

Practical tips/Best Practices with Aboriginal clients with FASD or suspected FASD

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The following tips are suggested based on being Aboriginal and almost 35 years of adult life experience working and living in various Aboriginal communities across the country as a registered nurse, later as a nurse practitioner, and in other roles.

The points offered here have not been researched; they are knowledge gained by life.

Interacting with Aboriginal individuals who you suspect have FASD will require similar strategies as identified in the general information. However these general points may help.

- ✚ Despite apparent use of English or French, language barriers may exist. English is often a second language and under stress, English comprehension is diminished. In many Aboriginal languages there are potential barriers requiring translation by someone skilled in legal concepts. Translation needs to be aimed at a grade 3-5 English-comprehension level.

- ✚ Translation by family members may work for general conversation but legal terminology requires specialized knowledge not generally in common use in Aboriginal communities regardless of location.

- ✚ Decreasing the amount of stimulation within the court room or law office will assist any Aboriginal person to focus on the task of communication.
 - Move the prosecution and defence tables and chairs to positions closer to the judge's desk.
 - Turn off any fans and reduce noise by closing doors and windows for the duration of the court room time.
 - Remove pens, papers, etc. to drawers so they don't become what the languages translate as meaning "toys".
 - Keep visual and auditory stimuli to a minimum in community court settings (choose rooms with blank neutral walls rather than wallpaper, posters,

intense colours, remove additional furnishings, avoid patterned clothing, remove observers, etc.)

- Do not wear scented shampoo, colognes or after-shave lotion
 - Speak slowly, clearly and succinctly. Extraneous words confuse.
 - Do not repeat words until the person has had time to process what you've already said.
 - Pose simple questions, one at a time. Do not use negative questions (is it not true that...?)
 - Link history to person's activities to reduce failure and confusion (e.g. TV programs, meals, bedtime) rather than specific hours or minutes. Failure or perceived failure becomes persistent chatter in their heads
 - Provide water to drink in advance or as you proceed and remove glass so it doesn't become a "distraction."
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- ✚ The presence of another Aboriginal person well-known to the individual will assist in comfort and that may improve your chances of getting the best possible reliable information and the best follow-up of any community-based measures.

 - ✚ Elders and traditional teachers have a calming effect and these resource people are well-versed in dealing with stress. Their assistance for you and Aboriginal individuals can be invaluable.

 - ✚ Research on FASD in Aboriginal communities shows that openness to a problem results in intervention to address it. However, stereotyping of individuals as having FASD creates a barrier that bars effective communication resulting in inaction.

 - ✚ Research on Aboriginal communities shows that increases in autonomy, community control and social integration prevent disease.

 - ✚ Success is evident in Aboriginal efforts to deal with abuse of all types, loss of self-esteem, culture and exclusion.