

## How You can Help Create Success at Camp

Summer camp, whether it is a day camp, or a sleep away camp, can be fun and exciting. Camp can be a great way for children to explore the world. However, children with FASD have trouble in the less structured setting of camp. Children may find it hard to get used to not being in their own home with routines they are used to. Meeting so many new children and adults is stressful to a child with FASD. All these stresses may cause the child to behave in ways we find difficult to understand. Some children act aggressively. Some may be in your face, invading your space. Some children ask questions and talk non-stop. Other children may shut down because they feel so overwhelmed by everything.

Unsupervised free time may be a problem. The excitement and high energy of the activities can also be difficult. This does not mean that children with FASD can't enjoy camp. It means that they need extra support and understanding to have a good time at camp. Here are some "real life" examples and some tips on how to encourage success at camp.

### Example #1:

A camper wants to be helpful. She gets up very early and vacuums the cabin while others are sleeping and the counselor is at a staff meeting.

#### What is happening

The child wants to be liked and believes that by doing extra chores the kids in her group will like her more. She knows it makes her mom happy when she vacuums at home. She does not grasp that waking up her cabin mates very early will annoy them.

#### How you can help

An unsupervised child usually means trouble! Make sure there is always someone in charge in the cabin. FASD causes a child to be impulsive and make poor choices. A child with FASD tends to 'live in the moment' and not see how her actions can upset others.

### Example #2:

A camper is sitting alone on a bench while other campers are having fun making tie dyed t-shirts. He is just sitting there and it looks like he doesn't want to be with the other campers. Some of the other children think he is mad at them or doesn't like them anymore.

#### What is happening

The child with FASD often misses all or part of the instructions. He may not know where he is supposed to be or what he is supposed to be doing. The more he sees the others having fun, the more frustrated he gets with himself. He really wants to join in but is too confused to know what to do.

#### How you can help

Ask staff to be clear in their words and use actions to show how to complete the steps of an activity.

## FASD Tip #16

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Please feel free to photocopy and use these sheets.

## **Some Tips for Success at Camp:**

1. Pick a camp with as much structure as possible. Call the camps in your area to ask questions about their programs. Ask about what kinds of structures and routines they have.
2. Tell the Camp Director that your child has FASD and explain what this means to your child. Offer to answer all their questions and send them more information about FASD. Let them know they can contact the FASD Support Network of SK so the camp staff learn about FASD and can make plans and be prepared.
3. Supervision, supervision, supervision. Supervision at all times even 'free' time. Rules and supervision keep everyone safe. Supervision will help the child to follow the rules.
4. Camp staff or counselors should meet the child and have plans ready to put into place as soon as the child arrives at camp.
5. A 'buddy' system with an older camper or a junior counselor could be set up to give the child with FASD some extra help and a feeling of security.
6. Verbal instructions must be short and simple. Be precise and concrete. Clearly tell the child what to do, rather than what not to do.
7. Be consistent and clear with rules. Rules should be as few as possible, but safety for everyone is important so there will need to be some rules.
8. Be ready to repeat and demonstrate instructions as many times as needed. Instructions may be needed each time an activity is presented as learning can take longer for children with FASD.
9. Consequences for poor choices need to be immediate and short-term. Children with FASD have a poor understanding of cause and effect.
10. Enjoy the creativity of children with FASD. They may excel in some areas such as crafts and drama.
11. An excellent booklet for parents and camp staff is **Your Victory: A Happy Child** Supportive Strategies for the Staff of Children's Summer Camps. For information on how to purchase, call the Network office.