issues.

This resource focuses on modifications to the classroom environment to better support students with FASD. One key suggestion is to reduce visual and auditory distractions by arranging seating in a way that minimizes overstimulation. Keeping classroom decorations simple and uncluttered can help students focus better.

Another recommendation is to create clear, predictable routines that allow students to know what to expect each day. Since children with FASD often struggle with transitions, teachers can use visual schedules and verbal reminders to help them move between tasks more smoothly.

The article also emphasizes providing movement breaks and offering flexible seating options (such as standing desks or wiggle cushions) to accommodate different learning styles and energy levels. Fidget tools and stress balls are encouraged as a way to help students manage sensory needs without disrupting others.

The article underscores that small environmental changes can have a big impact on a child's ability to engage with learning. Rather than expecting students with FASD to adapt to traditional classroom models,

Students with FASD thrive in structured yet flexible environments where teachers provide clear guidance, patience, and understanding.

By implementing simple but targeted strategies, educators can empower these students to succeed and develop essential life skills.

educators should focus on adjusting the environment to support their needs, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and effective learning space.

3. Classroom Strategies for Supporting Students with FASD

Children with FASD face unique challenges related to executive functioning, impulse control, and processing speed, making traditional teaching approaches less effective. Without proper support, they may struggle with behavior management and academic engagement.

This article suggests that classrooms should be structured in ways that reduce frustration and increase accessibility for students with FASD. Teachers are encouraged to break tasks into smaller, manageable steps and provide visual aids to support comprehension.

A particularly useful strategy is the use of social stories—short, illustrated explanations of expected behaviors and routines—which can help students understand classroom expectations. Additionally, role-playing exercises can prepare them for social interactions and conflict resolution.

Another focus is on self-regulation strategies, including mindfulness techniques, breathing exercises, and calm-down areas where students can go if they feel overwhelmed. The article highlights the importance of positive behavior reinforcement, such as rewarding small achievements rather than punishing mistakes.Teachers are also encouraged to build strong partnerships with parents and caregivers, as students with FASD often need consistent support across home and school settings. Open communication ensures that strategies used in school align with those used at home.

The article reinforces the idea that students with FASD thrive in structured yet flexible environments where teachers provide clear guidance, patience, and understanding. By implementing simple but targeted strategies, educators can empower these students to succeed and develop essential life skills.

4 Education & FASD Toolkit

Many educators are unfamiliar with FASD and its effects on learning, leading to misconceptions and ineffective teaching methods. Without proper knowledge, students with FASD may be mistakenly labeled as lazy, defiant, or unmotivated, rather than being understood as children with neurological differences that require specific teaching approaches.

The FASD Toolkit for Educators provides an overview of how FASD affects brain function, including issues with memory, emotional regulation, and impulse control. One of the most useful features is a set of video demonstrations showing teachers how to implement FASD-friendly strategies in real classrooms.

The toolkit also includes ready-to-use lesson modifications such as:Breaking down assignments into smaller sections; Using visuals and hands-on activities instead of relying solely on verbal instruction; Providing extra processing time for answering questions and completing tasks

Another key feature is behavior management strategies that focus on positive reinforcement rather than punishment. The toolkit explains that traditional discipline methods often fail with students with FASD because they struggle to connect actions with consequences. Instead, offering immediate feedback and clear, structured alternatives to unwanted behaviors is more effective.

The Education & FASD Toolkit equips teachers with the practical knowledge and resources needed to create an inclusive classroom. It emphasizes that FASD is a brain-based disability, not a behavioral issue, and that with understanding and simple adjustments, students with FASD can thrive in school.

5. Classroom Environment Strategies

Classroom environments can be overwhelming for students with FASD, who often have heightened sensitivity to noise, bright lights, and unexpected changes. A poorly designed classroom can increase anxiety and make it harder for these students to focus and regulate their emotions.

This guide provides educators with practical, low-cost ways to create a more FASD-friendly classroom.

Some key recommendations include:

Reducing noise distractions by using carpets, soft furniture, and noise-canceling headphones; Minimizing clutter and arranging desks in a way that promotes focus; Providing personal workspaces (such as quiet nooks or study carrels) for students who need a low-stimulation area.

The article also encourages teachers to use color-coded schedules, visual timetables, and predictable routines to reduce stress and help students feel more in control of their environment.

Another important recommendation is offering

FASD-Friendly Classrooms.

Supporting students with FASD in the classroom requires patience, flexibility, and creativity.

sensory breaks, where students can take a few minutes to stretch, move around, or engage in a calming activity before returning to classwork.

The article concludes that modifying the physical classroom environment is one of the simplest yet most effective ways to support students with FASD. By reducing distractions and offering structured support, teachers can create a calm, organized space where students feel comfortable and ready to learn.

Supporting students with FASD in the classroom requires patience, flexibility, and creativity. By incorporating structured routines, visual supports, sensory-friendly spaces, and positive reinforcement strategies, educators can empower students to succeed both academically and socially. Collaboration between teachers, families, and support professionals ensures that students receive consistent guidance across all areas of their lives.

As research continues to evolve, so too must our approaches to fostering inclusive and adaptable learning environments. By embracing these strategies, we not only enhance the educational experience for students with FASD but also contribute to a broader culture of understanding, acceptance, and educational equity.

1. Strategies for Supporting Students with FASD
2. Teaching and Learning Strategies to Support Primary Aged Children with FASD
3. Effective Teaching Strategies
4. Education & FASD Toolkit
5. How to Create a Supportive Learning Environment for Primary Aged Children with FASD

NEAFAN
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Many students with FASD struggle to recognize non-verbal communication, regulate emotions, and maintain attention in social settings.

FASD For School Staff Level II is an advanced training course intended for all educators working with students with FASD.

FASD for School Staff Level II is an advanced training course intended for all educators working with students with FASD including all administrators, teachers, educational assistants, ECE's, office admin, Board personnel and bus drivers. This Level 2 training course, building on the Level 1 Foundations in FASD course, provides the perspective of individuals who have FASD and their caregivers, is evidence-based and current, employs a culturally sensitive approach, and is presented in a way that is responsive to educators.

Level 2 training will provide knowledge and understanding of:

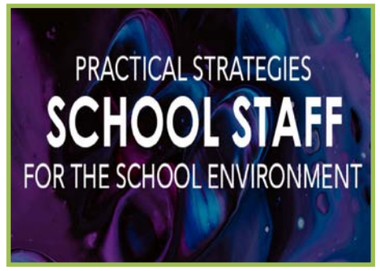
·a review of the key points of the Foundations Level I course
·characteristics of a FASD-Friendly school
·teaching strategies for students with FASD
·the importance of educator/caregiver collaboration
·instructional, environmental, and assessment strategies in the classroom
·transitions facing students with FASD

After completing all the modules, a certificate will be available to each participant.

**FASD for School Staff Level II is discounted by 25% for residents of British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, Yukon, Nunavut, and New Brunswick.*

***This course is free for residents of Alberta.*

FASD for School Staff Level 11 link



Students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) often face difficulties in social interactions due to cognitive challenges such as memory deficits, difficulty interpreting social cues, and impulsivity. However, educators can support their social skill development through informed teaching strategies that foster inclusivity and understanding in the classroom.

Many students with FASD struggle to recognize non-verbal communication, regulate emotions, and maintain attention in social settings. These challenges make it difficult to build and sustain relationships with peers and authority figures. Creating a supportive and empathetic classroom environment is

Effective Teaching Strategies for Students with FASD

essential in helping them feel valued and engaged. Clear routines and expectations provide structure and reduce uncertainty, making it easier for students to participate in social interactions.

Visual aids such as charts, schedules, and cues reinforce social expectations and reduce anxiety by providing clear guidelines. Social stories, which outline common social situations and appropriate responses, offer additional guidance for understanding and practicing social behaviors. Teaching social skills explicitly by breaking down interactions into manageable steps helps students better grasp and apply appropriate behaviors. Role-playing and group activities provide safe opportunities to practice these skills in a structured setting.

Encouraging collaboration and peer support further enhances social development. Pairing students with neurotypical peers or integrating group projects fosters communication, cooperation, and inclusivity, allowing them to build meaningful connections. Recognizing and celebrating their strengths boosts self-esteem, reinforcing positive engagement in social interactions.

With these strategies, educators can create an environment where students with FASD develop essential social skills, build confidence, and form meaningful relationships.

WRAP ARTICLE LINK

"Recognizing and celebrating their strengths boosts self-esteem, reinforcing positive engagement in social interactions. "

A Guide to Effective Learning Approaches.

A stable and positive education experience plays a crucial role in supporting students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). The LORS framework helps educators remember essential strategies for fostering success by emphasizing a brain, trauma, and strengths-based approach to learning. LORS stands for Learning style, Observations, Relationships, Repetition, Role models, Routine, Self-esteem, Sensory overload, Strengths, and Supervision.

Understanding a student's preferred learning style and incorporating it into teaching methods enhances engagement. Educators should go beyond acknowledgment and actively integrate these approaches into their instruction. Observing students across different settings helps identify strengths and challenges, allowing for targeted support and scaffolding to ensure success.

Building authentic, trusting relationships is fundamental. Establishing felt safety through consistent adult connections, such as the 2x10 strategy—spending two minutes a day for ten consecutive days—encourages student engagement. Repetition is essential for transferring knowledge from working to long-term memory. Since retrieval can be inconsistent due to neural damage, patience is necessary.

Role models play a key role in social learning, as students with FASD learn best by observing others rather than through consequences. A structured, predictable routine reduces anxiety and enhances learning. Maintaining self-esteem is critical; students require five positive interactions to counterbalance one negative experience. Educators should nurture confidence and motivation through a strengths-based approach.

Sensory overload can trigger distress responses, making sensory planning vital. Finally, continuous supervision ensures inclusion and safety, as impulsivity and

The LORS Framework for Success in Education

difficulty understanding social cues require ongoing guidance. By implementing LORS, educators can create an environment where students with FASD thrive.

LORS link

FASD Special Education Survey Results.

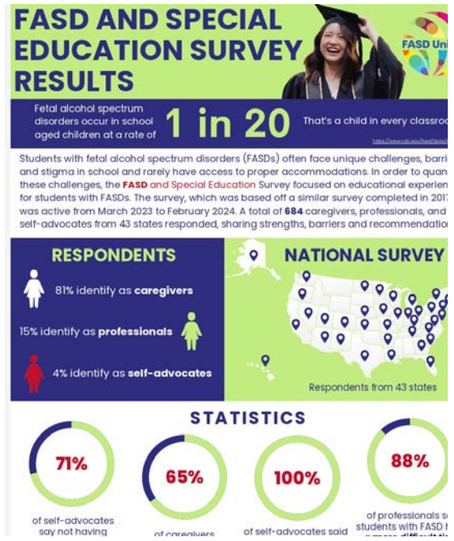
Students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs) often face significant challenges, barriers, and stigma in school, with limited access to appropriate accommodations. To better understand these issues, the FASD and Special Education Survey examined the educational experiences of students with FASDs.

experiences of students with FASDs. Conducted from March 2023 to February 2024, the survey built upon a similar study from 2017-18. A total of 684 caregivers, professionals, and self-advocates across 43 states participated, providing insights into strengths, barriers, and recommendations for improving support systems. - 71% of self-advocates say not having appropriate FASD education accommodations is a significant challenge. 65% of caregivers began noticing educational challenges in preschool. 100% of self-advocates said the lack of recognition and understanding of FASD in schools is discriminatory for students with FASD. 88% of professionals say students with FASD have a more difficult time. obtaining educational accommodations compared to others with disabilities. 98% of caregivers think an FASD qualifying category would benefit schools while 78% of professionals find educational experience a significant factor in developing secondary disabilities.

Reccomendations

Include FASD as a qualifying category under IDEA for Special Education services. Ensure that people with living experience (PLE) are included, trusted, and remain in the forefront of special education and disability services. Use multidisciplinary approaches to address the spectrum of FASD. Emphasize strengths and improvement rather than punishment; an increase in societal/ general knowledge of FASD will help accomplish this.

Survey Link



"The lack of education and awareness on how to appropriately work with students with FASD is disturbing. Using interventions that create greater problems for the students because of lack of education is unacceptable when there are resources and information available."

Caregiver

Let's Talk

The Prevention Conversation

It's time to talk about alcohol and pregnancy

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Amy Tobin, B. Ed, is the FASD Prevention Conversation Facilitator with NEAFAN (Northeast Alberta FASD Network) and an adoptive mother of two. Prior to motherhood, she was an elementary school teacher with the Fort McMurray Public School District for six years. Her passion for FASD, and its prevention, began nine years ago when she became a mother through adoption and was introduced, personally, to the beauty and perplexity of parenting those with prenatal alcohol exposure. Since then, she has dedicated much of her time to learning about, and educating others, on the effects of alcohol during pregnancy and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Her approach is one that takes into consideration the complexities that adoption, generational, and cultural trauma can play within FASD.

Prevention Conversation

The Prevention Conversation program aims to raise awareness of FASD and Prevention among target populations including Healthcare and Social Service Providers, Women of Childbearing Age(18-45), Partners, Families and Friends.

The Project is geared towards highlighting the importance of screening all women in child bearing age for alcohol use and risks associated with FASD, improve supports for these women and promote involvement of community members and primary care providers.

The Prevention Conversation is aimed at encouraging a community wide awareness of FASD and prevention, developing the skills within the community to engage in non-judgmental, empathetic conversations about alcohol use during pregnancy. The Prevention Conversation is centered around increasing our knowledge of FASD, training service providers on the use of screening tools to engage women in the Prevention Conversation.

To book a Prevention Conversation presentation, please contact:

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