Patterns and Connections

The child may not understand the connections between people in their birth family, the care family, people in the neighbourhood, children at school etc. and have difficulty applying appropriate labels to their different roles. There may also be a lack of understanding of similar patterns in the relationships of roles in other families. For example, a female sibling in the care family might be labelled as the next door neighbour's partner.

There are understood patterns in routines - organisation of daily tasks at home and school to ensure predictability and structure. Patterns are sometimes invisible to this child and "every day of school is the first day."[1]

Strategies

- Don't arbitrarily change the environment. If this is necessary, introduce change slowly – for example: What do you think about a sleepover in Penny's room?
- Label baskets or containers with a word or a picture so that packing up is less confusing.
- From the start, set simple family ground rules (as few as possible to allow for impaired memory). This means everyone abides by these simply expressed rules. Eg don't use words like respect but instead say no hitting or yelling loudly. Talk to siblings about FASD and how they can contribute to making the environment calmer. Ensure each has their space which is private even when sharing a room.
- Explain the child's particular needs to family members, teachers, sport coaches etc. Put together a book – My name is Jenny. I have some trouble remembering things so you will need to remind me a lot. I like pictures better than words. Please tell me exactly want you want me to do and avoid using words or phrases like behave, concentrate, be good, don't be naughty, clean up your room. It takes me a little bit longer to finish my tasks so it would be good if you could help me out here. Maybe I could do the work in class and then finish at home or in the next lesson. I like to play outside but it is good if I have a grown-up person around to help me understand the rules of the game. If I do something silly like climb on the roof or have a meltdown and get angry, I would like you to understand that I am easily overwhelmed when there are too many people around me and too much noise. At these times I may need to go to my quiet area for a short time.

Pretending "it will go away" or there is nothing to worry about patronizes the child's effort to make sense out of the reality of daily experiences. The more intelligent the child, the more he or she will sense differences from peers. Children can use art, poetry, songs, etc. for self-definition and strengthening emotional coping skills.[2]

[1] McCreight 1997:19

[2] The Arc; Sharing Stories, Finding Hope

NOFASD Australia is funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Health and Aged Care.