

How You can help Children with FASD Learn to Cope with their Senses

Some children with FASD are very sensitive to touch, movement, light or sound. Because of the way their brains work, children with FASD may be so focused on what they hear, see or feel on their skin that they can't focus on other things. When children have over-sensitive senses, they may need to shut down. Or they might act out and act badly as they try to stop the thing that is bothering them. This can be very hard for parents to cope with, especially when you are out in public.

It is important to remember that some children with FASD have senses that don't work well or that are numb. They really can't tell when they are hot or cold. And some may not feel pain as much as other children can. Try to help these children dress in the right way for the weather and to check them for illness or injury.

Here are some 'real-life' examples and solutions:

Example #1

A parent takes her child to a puppet show at the library. All week they've wanted to go! But, when they get there the room is noisy and crowded and the child gets nervous. He plugs his ears and as he gets more frustrated he starts to yell, "shut up" at the kids around him.

What you can learn

This child is over-sensitive to sound. The noise in a crowded room is too much for him. He tries to cope by covering his ears. His sensitivity to noise makes him frustrated and over-stimulated.

Example #2

A 7-year old child takes off her socks as soon as she gets home from school. Sometimes she takes her socks off at school. When the girl is asked why she takes off her socks she says, "I can't stand to wear them".

What you can learn

She is over-sensitive to the clothing she's wearing. She can feel even the small seam in a sock and can't 'tune out' that feeling. This means she can only focus on the clothes that bother her and nothing else. She needs to wear clothes that are comfortable for her.

FASD Tip #7

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Please feel free to photocopy
and use these sheets.

Tips on How to Adapt to Sensitivities:

Try to find out what your child is reacting to so that you can avoid what's causing them trouble. Try not to go to places where your child may be over-stimulated by noise, light etc.. You may also want to be pro-active and have sunglasses or headphones ready.

If a child is showing signs of over-sensitivity to something, and heading to a 'meltdown' try to leave before the meltdown happens. As the child gets older, he or she can be taught why they are feeling over-sensitive, and how they can avoid these situations. An Occupational Therapist may be able to suggest some exercises or ways to reduce the child's sensitivities.

Sensitivities to Noise:

1. If you want or need to go to public places like malls or fast food restaurants try to go at quiet times of the day. Less people go mid-afternoon or early in the day.
2. Holding the child's hand will help them feel calmer and less confused by the hustle and bustle around them. Plan to stay for a short time only.
3. Turn down the TV, radio, telephone etc. Do not have the TV and video games on in the same room. It is too much for the child with FASD to hear at one time.
4. Speak to your child in a quiet voice .

Sensitivities to Light:

1. If a child seems sensitive to light offer sunglasses, tinted goggles or a big sunhat.
2. Use dim lighting when you can.
3. Avoid flickering or blinking lights like the ones on Christmas tree decorations.
4. Avoid TV shows, movies and video games that use flashing lights and flashing things to make you notice the screen.

Sensitivities to Touch:

1. Wash all clothing a couple of times before wearing.
2. Turn socks and gloves inside out so the seams won't bother them.
3. Comfort is the most important thing for your child. Buy soft feeling clothes and avoid stiff and scratchy clothes. Remove all tags. Bedding needs to feel comfortable for the child. Some children like heavy blankets on their beds (even in summer) and, some like light blankets on their bed (even in winter).
4. To some children firm touch feels better than light touch. Some children like their hair stroked while some children like a firm backrub. Find out what kind of touch your child likes.