

Using the RIRO Skills & Concepts to Work with Children with FASD

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When working with children with FASD, it can be very helpful for **caregivers** to cultivate **realistic optimism**: *see the situation as it is and accept that ongoing effort and support will be necessary*. This is a relatively fixed neurological condition.

You may not be able to impart the resiliency thinking skills to many children with FAS or FASD. The adult will need to continue to function as the “external brain” for the child regarding routines, tasks, social cues, planning, etc. However, you can role model appropriate responses for them to incorporate so that you are entraining socially appropriate responses.

As well as realistic optimism, strengthening **all the resiliency abilities** will help adults themselves to cope with daily stressors and role model resilience.

Practicing emotional regulation and impulse control strategies will help keep adults calm, grounded and flexible in the face of these children’s often challenging behaviour.

Causal analysis gets to the root of what triggered the child’s behaviour and helps develop ways to prevent or deal with it, i.e., Was it sensory stuff? Too much stimulation? What else was happening in the environment?

Using empathy enhances the relationship and really acknowledges the challenges these children face emotionally, socially, physically and intellectually.

Looking for strengths... celebrating them. This helps the *adult* feel a sense of **efficacy** in their handling of the tough situations these children get into and helps the *child* own their accomplishments.

Reaching out for support *before* the adult feels depleted by the childrens’ behaviour is a very important strategy to keep the relationship intact.

And, of course, it is crucial to remember that **maintaining resilience is an ongoing process**. Adults working/living with children with FASD need to continually facilitate opportunities with these children for direct, concrete teaching and support of all the resiliency abilities.

Flexible and accurate thinking helps adults avoid overgeneralizing or jumping to conclusions about why the child is behaving in certain ways. It may appear that the child is deliberately disregarding a request, but more often than not, the child would like to please the adult, but has been unable to process or remember instructions. When the adult **separates the child from the behaviour**, it protects the relationship and both parties from feeling overwhelmed or hopeless.

Use the BC connections as an assessment tool to identify what is happening and define the triggers to the behaviour.

Create a secure base and positive environment – make use of the relationship to acknowledge the need for affection and approval that these children long for.

Focus on impulse control strategies built into the environment such as visual cues to stop and wait. e.g., One foster mom carried a little stop sign in her purse to show a child who would not respond to verbal direction.

Challenge the child's negative thoughts about themselves by providing concrete specifics with **Descriptive Feedback**. For example, the child says, "I'm a bad kid" and the adult responds, "You're body went out of control, you're not a bad kid. You needed some physical movement to get rid of energy. We have to make sure you do your run every morning and every afternoon."

Encourage teachers and others to be very flexible about allowing for lots of physical release - Allow child to walk around the room every 15 min. / use rocking chairs, squeeze balls, etc. This grounds the child's body energy enough so they can concentrate on learning in small chunks. If teachers need to talk something over or problem solve with the child, do it while going for a walk, as the child will be able to hear and think better when the body is in motion. This is realistic optimism and causal analysis in action.

Post pictures of the child doing physical activities as a celebration of one their strengths and a reminder to expend energy constructively.

Identify and reinforce areas of competence –

- **Post pictures** of child succeeding in other areas to **challenge child's negative self-concept**, i.e., photo of the child smiling and sitting with a peer or mentor to dispute the child's belief, "I'm unlikeable."
- Display something they made to dispute the belief, "I can't do anything."
- Use photos showing the child being successful or engaged positively to remind child of the "Good Time Nuggets."

Relationally, encourage one friend instead of group of friends to reduce the potential for overstimulation and provide more emotional safety to practice social skills. Focus on social skills rather than academic skills.

Lori Nichols, a clinic nurse for the Children Aid Society of Toronto teaches the RIRO skills to foster parents. She says this about the training:

The adult resiliency skills help the caregivers to understand the situation better and be more willing to be flexible in their approach and setting up the environment. If you ask the question "what do these children need for resiliency?" the answer is relationship that demonstrates relaxing, emotional regulation, and impulse control. That's the adult skills. The A-B-C model can be very useful to figuring out what isn't working, and challenging assumptions. My experience is that one of the biggest hurdles caregivers have is that they have a hard time learning that the child with FASD does not learn from consequences in the normal way. Once they put this in perspective, everything else is easier.