

“Trying my hardest, doing my best”

**Supporting people with FASD
who are**

**functionally dependent
and
emotionally fragile**

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Part Three

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Before “dealing with behavior” check out

Neuro-developmental brain dysfunction

- Observe dysfunctional behaviors to identify what may be non-remediable brain dysfunctions that must be accommodated.
- Inability to follow daily routine
- Inability to organize own behavior
- Inability to follow any sequence
- Inability to focus without external prompt
- Not learning from experience.
- Every day is start all over again.

**Some people are more handicapped by their
functional dependence
than they are by any of their cognitive deficits.**

When the primary functional disability is inability to independently self-initiate and/or sequence one's own actions, this demands to be the starting point for individual intervention.

How to tell if person is functionally dependent?

- Incident documentation is three inches thick
- Ability is situational and compartmentalized
- They function in the “here and now”

How to tell if person is functionally dependent?

- Do they “rise to expectations?”
- Are they helpful and independent in well known role?
- Are they totally attention seeking without a role?
- Do they drift and act vulnerable between school or work and home?

How to tell if person is functionally dependent?

- Person can't tell what to do when they don't know what to do. Can not analyze situations.
- No one else believes you when you try to let them know how much help individual needs

Predictable expectations

- **Happy theme:**
- "I can do things if I see someone else doing it first."
- **Sad theme:**
- "I can't do things till it becomes my own idea."

Predictable expectations

- **Happy theme:**

- "I can do things if it's what I expected."

- **Sad themes:**

- "Things have to be just the way I thought it was going to be" (or it blows my mind.)

- ▶ I have to constantly ask questions to reassure myself that I know what is expected

- ▶ I can't "fill in the blanks" for myself

- ▶ To be able to function I need all the information.

Predictable expectations

- **Happy theme:**

- “If you focus me I know what to do. When I know your expectations I can follow them. I can do things if I'm ready and sure.”

- **Sad theme:**

- “If you don't prepare me I can't meet expectations.”
“If I am uncertain I can't figure out how to begin to begin.”

Familiar routine

- **Happy theme:**
- "I can do things if it's part of my familiar routine."

- **Sad theme:**
- "I can't do things if I don't know how they will turn out."

- Often have poor "working memory." Things "slide out of their mind."

Finding the right balance

Identify the following:

- Where to let them cope on their own the best they can
- Where to protect them from their disability
- Where to intrude and structure their life for/with them.

Functionally Dependent on External Boundaries

- **Happy theme:**
- "When I am involved in what I do well there are no problems."

- **Sad theme:**
- "I don't know what to do when I don't know what to do. I 'act out' when I'm not occupied."

Functionally Dependent on External boundaries

- **Happy theme:**
- When you are “watching me” I can regulate my emotions. If you watch me I can use self-control.
- **Sad theme:**
- When I am alone my emotions are out of control and I panic. Without your “eyes” on me I have no impulse control

Functionally Dependent on External boundaries

- **Happy theme:**
- "When someone is with me I feel safe and secure."
- **Sad theme:**
- "When I am by myself I am symptomatic."

Functionally Dependent on External boundaries

- **Happy theme:**
- If you give me “rules” I can use self-control and act like I have a “conscience”

- **Sad theme:**
- Without your “rules” I act like I have no “conscience”.

Metaphors for assisting others to sequence their actions

How to “set up” a person for success

- Life with subtitles
 - ▶ Narrate their ongoing experience
- Life as a jigsaw puzzle, one piece at a time.
 - ▶ Life as Lego blocks, you are the connecting link
- Life as an AAA roadmap
 - ▶ Each section has beginning, middle and end laid out
- Life as multiple choice test with all choices correct
 - ▶ Ask, “What’s next?” from the selection you prompt

How to “set up” a person for success

- Meet the developmental disability needs
 - ▶ Step-by-step break down
 - ▶ Assist to focus on relevant cues
 - ▶ Repetition
- Meet the emotional needs
 - ▶ Have realistic and achievable goals at their developmental level
 - ▶ Give extra feedback and reinforcement
- Train adequate coping skills as part of task
 - ▶ How to ask for help as a skill
 - Teach what to do when they don't know what to do

**Some people are more handicapped by their
emotional reactivity
than they are by any of their cognitive deficits.**

When the primary functional disability is emotionally fragile and reactive behavior, this demands to be the starting point for individual intervention.

Intense emotional reactivity can torpedo any of our previously planned intervention models.

How to tell if person is emotionally fragile?

- They are explosive about receiving “correction.”
- They are painfully aware of what they can not do and angry about their need for your help.
- Without a person to reflect or a defined role they are anxious, display psychiatric or regressed function.

What is emotionally fragile and reactive behavior?

- Highly vulnerable to stress and distress.
- Unable to tolerate:
 - ▶ Frustration
 - ▶ Failure
 - ▶ Lack of control
 - ▶ Rejection

Emotional factors-reaction to anxiety

Reactions when under stress or distress

- **Loss of ability to modulate emotional reactions.**
 - ▶ Can't inhibit arousal.
 - ▶ Longer to return to baseline.
 - ▶ Once aroused may get “stuck” in emotion (emotional perseveration), flooded with adrenalin, extreme dis inhibition, panic.

- **When anxious, loses ability to think.**
 - ▶ Shifts from cognitive to sensory functioning.

How to tell if person is Emotionally fragile?

- Without a person to reflect or a defined role they are anxious, display psychiatric or regressed function.
- Function as an “emotional sponge/mirror” and/or “emotional radar.”
- They are explosive about receiving “correction.”
- They are painfully aware of what they can not do and angry about their need for your help.

How to tell if person is emotionally fragile?

Personal boundaries are permeable.

Metaphors for unusual states
in persons who are fragile and vulnerable

- Emotional radar (wired to pick up rejection)
- Conditioned emotional reactions (old triggers lead to “automatic” reactions.)
 - ▶ Having a memory is the same as if happening right now. (Can look like PTSD or dissociation)

Emotional responses to distress circumstances

Emotionally unstable reactions
when unable to meet own needs
or other's expectations

- Failure and rejection. Dependent.
- Confusion and anxiety. Fear, loss of control.
- If you think it's your fault: Embarrassed, inhibited. Shame, desire to save face.
- If you think it's someone else's fault: Angry, disappointed, demoralized. Blame, desire to get even.

Ability to form attachments may be impaired.

- They can not resolve conflict, but they can tell what is wrong right now!
 - ▶ They are “smarter” than they can do!
 - ▶ Able to tell when they do “wrong”, but unable to figure out what to do about it.
 - ▶ Life is never “fair!”

Maintain clear personal boundaries

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The NADD Bulletin, March/April 2005, Volume 8, #2, pages 22-32.

“How to become more emotionally thick skinned, Part II.”

The NADD Bulletin, July/August 2005, Volume 8, #4, pages 76-80.

“How to become more emotionally thick skinned, Part III.”

The NADD Bulletin,

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Avoid confrontation by dealing with predictable issues in a routine manner.

If you can identify that escalating behavior is based on “I can’t be criticized,” set up a way for person to be in control, yet also accept clear boundaries.

- May have little ability to focus unless provided with an external “target” for their immediate attention.
- What they “oppose” is your emotional opposition to them. They fixate on and over-focus on the unfairness of it all.
- If you do not appear to be “in their way”, they may not display oppositional or emotionally reactive behavior.
- **Don’t be a “sail in their wind.”** Be cautious about being “set up” to give him/her an excuse for becoming explosive.

What does a person who is functionally dependent and emotionally fragile do when they are not being externally focused?

- When not provided with external focus person may be unable to stop the flood of thoughts about “What if?” “What if not?” “When?” “How will I do that?”
- Anxiety associated with “thought flooding.”
- Momentary focus of attention is like the ball dropping into a spinning roulette wheel.
 - ▶ Person is “captured” by their immediate sensations.

“peaceful coexistence”

Rather than “unsuccessful independence,”
work towards “successful dependence”

- **Goal with person with frequent, challenging behavior is “peaceful coexistence”.**
 - ▶ Give as much support as is necessary to achieve this.

What to do when you don't know what to do.

- Think of creating a mental health SANCTUARY.
- Think that some people are in a chronic state that will remain for the rest of their life, with periods of remission when everything goes perfectly well.
- Lower expectations for how much person will accomplish
- **Raise expectations** for how successful person will be while remaining calm, focused and self-controlled.

Respond to chaos with a ritual

Always provide windows of opportunity

- Have ritual for a “way out”
- Have a ritual for a “way down”
- Have a ritual for a “way back in to normal”

It's OVER when it's over!
Don't hold a grudge!

Crisis management

What to do

when you don't know what to do?

Make it a safe, accepting place to be.

- Drop demand for immediate action
 - Drop cognitive demands

- Increase sensory interaction and emotional feedback
 - ▶ Lower your voice, slow your pace of speech, say less, hum a tune

 - ▶ Self-calm, say familiar things, shift mental and emotional gears (look at happy pictures)

Metaphors for successful methods

Alternative methods to sustain relationship

- Mind-space management: Expectation management
- Focus-orienting in the moment management
 - ▶ (A concrete prop.)
- Continuity management (Familiar routine.)
 - ▶ (Set ahead of time, a rule.)

Emotional management

- Emotion in the moment management
 - ▶ (Humour and release)
- Empathy-mood management
 - ▶ (A role of belonging)

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“Working with people with challenging behaviors: A guide for maintaining positive relationships” 2nd edition 2007

www.fasdconnections.ca

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