

Primary Behaviours Related to FASD – Diane V. Malbin

Primary behaviours are those that most clearly reflect underlying changes in brain structure and function. Brain damage = Behaviour. None of these behaviours are exclusive to FASD. However, people with FASD usually exhibit several of them. These behaviours show a wide variability in frequency and magnitude from person to person. (Diane V. Malbin, 2002:55-56)

Type of behaviour	Primary Behaviour	Justice Implications
Poor Executive Functioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Difficulty planning, organizing, prioritizing, sequencing, initiating and following through •Difficulty setting goals, complying with contractual obligations, being on time and sticking to a schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Difficulty meeting the requirements of probation, following through on complex orders •Late or absent – failure to appear – sanctions don't make sense to her
Poor executive functioning: Difficulty abstracting, predicting outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪In the present, has difficulty abstracting and predicting, seeing what's next – similar to Alzheimer's Disease ▪Difficulty with planning and projecting into the future which is abstract ▪Difficulty formulating options and making choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪“Oops” kids, act fast, process slowly ▪Often unable to foresee consequences of actions, or to predict outcomes •Difficulty seeing why doing the same crime over and over gets him in trouble ▪Recidivism may start here
Difficulty with Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Has difficulty with short term memory, information input, integration, forming associations, retrieving memories and forming output based on memory •Does not learn from past experience •Makes the same mistake over and over despite the severity of punishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Will not remember that he has a court date or a probation appointment •This may look like carelessness or a problem with attitude •Repetition of the same crime with little escalation to more serious crimes •Punishment for crime rarely works; doesn't learn from experience
Inconsistent Memory and Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •May remember and perform well on Monday but forget on Tuesday •This trait is very difficult for teachers to understand: “he did well on Monday's test but by Wednesday it was as if he had learned nothing.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Performs very well sometimes •Does the same task very poorly the next time •Very confusing for anyone supervising community service – why is performance so up and down?

Time, Math, Money Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Time – often late, “doesn’t get it” •Mathematics – hard or impossible •Science – hard or impossible •Money – never knows where it goes, never has enough to meet obligations •Activities in all these areas cause great difficulty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Paying fines – may commit a crime to get the money to pay a fine •Never has enough money to get necessities of life, spends on impulse forgetting he needs bus tickets to get to court tomorrow •May be late for court and not realize it •May not understand the difference between a 3-year sentence and a 3-month sentence
Impaired Judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Often unable to make decisions •Difficulty understanding safety and danger •May not recognize differences between a friend and a stranger – street-proofing of young children is very difficult for parents •Fantasy and reality get mixed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •May choose to go to a federal prison so she can smoke •May make sentence choices with little or no understanding of what they mean •Will need to be told, told, and re-told and still may not understand it •Poor choices regarding bail conditions (e.g. agrees to a fine he can’t pay)
Inability to Generalize Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Forming concepts by generalizing is almost impossible •Difficulty associating information •Unable to apply rules in new settings (e.g. knows not shoplift at store A but Store B is not the same store) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Does not learn from experience •May not link previous charges to current ones •Corrections implications – usual rehabilitation doesn’t work •May not understand that robbery is robbery regardless of where they do it.
Communication Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Appears to understand instructions, may nod and repeat rules verbatim but then fails to act congruently •Go to your locker and get your book – goes into hall and passes locker, and returns, without the book •Is to attend a probation appointment – doesn’t turn up and doesn’t know (remember) why she didn’t •Don’t ask why – they do not know “why” – but may confabulate/create an answer for you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Agreement doesn’t lead to actions •Will sound like they understand what you are saying •Will not be able to explain what you said but may be able to play it back so it sounds like they got it •Will not be able to explain why but may make up a story that they think you will like •Will read your body language to try to figure out what you want to hear

Language Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Often talks a lot and creates an aura of competence but won't understand what he said – strong expressive language skills ('flim-flam man', 'snake oil salesperson') •Does not get the message – receptive language skills are often extremely weak •Will confabulate and make up stories and explanations; this looks like lying but is not volitional lying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The messages are not received in an understandable way •Will try to make you believe that they are “cool” and understood everything you said; they do not want to appear “stupid” •May get stressed enough that they “melt down” in front of you •Confabulates – provides what she thinks you want to hear – this can create real problems for child welfare workers, legal counsel and judges with reports of abuse, etcetera
Slow Cognitive Pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Often thinks more slowly •Requires minutes not seconds to generate an answer •Often says, “I don't know” or “I can't” to avoid answering quickly •Malbin calls them “ten second people in a one second world” •(Think of the last joke <i>you</i> didn't get!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Speak clearly and succinctly. They are not dim-witted but need time to process information. •A busy court room with people performing many tasks will be very distracting; most of the communication will be missed •Be prepared for shut down and a blank look
Slow Auditory Pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Central auditory processing delays mean that language is processed slowly, requiring time for comprehension •May only hear every third word in normally paced speech •Need you to talk clearly and succinctly. Repetition helps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Related to slow cognitive pace. •Their brain operates slowly •Will not get all the information they need to make a decision because they don't hear everything that is said.
Perseveration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Rigid, gets “stuck”, repetitive behaviour •Often has difficulty changing gears, stopping one activity and starting another (e.g. “Put away your language books and get ready for music” may cause real difficulty) •Transitions are extremely difficult •“These kids just don't get it.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Will commit the same crime over and over again. •Recidivism may originate here •Stopping one activity and starting another could be a problem (e.g. can't button shirt while walking from the holding cell – finishes one activity at a time) •May begin clicking a pen and can't stop

Dysmaturity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Often function socially, emotionally and cognitively at less than half their chronological age •Observers expect age-appropriate behaviour that isn't evident •Dysmaturity shows inconsistency in age: chronologically 15, but socially 10, emotionally 8, and cognitively 9 •Tend to reach their maximum maturity by age 35 – will continue to need support for the rest of their lives. •Supporters have trouble dealing with and accepting dysmaturity, it's very confusing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sexual maturity is rarely delayed but social and emotional maturity is almost always delayed. This can lead to sexual choices that look adult but aren't. •Have often been abused due to dysmaturity and repeat it as chronological adults. •Adjust your expectations; age-appropriate for that individual is impossible •Often charged with crimes as an adult but doesn't have the social, intellectual or cognitive abilities of an adult
Impulsivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Acts first, sees the problems that develop after they are created •Impulsivity coupled with inability to abstract and predict outcomes leads to one <i>faux pas</i> after another – cause of extreme frustration for supporters, parents, teachers, social workers, judicial professionals •(Supporters/external brains may not cope resulting in a withdrawal of support) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Often commits impulsive acts such as fighting with a weapon, shoplifting or purse snatching •Impulsivity is increased when under the influence of alcohol or drugs •They act without consideration of consequences (consequences rarely prevent repetition) •Parents and caregivers can give up on their children because they don't understand or accept impulsivity as brain damage
Sensory Systems Dysfunctions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Massive Information Processing disorder(s) (Sensory Information Disorder) •May over-react to stimuli (e.g. a simple touch) •OR may under-react to painful stimuli ignoring earaches, broken bones, need to urinate, etcetera •Overwhelmed by sensory input •Unable to filter out extraneous stimuli •Often appear agitated, irritable, and/or aggressive from stimulus overload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •May have a diagnosis of SID (Sensory Information Disorder) •An unfamiliar courtroom may present a frightening stimulus overload •Arrest, especially if roughly done, may cause a serious overload leading to more charges •May totally shut down or rage when overloaded •Do not assimilate or process information effectively

Chart created and adapted by Mary K. Cunningham