

Respond to FASD impacts on the brain

A suggestion for implementing the strategy
'Key areas to support' from the Guide: [FASD
and learning](#)

Includes:

- Reframe won't to can't ... yet
- Understand the “cloak of competence”
- Design for variability across days and times
- Give ākongā more processing time
- Check your assumptions
- Keep interactions positive and upbeat

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and learning](#)

Strategy: [Key areas to support](#)

Suggestion: [Respond to FASD impacts on the brain](#)

Date

11 June 2026

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inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-and-learning/respond-to-fasd-impacts-on-the-brain

Reframe won't to can't ... yet

FASD is a lifelong brain injury. The impacts are unique to each individual.

Consider approaches to:

- recognise and respond to unique needs
- prevent problems rather than applying consequences
- create a toolkit of individualised strategies
- develop effective strategies and change environments.

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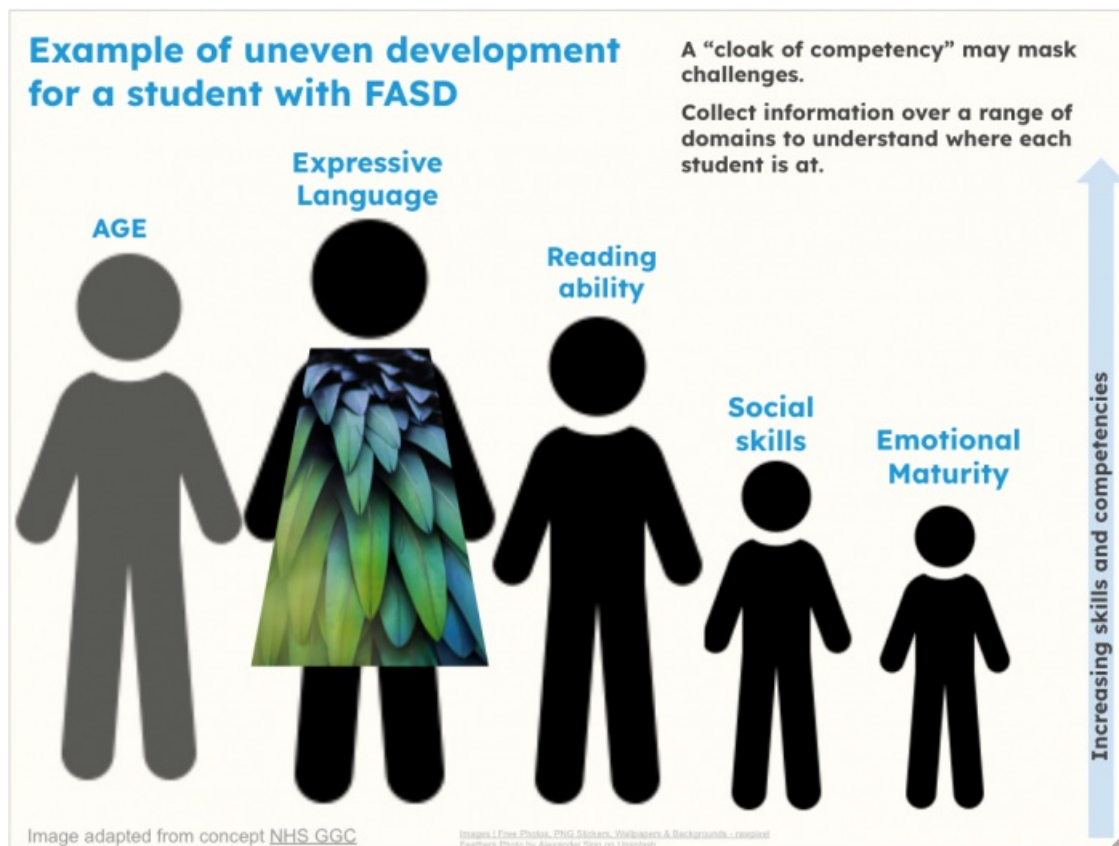
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Understand the “cloak of competence”



Source:

Image adapted from School years, National FASD (UK)

<https://nationalfasd.org.uk/learn-more/wellbeing/supporting-a-loved-one/school-years/#>

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Design for variability across days and times

Think 'gravel roads not highways'. Damage to the brain means that students with FASD may need to work harder than their peers to complete every task required of them. This in turn leads to fatigue, and overload if the demands placed on them are too high.

- ✓ Design the day with several brain breaks and quiet times.
- ✓ Have low sensory zones available to students at all times.
- ✓ Give students more time to process, understand and complete tasks.
- ✓ Prepare a routine for break times, and make sure the student knows where to eat, where to play, and so on.
- ✓ Teach and use sensory regulation strategies such as wearing noise cancelling headphones and calming strategies.
- ✓ Keep instructions and tasks simple using step by step approaches.
- ✓ Recap and consolidate previous learning before moving on to new learning.
- ✓ Extend learning opportunities with repetition, games and a variety of activities.
- ✓ Anticipate difficult times and design strategies to minimise distress.
- ✓ Check in on students regularly and intervene early when issues arise.

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Give ākonga more processing time

Ākonga with FASD need more time to process what they see and hear, as well as time to think and understand new information.

Accommodations do not have to be complicated — give more listen time, create space for more think time, write it down to help with processing, and give your child permission upfront to take the time they need.

Source:

[“Ten second child in a one second world” Eileen Devine](#)

<https://www.eileendevine.com/single-post/the-10-second-child-in-a-one-second-world-slower-processing-pace-and-4-ways-to-support-it>

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Check your assumptions

By understanding the range of impacts on the brain, teachers can read behaviours as indicators of a need and respond by adapting their expectations and teaching and learning strategies.

Here are some examples of understanding and reframing behaviours.

Noncompliance and wilful misconduct may be needs associated with:

- understanding verbal instructions
- processing information
- impulse control
- knowing how to act or what to do next.

Repeatedly making the same mistake may be needs associated with:

- linking cause to effect
- seeing similarities in situations
- generalising from one event to another.

Not sitting still, attention seeking and bothering others may be needs associated with:

- a need to move while learning
- sensory or cognitive overload
- not understanding personal space, needing barriers to define appropriate distance.

Lying or deliberate dishonesty may be needs associated with:

- trying to please by telling you what they think you want to hear
- problems with memory or sequencing
- inability to accurately recall events.

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Keep interactions positive and upbeat

It is easy for people with FASD to feel rejected. In this video, people with FASD talk about how they would like others to treat them.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/rSkKM7Hr-Ic>

Closed Captions

Source:

[National Organisation for FASD UK](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSkKM7Hr-Ic>

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