

## SUPPORTING WORKPLACE COGNITION

# Supporting language & communication difficulties in people with FASD



Communication is key to any successful relationship. It is the oil that keeps a business moving. Good language and communication skills amongst employees, management and customers foster a more productive workplace. Communication can be challenging for someone with FASD due to fundamental difficulties with language and social skills.

Strategies that may address language & communication challenges associated with FASD:

Types of Language/ Communication Difficulties	How they manifest...	Supports and Accommodations
<b>Difficulty receiving information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not paying attention to what is being said.</li> <li>● Misinterpreting/not understanding information.</li> <li>● Needing to repeat information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Get full attention before speaking.</li> <li>✓ Speak calmly, slowly and clearly.</li> <li>✓ Keep the language brief, concise, and simple.</li> <li>✓ Use the person's own words.</li> <li>✓ Emphasise important information.</li> <li>✓ If confused, respectfully check if they want the information repeated.</li> <li>✓ Encourage questions and clarifications.</li> <li>✓ Minimise use of acronyms.</li> <li>✓ Use encouraging words.</li> </ul>
<b>Difficulty expressing themselves</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Difficulties initiating conversations.</li> <li>● Lack of response.</li> <li>● Long pauses.</li> <li>● Difficulties communicating information and meaning, and finding it difficult to explain things.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Encourage participation by asking questions such as "What do you think about...?" or, ask open-ended questions such as "Tell me about...".</li> <li>✓ Give time to organise their thoughts and bear in mind that they may need extra time to respond to questions or requests.</li> <li>✓ Give your full undivided attention and reduce distractions.</li> <li>✓ Rephrase what has been said – e.g., "Do you mean XYZ...?".</li> </ul>

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<b>Difficulty with conventions of two-way conversation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not following proper communication etiquette such as taking turns, giving others the opportunity to talk, adjusting communication to audience and maintaining appropriate physical distance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Pre-empt to be brief and let them know that you would like to say something.</li> <li>✓ Maintain a comfortable distance or shift your position.</li> <li>✓ Politely request that physical contact is modified.</li> </ul>
<b>Difficulty actively participating in ongoing conversations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Difficulties selecting topics of conversation.</li> <li>● Difficulties keeping up with changes in topics.</li> <li>● Introducing new topics abruptly.</li> <li>● Difficulties staying on topic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ask about their interests and opinions.</li> <li>✓ Inform of an imminent change in the conversation if possible.</li> <li>✓ Clarify new topics as they come up.</li> <li>✓ Clarify how their comments relate to the ongoing topic of discussion (e.g., “Do you mean...?”).</li> <li>✓ Politely inform that there may be some confusion or misunderstanding, provide clarification, and give them time to redirect themselves.</li> </ul>
<b>Difficulty interpreting nonverbal cues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Difficulties understanding nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and body language.</li> <li>● Giving excessive or poor eye contact.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Politely inform that you’ve noticed a discrepancy between their body language and the spoken message.</li> <li>✓ Be clear about the emotions you are feeling, whilst remaining tactful.</li> <li>✓ Ask how they are feeling.</li> </ul>

Problems with communication and language can take various forms. It is important that anyone working with people with FASD familiarise themselves with the ways in which poor communication and language can present themselves, bearing in mind that these difficulties may be subtle.

Simple strategies can greatly improve the communication between people with FASD and those they work with.

1. Regina Community Clinic and OLES Literacy Project. (2010). Welcoming employees with FASD into Your Workplace.

2. noFASD Australia. Supporting success for adults with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Supporting-Success-for-Adults-with-Fetal-Alcohol-Spectrum-Disorder-web.pdf (nofasd.org.au)