



Communication Strategies for FASD

The 6S Rules

Short, Simple, Same, Slow, Specific, Show

This pānui is a reminder of the need to slow down and be calm and reassuring when interacting with a person with FASD.

Communicating FASD-style is based around the brain-processing challenges many people with FASD experience in terms of memory, focus and attention, slower information processing speed, developmental versus chronological age (particularly in expressive and receptive language skills) and their tendency for black and white or literal thinking. The two main things to always consider are **what** we say and **how** we say it – think about speed, complexity and tone.

- **SHORT** – use only one or two short sentences at a time, then pause for at least 10 seconds for them to process that information.

- **SIMPLE** – use simple, unambiguous words, and avoid confusing colloquialisms or irony.

- **SAME** – always use the same terminology and phraseology. We have several different words for some things and that can be confusing. Repeating words or phrases regularly (like a litany you regularly say or use) helps cement them in memory. Repetition is required to shift learning from the working memory to long-term memory – this information is stored nearer the brain stem where it is usually easier for a person with FASD to retrieve. However, memory retrieval may still be 'patchy'.

- **SLOW** – talk slowly and clearly. Don't rush. Give them time and attention, and check they truly understand what is being asked or explained by asking them to repeat it back in their own words. Do not accept a nod or an ability to parrot the words back as constituting understanding.

The brain loses its ability to process language when in a heightened emotional state. This is true of all of us. The more dysregulated we are, the less verbal language we should be using.

- **SPECIFIC** – be clear with instructions or requests. Use clear, positive phrasing, rather than negative, e.g. "I would like you to ... by ...", rather than "Don't do that!"

- **SHOW** – people with FASD tend to be kinesthetic, tactile and visual learners. They learn best by 'doing'. Showing them what you mean as you talk with them, walking along side them as they do it, is an excellent communication strategy to reduce frustration and help cement understanding and learning.

Finally, remember: when they go fast – you go slow. When they go high – you go low.

When people with FASD become elevated in behaviour, it is important you slow down and lower your voice tone to be calming, reassuring, and neutral. Most people tend to mirror the behaviour and tone of others if they can.

With shared strength, guidance and wisdom, those with FASD can grow and achieve.

