

Making Changes with Children and Youth with FASD

Life is full of change. For children and teens, adults control many of the changes. Moving to a new home, starting school, changing classrooms or teachers, changes in the family or moving to the next grade are changes children often face. But for children and youth with FASD, change can be very difficult to cope with. Along with the big changes, they may really struggle with simple every day changes such as, stopping play to go eat. There are many ways you can help your child or teen learn to cope with change. This sheet offers some 'real life' examples and tips:

Example # 1

At school a child with FASD is working on his math. The teacher tells all her students to stop and get ready to go to gym class. The girl with FASD starts shouting that she's not done with her math!

What is happening

It is hard for this child to get into her math work and then have to leave. Changing from one activity to another is harder for her than for most children. It would help if the teacher would give her advance notice before a change in class needs to be made.

Example #2

A teenaged girl with FASD is being given a ride to a friend's home. On the way she asks, over and over again, which streets they will be going down and at which corners they will turn.

What's happening

She wants to make sure she'll get home. She's nervous about not having control of getting there and she believes there is one 'right' way to get to her house.

Example #3

One day a child with FASD gets to school late. She is really upset about being late. But instead of going into her classroom, she stands just inside the door and she can't move.

What's happening

Being late has changed her routine. She doesn't know what to do so she does nothing. She is a concrete thinker. It is hard for her to problem solve about what she should do next. If she usually hangs her coat up at 8:50, and it is now 9:05, what should she do?

FASD Tip #9

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Please feel free to photocopy
and use these sheets.

Some Tips to help Your Child Deal with Change:

1. Create routines so your child knows what comes next in the day. Try hard to stick to the same routines. This way no matter how much change is in their life, their home life will be secure. Structure helps ease stress.
2. For young children, it is helpful to have a board with pictures that show the daily routine. (Many preschools and daycares have picture boards.)
3. Tell your child ahead of time if the routine has to change. Some children may need a full day's notice of change, and others may do best with just a few minutes warning.
4. Sometimes plans change. Talk with your child or teen about what might happen if the plan doesn't go the way you hope. For example, "What will we do if our car isn't fixed by tomorrow?"
5. Sometimes it makes sense to plan for problems. Talking about a plan B or C can teach your child or teen about how decisions need to be flexible. For example, "Since our car is always breaking down, do you think we should look into getting a bus pass?" Have a 'plan B' and maybe a 'plan C' too.
6. Break changes into small steps. For example, "First you need to put away your toys." "Okay, now let's go brush our teeth." "Good, here are your pajamas." A long list of things to do is very confusing for children and teens with FASD
7. Instructions need to be simple and clear. It helps to look each other in the eye.
8. A countdown may be helpful for younger children. For example, "Play for five more minutes and then it's time for your bath. ...three more minutes... Time to put the toys away your bath is ready."
9. Using an egg timer may help your child or teen 'see' how much time is left for a certain activity. For example, if you ask them to do homework for 15 minutes, they will hear the bell when the time is up.
10. When you can, let your child finish the thing they are working on. Some children really like and need to take their time to finish things. They enjoy working on things at their own pace and like to finish a project.
11. Organize yourself for the morning. Have school clothes out and ready to wear. Have backpacks packed and ready to go.
12. Use photos of real people and places to help prepare a child for moves from one grade to another or to a different school or home. For example, a 'transition book' can help get a child ready for a move to the next grade. This book can have pictures of the child with this year's teacher and pictures of the child with next year's teacher. The book can hold pictures of the child's new classroom, where he should put his boots, what door to come in etc. This may make it easier for him to adapt to a big change in his life.