Keys to Successful FASD Interventions

The State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and Department of Education and Early Development recently published “Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: Alaska Educator’s Guide.” As part of this guide, there is a list of successful interventions for students with FASD. The authors label these as “8 Magic Keys,” and they include:

- **Concrete** – students with FASD can do well when parents and educators talk in less abstract or more concrete terms. This means avoiding words with double meanings, idioms, etc. Because the student’s social-emotional understanding may be far below their chronological age, it helps to “think younger” when providing assistance and giving instructions.

- **Consistency** – because of the difficulty students with FASD experience trying to generalize learning from one situation to another, they do best in an environment with few changes. This includes language used by parents and educators, so teachers and parents can coordinate with each other to use the same words for key phrases and oral directions.

- **Repetition** – students with FASD have chronic short term memory problems; they forget things they want to remember as well as information that has been learned and retained for a period of time. In order for something to make it to long term memory, it may simply need to be re-taught and re-taught.

- **Routine** – stable routines that don’t change from day to day make it easier for students to know what to expect next and will decrease their anxiety, enabling them to learn.
• Simplicity – remember to “keep it short and sweet (KISS).” Students with FASD may be easily over-stimulated, leading to “shut down” at which point no more information can be assimilated. Therefore, a simple environment is the foundation for an effective school program.

• Specific – say exactly what you mean. Students with FASD may have difficulty with abstractions, generalizations, and not be able to “fill in the blanks” when given a direction. Tell them step by step what to do, developing appropriate habit patterns.

• Structure – structure helps the world make sense for a student with FASD. A student with FASD achieves and is successful when their world provides the appropriate structure permanently.

• Supervision – because of their cognitive challenges, students with FASD often bring a naivete to daily life situations. They need constant supervision, as with much younger children, to develop habit patterns of appropriate behavior.

For further information about this guide for educators, please contact the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Office of FASD at 1-877-393-2287.

For further information regarding Georgia’s FASD prevention efforts, please contact Karen Kuehn Howell, Ph.D., at the Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 1256 Briarcliff Road, N.E., Suite 309W, Atlanta, Georgia, 30306. You can also phone us at 404-712-9800 or visit our website at

http://www.emory.edu/MSACD
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