

Winter
2014

Advisor

NEWSLETTER

Featuring

Recognizing FASD

Understanding and Preventing
Cyber Bullying

Plus

New legal program
helps Saskatchewan
Children and Youth

In Home Support
program



SASKATCHEWAN
FOSTER FAMILIES

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Have you ever considered being a foster parent and don't know how to get started?

Watch our foster parent recruitment video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhTmzH8LYFs>



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New Legal Program helps Saskatchewan Children and Youth

Released on December 2, 2014

The Government of Saskatchewan is pleased to announce the official launch of a program that will help ensure the voices of children and youth are heard.

The Public Guardian and Trustee Amendment Act, 2014 (No. 2) goes into effect today, which establishes the Counsel for Children program. This new program is intended specifically for situations where children and youth benefit from having their views and best interests represented in child protection proceedings by independent legal counsel.

"The Counsel for Children supports the rights of children defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child," Justice Minister and Attorney General Gordon Wyant said. "Through this program, we recognize children have their own unique perspective that should be taken into account in child protection matters."

Counsel will be appointed by the Public Guardian and Trustee from a roster of trained lawyers upon request from the court, or on referral from the child, a family member, or another concerned person. Counsel for Children can assist all parties with an early resolution by focusing on the child or youth's perspective, which will reduce the need to go to court.

The program was created in response to a recommendation made by the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth.

"With this program's launch, a child or young person involved in a protection hearing will have a lawyer to represent them, and help them share their opinions if they are able to articulate them," Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth Bob Pringle said. "That's critical to respecting their rights."

The Counsel for Children is a component of the Saskatchewan Child and Family Agenda, which invests in meeting the needs of children, youth and families.

"This program is an excellent example of the Government of Saskatchewan's cross-ministry approach to helping our province's most vulnerable citizens – our children," Social Services Minister Donna Harpauer said. "We all share the belief that our children must come first in all we do and the decisions we make."

To contact the Counsel for Children, call 1-877-787-5424, or look online at www.justice.gov.sk.ca/cfc.



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Executive Director's Message

As I am preparing my message for the Advisor, I begin to reflect on my career as both a foster parent and as Executive Director with the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association. I opened my home to children in need in 1981 not knowing that 33 years later I would still hold the same passion for improving the lives of families, children and youth across the province.

Last year was a year to celebrate for our organization. Our bi-annual conference "40 years of Families Helping Families" was held in Saskatoon this past June. Foster families, ministry staff and special guests were honored to share in the joyous milestone of our association. To commemorate this important event the association unveiled a collage of artwork consisting of forty squares which were painted by families from across the province. This piece is now proudly displayed at the provincial office in Saskatoon.

Over the past 10 years as Executive Director I have seen extensive growth in our relationship with government and the work that is being done within our foster care system. In 2005, the PRIDE Model of Practice was introduced to our families across the province. I have been honoured to see how this model has assisted us in mapping out the new direction that the Ministry has taken in providing increased supports and recognition to foster families for the important work in which they do.



In September, we extended our In Home Support Program to the northern region. To date our program supports families throughout the north, central, and Regina service regions employing over 100 staff to provide day-to-day support to families.

Many of these accomplishments would not have been possible without the strong support and role that your Provincial Board of Directors has played in ensuring that your voice is heard. Without everyone working together as part of the professional team, we would not have been able to achieve the same goal of providing quality care to children and ensuring that our foster families feel supported.

In closing, may 2015 fill your home with love, happiness, and good health.

Deb Davies

Make a difference
for foster parents and
**become a
volunteer!**

The SFFA volunteer programs provide important support to our members.

We are actively recruiting volunteers for your region!

If you are interested in providing support to fellow foster parents, please call Wayne Roman toll free at **1-888-276-2880**.



SFFA's Board of Directors:

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We need your e-mail

We are now sending e-mails to our foster parents on a monthly basis. To be added to our list and receive the latest news, please send your e-mail address to wayne@sffa.sk.ca — **THANK-YOU!**



cyber bullying

Understanding and Preventing Online Harassment and Bullying by the Media Awareness Network

In 2003, a 15-year-old from Trois-Rivières, Québec, dropped out of his high school after classmates found an embarrassing video of him pretending to be a Star Wars character and posted it on the Internet (Harmon, 2003).

Three years earlier, a 14-year-old from Mission, B.C., hanged herself after receiving threatening phone calls from classmates (CBC News Online, March 23, 2005).

These are just two of the most disturbing examples of a hard-to-detect problem that affects thousands of Canadian children and teenagers every year: cyber-bullying.

What is cyber-bullying?

Dr. Shaheen Shariff of McGill University's Faculty of Education defines cyber-bullying as follows: "Cyber-bullying consists of covert, psychological bullying, conveyed through the electronic mediums

such as cell-phones, web-logs and web-sites, on-line chat rooms, 'MUD' rooms (multi-user domains where individuals take on different characters) and Xangas (on-line personal profiles where some adolescents create lists of people they do not like). It is verbal (over the telephone or cell phone), or written (flaming, threats, racial, sexual or homophobic harassment) using the various mediums available" (Shariff and Gouin, 2005, p. 3).

How widespread is the problem?

Cyber-bullying is on the rise because more kids than ever before are using electronic communications technologies. In a 2005 survey of more than 5,000 students in grades 4 to 11, Media Awareness Network (MNet) found that 94% have Internet access at home, and a significant majority has a high-speed connection. By the time they hit Grade 11, half of students have an Internet-connected computer for their own use.

Kids use the Internet to build and sustain their social networks. One of the most popular activities is chatting with friends and "meeting" new acquaintances, particularly through instant messaging (IM). On an average school day, 28% of Grade 4 students use IM; among Grade 11 students, that figure rises to 86%.

Although kids are still more likely to be bullied in the "real world," MNet's research found that of the 34% of students in grades 7 to 11 who reported being bullied, almost a third were bullied through the Internet.

Isn't cyber-bullying much like traditional bullying?

In some respects, cyber-bullying is similar to traditional bullying. The behaviour is always unwanted, deliberate, and relentless. Often, bullies use it to exclude the victim from a social circle for reasons such as looking different, being gay, being intelligent or gifted, or

having special needs or disabilities (Shariff and Gouin, 2005, p. 3-4).

However, some significant differences make cyber-bullying a unique problem. New technologies can affect kids' ethical behaviour in several ways (p. 5).

First, technology doesn't give kids visible feedback about the consequences of their actions. One of the most effective ways to end bullying behaviour is to get bullies to feel empathy for their victims. But online, even when kids know their actions are hurtful, they can easily convince themselves they haven't hurt anyone. As one elementary school student in Toronto put it, "I don't think a lot of people would have enough confidence to walk up to someone and be like, 'I hate you, you're ugly.' But over the Internet...you don't have to look in their eyes and see they're hurt" (CBC News Online, March, 2005).

Second, technology allows kids to be anonymous. In the physical world, behaviours often have known consequences, and kids feel they are continually observed, monitored, watched, and protected. Online, they can post something anonymously and then distance themselves from it, confident they won't be caught. In one Calgary survey of middle school students, 41% of students who had been cyber-bullied didn't know the identity of the person who was bullying them (Sharif and Gouin, 2005, p. 5).

What other appeal does cyber-bullying hold for bullies?

The Internet can be a perfect tool for harassing others because it offers bullies access to their victims 24/7, even when the victim is at home.

The power of the Internet also means that hateful messages can



Technology doesn't give kids visible feedback about the consequences of their actions.

be widely distributed to millions of people. And the more people who are involved, the worse bullying can become. Research on bullying has found that 30% of bystanders support perpetrators instead of victims, and that the longer the bullying persists, the more bystanders are likely to join the abuse (Sharif and Gouin, 2005, p. 5).

As an Ontario teenager who became the subject of an abusive Web site told CBC News, "Anyone with a computer can see it... And you can't get away from it. It doesn't go away when you come home from school" (CBC News Online, 2005).

Are boys and girls equally affected?

Preliminary research has found girls to be primary targets of cyber-bullying (Sharif and Gouin, 2005, p. 7). However, they are also increasingly surfacing as instigators. In the Calgary study of middle school students, 17% of girls confessed to online bullying over a two-month period, compared to 10% of boys (Sharif and Gouin, 2005, p. 10).

One explanation offered is that girls, who may be more submissive

in face-to-face communications, may not feel so constrained when they're online (Sharif and Gouin, 2005, p. 5). As a 13-year-old Edmonton girl told MNet researchers, "In school ...you don't want anyone to think of you as a 'gossip' or someone who says things about other people. Everyone wants to be 'nice.' You don't have to be nice if you don't want to online."

Are there laws to prevent cyber-bullying?

In some cases, online bullying may be considered a criminal act. Under the Criminal Code of Canada, it's a crime to communicate repeatedly with someone if your communication causes them to fear for their own safety or for the safety of others (Department of Justice Canada, 2005). It's also a crime to publish a "defamatory libel"—something likely to injure a person's reputation by exposing him or her to hatred, contempt or ridicule (Department of Justice Canada, 2006).

A cyber-bully may also be violating the Canadian Human Rights Act if he or she spreads hate or discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or disability.

However, cyber-bullying becomes more complicated where schools and the law are involved. When real world bullying occurs on school property, teachers and administrators can often intervene, but online bullying usually occurs in secret or off school grounds, making it difficult for schools to fight.

Because cyber-bullying is a relatively new phenomenon, schools are operating without legal precedents. Despite this vacuum, many schools are responding proactively.

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For instance, in 2005, when a Toronto boys' school discovered some of its students had created an anti-Semitic web site, they expelled the three students who created the site and four others who knew about it but did nothing to stop it (Moore , 2005). More recently, two Grade 11 students in Calgary , Alberta , were suspended from school after sending threatening e-mails to a classmate (Ferguson , 2006).

What steps can kids take to avoid being cyber-bullied?

Young people can take some basic steps to protect themselves from cyber-bullying. One of the most important is to guard their contact information and passwords. They should avoid giving their cell phone number or e-mail address to people they don't know. And they should never give their e-mail or IM passwords to anyone, even friends. Friendships can go sour.

What can kids do if they are cyber-bullied?

Unlike whispered threats, cyber-bullying leaves a trail of evidence, enabling victims to trace their aggressors. When cyber-bullying occurs, victims should keep a record of all messages, with their times and dates. E-mail messages can be traced and used as evidence. Kids setting up IM accounts should enable the "conversation history" option, so that their computer will store logs of IM conversations.

Cell phone companies can trace any harassing calls and text messages sent through their service, unless the messages are coming from a Web site. Victims can also ask to have their phone numbers changed.

In the case of an offensive Web site, victims can track down a Web site host by using one of the many

■ ■ The best time to talk to students about ways to combat cyber-bullying is in the late elementary and middle school years, when peer pressure intensifies and Internet use rises dramatically.



Whois search tools on the Web, then ask the company hosting the site to remove it, however, unless the content is illegal, hosts are not obligated to do so. Whois sites allow people to search for the host of a Web domain. Because there is no central database for this information, users may need to reference more than one Whois site.

Here are three easy-to-remember actions MNet recommends to victims of cyber-bullying.

- Stop: Don't try to reason with or talk to an online bully.
- Block: Use the technology to block the person from contacting you again.
- Talk: Tell a trusted adult (such as a parent, teacher, coach or guidance counsellor), use a help line such as Kids Help Phone or report the incident to the police.

How can adults help kids confront bullies?

Just like kids watching a fight in the schoolyard, bystanders may hesitate to speak out against cyber-bullies for fear of retaliation. Schools and parents need to create a culture that encourages kids to challenge bullying, harassment, and meanness.

Educating kids about the seriousness of cyber-bullying is vital. Many kids think "bullying" means only physical threats and violence. Once they realize that cyber-bullying can be just as hurtful psychologically, they need to know that parents, teachers and other adults will support them if they choose to confront a cyber-bully. Kids' reactions can be crucial to defusing a cyber-bullying situation, because censure from fellow students can carry more clout with bullies than criticism from adults.

That anti-Semitic web site in Toronto came to light when some girls e-mailed the offenders and asked them to pull the hateful materials off their Web site. In response, the girls were bombarded with hate mail, but instead of being intimidated, they notified parents and school officials.

The best time to talk to students about ways to combat cyber-bullying is in the late elementary and middle school years, when peer pressure intensifies and Internet use rises dramatically.

How can adults encourage kids to behave ethically online?

Nancy Willard of the Responsible Netizen Institute has developed a list of ethical decision-making

strategies that can help young people learn to behave ethically and responsibly online. They include the following tests.

- The “Golden Rule” Test: How would you feel if someone did this to you? If you wouldn’t like it, then it’s probably wrong.
- The “Trusted Adult” Test: What would an adult whose opinion you respect, such as a grandparent or coach, think of your actions?
- The “Front Page” Test: How would you feel if your actions were reported on the front page of a newspaper?
- The “Real World” Test: Would it be okay if you acted the same way in the real world? (Willard, 2000, p. 3).

How can schools address the problem?

Because cyber-bullying is a relatively new phenomenon with few legal precedents, schools are struggling to understand where their responsibility lies in dealing with cyber activities taking place off school property. Prevention measures should be the first line of defence in addressing this emerging issue. Key approaches can include:

- integrating cyber bullying into current anti-bullying school-based programs (such as safe schools initiatives);
- reviewing all existing policies (including bullying and computer Acceptable Use Policies) to include online

harassment;

- integrating curriculum-based anti-cyber bullying programs into classrooms;
- educating staff through professional development opportunities about the seriousness of cyber bullying; and
- informing parents of the issue through school newsletters and information evenings.

How can teachers and teacher-librarians respond?

Educators can approach online bullying with proactive, educational responses, including:

- modelling respectful and tolerant attitudes;
- intervening whenever a child is being bullied;
- encouraging shy students to participate in classroom and school activities;
- working with a diverse group of students to create an anti-bullying site;
- developing a peer mentoring program to encourage responsible Internet use;
- creating an anti-bullying pledge, with input from students;
- helping students host a Mix It Up day (tolerance.org, 2006), when students bridge social boundaries by sitting with someone new during lunch; and
- familiarizing themselves with Web culture and the way kids communicate online.

Is there no good news in cyber-space?

While this article has focused on the dark side of online communication, the majority of young people’s online experiences are positive. In the Media Awareness Network’s latest survey (2005a), only a quarter of kids classified memorable online experiences as “bad”—and a good portion of those “bad” experiences related to frustration with technology, not with peers.

The Media Awareness Network (2005b) also discovered that rules about Internet use, parental involvement and discussion about Internet issues do make a difference in kids’ online behaviour. Across the board, children whose parents enforce rules surrounding Internet use are less likely to participate in questionable or risky online activities.

Keep it in perspective

When it comes to online bullying, don’t blame the technology. These are age-old bullying behaviours that kids are simply applying through a new medium. Many adults feel at a disadvantage knowing that kids are way ahead of them when it comes to the Net. But it’s important to remember that even though kids may be ahead of adults in their use of technology, adults have the life experience and knowledge to help kids contextualize their online experiences and actions.

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When should I call for support?

Being a foster parent isn’t easy, but it is rewarding. It is important to know that you have support when you are struggling. If you have questions about policy, case planning or need support with investigations or quality of care, know that you are not alone. There are many different people who can support you and answer any questions that you may have.

Effects of Fostering on the family

Foster parenting is a rewarding, difficult, and demanding all at the same time. Fostering brings many new experiences and challenges which may affect the child in foster care and the entire foster family.

Foster parents need to take care of their needs and the needs of their own children just as they would take care of the needs of a child placed in their home. It takes time to adjust to the arrival of a child and the resulting change in dynamics of the whole family.

A child in foster care often arrives without the preparation that surrounds the birth of a child or sibling. The phone call, the family's decision, and the arrival of the child can all occur within a few hours. The child may be close in age (actual age of developmental level) to the foster family's own children, and children living in the home may have mixed emotions. The entire family needs to incorporate the foster child into family activities to help the child feel cared for and secure.

It is normal to request respite care or a break from fostering, either for an afternoon, a couple of day, or longer at times. Some families even choose to take short "time-outs" between foster care placements in their home to re-group as a family. Families should do what they need in order to continue to provide a stable and supportive home for a child and their family.

Children may worry what happens to the children in foster care when they leave your home. They may need to be told that it's OK to grieve the loss of their foster brother or sister. Many foster parents keep pictures of children who have been part of their family to help family members remember the children who lived with them.

Foster families may not expect feelings of grief or loss after a foster child leaves their home. But as the child moves on, the foster family loses the unique relationship that they had with that child. Foster family members may also face other kinds of grief such as the grief a child experiences by being away from their family.

A person dealing with loss may feel depressed, anxious, or angry; foster parents may miss the child who has left the home. Members of the foster family may have difficulty concentrating, cry exhibit restlessness, have trouble sleeping, avoid social contact and intimacy, and experience appetite disturbance and fatigue. These symptoms may be distressing to the members of the foster family, especially if the grief is unexpected.

Although the move of a child may be a deeply emotional time, it is potentially an opportunity for growth and change. Foster parents can use feelings of grief to build empathy for what parents feel when their child is removed, and for the losses of the children who have to leave their own homes.

Facing intense circumstances of grief and loss can be difficult, and foster parents should allow time to work through and recover from such experiences.

Remember—that in order to take care of our children, foster parents need to take care of themselves.

State of Wisconsin Foster Parent Handbook (2008 ed.) Chapter 5

Sidebar:

- in order to ensure the best possible care for children, it is important for foster families to identify their stress levels and let the caseworker know if they are feeling overwhelmed.
- the experience of fostering children may have unexpected positive and negative effects on all the children in the home.
- although the move of a child may be a deeply emotional time for the foster family, it is potentially an opportunity for growth and change.
- it is important to continually evaluate whether the demands of fostering can be managed and when to ask for additional help.
- It is the foster parent's responsibility to keep the agency informed and their right to request assistance when needed.
- A foster parent support group is a network of foster parents who come together to share ideas, experiences, and concerns related to the children in their home.
- A foster parent association is typically an organization that strives to support foster parents and to advocate on behalf of all children.
- continued learning can help foster parents understand and support ongoing needs of children placed in their home.

Reunifying foster children with their birth parents

by Carrie Craft from *About Parenting*

Those interested in becoming foster parents learn that a big part of their job as foster parents is to aid family reunification. There are numerous steps to a family reunification plan and each country and foster care agency handles it differently. Here is a rough idea of some basics to family reunification. Again, your agency may differ.

1. Case plan goals, objections, and court orders.

Most birth parents have numerous objectives that they must fulfill in order to have their children placed back within their home. The objectives, which are often court ordered, are also included within the case plan goal toward family reunification and may include the following:

- drug/alcohol classes or treatment, as needed

2. Progression of visits. As time passes and the child remain in foster care, visits between the child and birth parents will steadily increase in frequency and moderation. It's not uncommon for visits to move from supervised, weekly visits to monitored, weekly visits to unsupervised, weekly visits. Then they will progress from overnights and weekends to several days in a row. The visits are often increased as birth parents complete court orders, and have shown to be appropriate during previous supervised and monitored visits.

3. Court review of case plan goals. Court dates give the judge a chance to review the completion of court orders and read reports from the social workers, CASA, GAL, and foster parents on how the case is progressing and how the parents and children are handling the different transitions.

4. Role of the foster parent. As a foster parent, you help with family reunification through the following actions:

- role model appropriate parenting skills to the birth parents at visits, at teacher meetings, and doctor appointments,
- help the child manage behaviors through positive discipline
- help the child process grief and loss
- work with the child to meet educational and developmental milestones
- give feedback to the social workers
- transport the child to all doctor appointments, visits, and therapies
- be actively supportive of the reunification process.



5. Easing back into family reunification through visitation. The increase in visits leads into a natural transition of the child returning back home. This process may take several months.

6. Home checks with social workers and court officials. Once the child is back home with birth family a social worker, and/or sometimes court officials, check in monthly with the family for a set amount of time. For example, in Kansas, the family is monitored for 18 months after returning home. Again, each state, country, or agency may have different criteria and check points once the family is reunified.

7. Case closed and family successfully reunified. At the end of the monitored time the case is closed and social workers no longer visit the family.

<http://adoption.about.com/od/working-with-birth-parents/a/What-Are-The-Steps-To-Family-Reunification-Within-The-Foster-Care-System.htm>

Recognizing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

by Kathie Munro B.A. BISW,
Community Liaison SFFA



Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a range of complex disabilities that can occur in individuals when exposed to alcohol prenatally.

Alcohol can interfere with the growth and development of all fetal body systems, but it particularly affects the brain and central nervous system. In Canada, the Public Health Agency estimates there are up to 300,000 people living with FASD and that 9 in 1,000 births are affected by prenatal alcohol exposure (PHAC, 2010).

FASD is a permanent life-long, brain-based, and often invisible disability which affects each individual differently. Individuals living with FASD experience primary disabilities that affect their cognitive (thinking) abilities, sensory processing (touch, taste, vision, and hearing), behaviour (actions), and physical growth.

Individuals may also experience secondary disabilities including mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, addictions, difficulties in school performance and involvement with the criminal justice system. The damage caused to the brain does not lessen or improve with age. However, many of the secondary disabilities and the individual's behaviour may change with the proper supports, effective strategies and improved understanding of the disability.

Some primary disabilities, such as certain facial characteristics, poor growth or obvious changes in brain functioning may be visible. For most individuals, however, FASD is a hidden disability and there may be many barriers to

acceptance and understanding. While we cannot see the physical damages to the brain, we can see the permanent changes in the individual's behaviour. A wide assortment of behavioural signs and symptoms, often referred to as the neurobehavioural characteristics of FASD, serve as evidence of prenatal alcohol exposure.

The resulting neurobehavioural challenges can create a chaotic family life and are difficult to manage as no two individuals experience the cognitive, behavioural, physical or sensory disabilities in the same way. However, there are some common features experienced by those living with FASD.

Cognitive functioning refers to intellectual processes and mental tasks such as taking in, storing and finding and using information. Cognitive functioning also allows us to learn from experiences and predict outcomes based on our experiences. It allows us to pay attention to the world around us and to make decisions and solve problems. For those affected by FASD, this functioning may be mildly to severely impaired, though intellectual ability may or may not also be affected. In everyday life, impaired cognitive functioning may manifest in some or all of the following ways:

- Requiring extra time to process information
- Auditory processing (hearing) means that understanding verbal information takes longer and responses may seem out of context or off topic

- Difficulties with prioritizing, organizing, reasoning, planning, initiating and following through with plans and goals
- Difficulty with abstract thinking (problems with math, time, money, emotions)
- Memory issues include forgetfulness, losing items, repeating the same mistakes
- Problems generalizing means that what is learned in one context is not readily transferred to another
- Poor judgment leads to impaired decision-making, inability to differentiate between safety and danger, what is important or not important, and trouble predicting outcomes
- Difficulties with solving problems, making choices or decisions and cannot

think of alternatives or other possibilities other than what is happening right then

- Communication difficulties include speech and language problems. For example, they may be able to repeat a rule but do not understand what the rule requires. They may provide inaccurate or not logical responses to questions and might be perceived as lying or storytelling when trying to fill in the blanks, as there is difficulty with understanding the difference between truth and fiction
- Inconsistencies in their ability to learn and personal changes from day to day.



Behavioural difficulties arise because all of our behaviours are controlled by brain functions — a damaged brain creates disordered behaviours. Common among those affected by FASD are:

- Problems getting along with others
- Impaired ability to read social cues—not detecting subtle or even obvious social cues means responses are disordered
- Impulsivity and poor ability to delay gratification—wanting immediate results are an effect of “living in the moment”
- Impaired understanding of what is possible or realistic and may have grandiose aspirations and expectations
- Lack of inhibitions and a poor understanding and use of personal boundaries and personal space—may be overly friendly or too direct in approaching or speaking with others

- Struggling with emotions and unpredictable mood swings, anger, rage and violence possibly triggered by seemingly minor events
- Impaired ability to recognize a range of emotions or to articulate emotions and therefore may appear to be emotionless or “flat” and unable to express empathy. Bonding and attachment may vary in the individual from day to day
- Dysmaturity or acting, socially, emotionally and cognitively younger than one’s chronological age
- Blaming others and defiance are common as they struggle to connect their own actions with what has happened
- Perseveration, or “getting stuck” on an issue, idea or place is frequently an issue. This may also be seen in extreme focus and rigid and inflexible behaviour patterns

- Vulnerability to peer pressure and influence — easily influenced, overly trusting, naïve and gullible
- Sleep issues and fatigue (sleeps too much or not enough), lacking an internal clock and having a disordered sense of time
- Overactive and unable to self-calm or regulate energy levels
- Easily overwhelmed and may shut down entirely as a response
- Difficulties with changes and transitions and may seem confused or react badly to changes in routine.

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FASD IS A FAMILY & COMMUNITY ISSUE

FASD is not just an individual experience it is also a family and community concern. FASD not only influences the child, youth or adult affected by exposure to alcohol in the womb but mom, dad, other family members, classmates, teachers, neighbours, coworkers and the community as a whole. Since FASD influences each one of us, increased awareness and understanding of FASD at a community level is critical. With knowledge, community members can make a positive difference to individuals and families living with FASD.

Families, whether birth, foster, adoptive or extended will have a unique experience. All families need the understanding of others. Most will also need additional services from systems of social support and community organizations. Families benefit when they receive both formal and informal support with feelings of loss, grief or disappointment. Siblings, grandparents and extended family members may need help to understand FASD and how they can implement strategies to create a successful outcomes.

While many people with FASD have **physical disabilities**, not all individuals have physical or medical issues.

- Delayed motor development means they are slow to meet developmental milestones
- Problems with fine and gross motor skills
- Poor hand-eye coordination
- Poor balance and coordination
- Lower height or weight
- Distinct facial features
- Hearing impairments and auditory processing issues
- Poorly developed body systems, such as skeletal, muscular, renal or circulatory problems that can lead to further health issues.

Sensory impairments in individuals with FASD are often noticed during infancy and continue throughout the lifespan. Our senses not only allow us to taste, touch, smell, see and hear, they allow us to know our body position (proprioception) and perceive movement sensations (vestibular inputs) (Better Endings, 2009). Sensory processing and integration occurs when all our senses are working together, and helps with successful functioning, responding and making sense of the world. Disordered sensory processing and integration can create difficulties for individuals with FASD and can impair learning, physical functioning and behavioural development (Better Endings, 2009). Signs and symptoms of sensory disabilities may include:

- Poorly functioning sensory system—high or low pain tolerance, increased or decreased sensitivity to light, sound, texture, taste, smell, movement or combined stimulation
- Over-reaction to stimuli—unable to filter out varying forms of sensory input and difficulty knowing which sensory messages are important or unimportant

- Under-reaction to stimuli—shows little reaction to sensory input as the brain does not seem to focus on any one type of stimuli
- Sleep problems such as trouble falling asleep, staying asleep and/or trouble awaking, staying awake
- Sensory integration problems, the impaired ability for the senses to work together, result in disordered behaviour and learning
- Sensory processing problems, the impaired ability to organize and interpret sensory input
- These issues can lead to sensory seeking behaviours such as swinging, climbing, jumping or spinning or sensory avoidant behaviours such as avoiding crowds, bright lights or busy places
- Unusually high activity level (slow to settle down) or low activity level (shuts down).

Children affected by alcohol, like all children, have a range of negative and **positive characteristics**. It's important to have an accurate picture of each child you have in your care or are working with. Focusing on their positive traits is important for two reasons. First, it helps you to have a positive attitude and recognize the potential in each child. Second, a person's strengths can often be useful tools to help overcome or compensate for negative characteristics (Elfenbaum and Ridd, 1999).

- Friendly, cheerful, loving, affectionate
- Caring, kind, concerned, compassionate, justice/fairness oriented
- Gentle and nurturing towards young children
- Funny, with a great sense of humour
- Curious, creative, artistic, musical
- Interested in animals and activities such as gardening and constructing
- Highly verbal, good storytellers.

Saskatchewan Foster Families *commemorates* 40 Year Anniversary with a legacy piece

The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association recently celebrated its 40th Anniversary. The 40th Anniversary Gala was not only a celebration, but also a sincere “thank-you” to foster parents from throughout Saskatchewan for their

hard work and dedication in helping to make children’s lives better.

This was the perfect opportunity to create a legacy piece to commemorate the event. A large format mural 8 feet by 5 feet in size was designed. The mural was

cut into 40 squares and sent to 40 foster families across the province to colour (40 pieces for 40 years).

In having the pieces completed by different families, it was not only an opportunity for participation and engagement in the commemoration piece, it also provided an opportunity for networking and bonding at the ‘colouring parties’.

All the pieces of the mural were reassembled for an unveiling at the event.

This creative masterpiece was significant in the fact that it showed the power of families’ working together. It was amazing to see how all the pieces fit together both literally & metaphorically.

We are not alone—we are a community support for families. Families helping families.



Hayley Petrow, has been advocating for the SFFA since May of 2014.

Hayley Petrow says she is really enjoying her time at the SFFA and is getting to know more foster parents around the province. She says she has the utmost respect for you as parents as well as individuals; it takes a great deal of compassion to invite children into your home and treat them as your own. Hayley began her social work career after graduating from the University of Regina and completing a practicum within the child protection department of Social Services. Before she started with the SFFA, she worked at Aids Saskatoon in a crisis intervention role. Throughout her social work career Hayley has always maintained close ties to the child welfare spectrum, something that continues to benefit her while assisting foster parents around Saskatchewan. She states she has met many great coworkers at the SFFA who have welcomed her and graciously helped her to adapt into her new role as your advocate. Hayley looks forward to continuing to meet more of you as time goes on!



Barriers to Good Self-Care

Unfortunately, adoptive and foster parents face many barriers to taking care of themselves.

To start, the phrase—“Take care of yourself!”—has become so trite that, for many, it has lost all meaning. When someone casually tells an adoptive mom whose kids have special needs to take care of herself, she may feel frustrated and angry. It’s easy to say. It’s not easy to do.

Second, many who choose to foster and adopt are natural caregivers. They have pets, partners, children, and aging parents who all require care and attention. Most days, the amount of energy they devote to others’ needs far exceeds any energy directed to their well-being. In fact, many caregivers are uncomfortable being on the receiving end of others’ attention and assistance. They don’t want to be too needy, or seem like they are not up to the challenges they have taken on.

Third, many adoptive and foster parents really want to be there for their families. They want to remember birthdays with a homemade cake. They want to be the cheerful volunteer at their child’s school. They want to deliver a meal to a sick friend, help out at church, and serve on task forces that address children’s needs. So, they work longer and try harder to meet their families’ needs.

Fourth, too many parents simply do not know what would help them. They know something is missing, but can’t put their finger on just what might make them feel better. Parents are often told, “Call if there is anything you need,” but it is hard to call and ask for help, especially when you cannot even articulate



“The amount of energy they devote to others’ needs far exceeds any energy directed to their well-being.”

what you need. This leaves many parents vulnerable and exhausted.

Even more significantly, too many foster and adoptive parents believe they somehow shouldn’t need support. Many times I have heard parents say that they are in no position to complain or ask for help since they chose to foster or adopt their children. But even when parents know what challenges the child faces, it is often impossible

to predict how living with a certain child will change a family.

On a daily basis, news media never fails to remind us that there are always other people who are worse off. We are taught as children to be happy with what we have since other people have it much harder. It is little wonder we sometimes feel guilty because our ongoing trauma pales in comparison to these catastrophic tragedies.

The Road to Good Self-Care

To overcome social, mental, and emotional barriers to self-care, you must first come to understand the importance of taking care of yourself, and then build self-care into your daily routine. You must believe that you are worth taking care of, and that your happiness and well-being are not peripheral to, but essential for good parenting. Once you can accept that:



- **Give yourself permission to need something.** It is okay to ask for help. Having needs and trying to meet them is not a sign of incompetence or weakness. It is part of healthy family life. Thirst is your body's signal to drink and prevent dehydration. In the same way, when you feel stressed out, it is time to take a break so you can regain perspective and deal with the issue at hand more constructively.
- **Keep it simple.** Make life choices that fit your family. Develop consistent routines. Create a safe environment. Understand and respect both your limits and those of your children. Resist the impulse to over-commit what little time you have. Prioritize. Save energy for things that really matter, and seek outside help as soon as you need it. When possible, take advantage of respite opportunities and In Home Support staff to relieve some of the stress during really rough times.
- **Stop comparing yourself to other adults and families.** They do not live your life, and they are not raising your children. Get comfortable with compromising and being different. Your child may talk, think, achieve, behave, and live differently than other children. Instead of measuring your family's worth by other people's standards, set expectations for your family based on your children's capabilities and your family's reality.
- **Know which part of the day is the hardest and have a plan to make it go more smoothly.** If getting ready for school is rough, prepare as much as you can the night before. If bedtime is hard, start early and set a predictable routine. Decide beforehand how you will respond to behaviors that make that time of day so trying. Accept that you won't get anything else done, and do only what you must to get through the hard parts.
- **Join a parent support group.** Meeting with other parents who have similar experiences and feelings is one of the most powerful and renewing activities for anyone raising children who have special needs. Just knowing that you are with people who "get it" is affirming. Group members may also be able to trade respite care with you. If a group is not an option, find at least one person outside your immediate family with whom you can be real, and whom you can trust to understand.
- **Have down time every day. Maybe it's a morning walk.** It might be 10 minutes with the paper and a good cup of coffee. It can be writing in your journal before bed. It could be the drive into work, or times of silent prayer in church. Your mind, body, and soul need time to regenerate from life's stresses. If you have no down time—a time without distractions and demands—you cannot benefit from moments of reflection and calm that may help you to center and stay balanced.
- **Routinely have something to which you can look forward.** Maybe it's coffee with a neighbor after the kids are at school. Or a glass of wine Friday night. Or date night with your partner. It could be going alone to the grocery store Saturday morning or having an uninterrupted bath. Remember, waiting too long to reward yourself for a job well done is not an effective way to shape your behavior. Immediate positive reinforcement works for adults too.
- **Accentuate the positive.** It may not be easy, but as you step back to evaluate how you and the family are doing, find time to laugh at the silly situations that come up. Recognize the good in yourself and your children. Celebrate every step forward, no matter how small. Stay connected with your partner. Eat something you really enjoy. (Nutrition is important. Indulgence is wonderful.) Find affirmation in the process of raising an adopted child.

Caring for children who have special needs is a matter of the heart. Self-care is a mind-set and a positive choice. If you can find a balance between caring for your children and meeting your own needs, you will ultimately be much better equipped to do both.

In Home Support program provides assistance and support to foster families

It is the SFFA's objective to provide support and services that enhance the foster family's abilities to meet the needs of the children placed in their care.

The role of an *In Home Support* worker is to assist foster parents in various day-to-day routines as assigned. Some of these duties may include supervision of children, meal preparation, house cleaning, or laundry.

When is support provided?

Support is provided to families when it is identified by the Ministry of Social Services. The purpose of the *In Home Support* worker is never to replace the role of the foster family, rather to assist the family in the operation of their home.



Who can fill this role?

The SFFA seeks qualified individuals to fill the role of an *In Home Support* worker. The qualifications and abilities that we are seeking are: the ability to take initiative; able

to work as a team; take direction; and problem solve. *In Home Support* staff must be able to deal with stressful situations and have exceptional decision making skills.

Identified and relevant training may be provided to *In Home Support* workers. The SFFA offers a competitive wage, benefits package, and a rewarding place to work.

“Every day foster families play a vital role in our communities. The SFFA is proud to support families through this program.”

For more information on our *In Home Support Program*, or to contact us, visit our website at sffa.sk.ca or give us a call at 1-888-276-2880.

Structured Decision Making (method used by the Ministry of Social Services)

STEP 1: Clarify the Decision Context

The first step in good decision making involves defining what question or problem is being addressed and why, identifying who needs to be involved and how, establishing scope and bounds for the decision, and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the decision team.

STEP 2: Define Objectives and Evaluation Criteria

The core of SDM is a set of well defined objectives and evaluation criteria. Together they define “what matters” about the decision, drives the search for creative alternatives, and becomes the framework for comparing alternatives.

STEP 3: Develop Alternatives

A range of creative policy or management alternatives designed to address the objectives is developed. Alternatives should reflect substantially different approaches to the problem or different priorities across objectives, and should present decision makers with real options and choices.

STEP 4: Estimate Consequences

This step is an analytical exercise in which the performance of each alternative is estimated in terms of the evaluation criteria developed in Step 2. Care must be taken to determine the focal areas of uncertainty and to ensure that these are represented properly in the analysis.

STEP 5: Evaluate Trade-Offs and Select

SDM is not a black box, and group discussion should always play a central role in evaluating preferences for alternatives. However, in many cases, preference assessment techniques (such as swing weighting) may be used to help people understand their preferred alternatives.

STEP 6: Implement and Monitor

The last step in the decision process then is to identify mechanisms for on-going monitoring to ensure accountability with respect to on-ground results, research to improve the information base for future decisions, and a review mechanism so that new information can be incorporated into future decisions.

Key Ideas

These steps provide a framework for decision making. The steps are intended to be iterative—for example, feel free to loop backwards to amend objectives in the light of having developed alternatives.

<http://www.structureddecisionmaking.org/uncategorized/steps/#more-101>

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www.compassrm.com

Advocate for Children and Youth Celebrates 20th Anniversary

On November 7, 2014, the Advocate for Children and Youth welcomed more than 100 community members to an Open House to celebrate our 20th anniversary. People enjoyed cake, popcorn, getting balloon animals and interacting with our staff and each other for the afternoon.

The current Advocate Bob Pringle spoke briefly, as did Dr. Deborah Parker-Loewen, who served as the first advocate from November 1994 to June 2005, and Richard Rothenberger, an adult board member and former youth member of the Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network. The presentations were preceded by a prayer from elder Senator Nora Cummings.



Warren the BalloonFunn man makes a duck for a youth in attendance.

We also used the occasion to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international human rights treaty that guides our work. To increase awareness of children's rights, we have created posters for people to complete and share with us on social media, using

the hashtags #ChildRightsSK and #YouthVoiceSK. You can download the posters from our website at <http://saskadvocate.ca/public-education/national-child-day>, and fill them in and share them with us

“Our advocacy is usually initiated at the request of the young person.”

on Facebook (www.facebook.com/saskadvocate) or Twitter (<https://twitter.com/saskadvocate>). Many people are familiar with the Advocate's work investigating when things go wrong, such as when children or youth in foster care or custody are critically injured or die. However, a lot of our work takes place behind the scenes, advocating with children and youth so they receive the services to which they are entitled, and working with ministries, agencies and community-based organizations to improve services for children, youth and families. We also do education and training on what children's rights are, and how to respect them in policy and practice.

Who can call us

Anyone can call us if they have a concern about a child, youth or group of children and youth receiving services from a provincial ministry, agency, or publicly funded health entity. Children and youth are encouraged to call on their own behalf.

How We Help

We will listen to the concern, ask questions to clarify the situation, and review the steps already taken to resolve the issue. We might offer information or referrals to other agencies or ministries to help you to advocate for yourself and/or for the child or youth.



Bob Pringle, cutting the Cake at Open House.

Our advocacy is usually initiated at the request of the young person. We will work directly with them to negotiate a resolution to the matters raised with the service provider, caseworker and/or caregiver. We may also formally investigate the concern if required. If a child or youth is unable to provide direction, we will work to ensure that he or she receives the services and quality of care they are entitled to by legislation and policy. All contacts with us are confidential.

Contact Us!

Phone: 1-800-322-7221 or (306) 933-6700, Email: contact@saskadvocate.ca, Website: www.saskadvocate.ca, Fax (306) 933-8406, Facebook: [Facebook.com/saskadvocate](https://www.facebook.com/saskadvocate), Twitter: [Twitter.com/saskadvocate](https://twitter.com/saskadvocate), Address: 500-350 3rd Avenue North, Saskatoon, SK S7K 6G7.



Senator Nora Cummings, Richard Rothenberger, and Bob Pringle.



TOP RATED OUTDOOR

Chilly, snowy days are calling your kids outdoors. Find fun winter activities for the slopes, trails, ice rink, and backyard for children of all ages.

Sledding

There's nothing better than gliding through the cool air on a sled. Find a good hill and grab your tube, toboggan, or saucer for hours of entertainment. Sledding is fun for all ages, but toddlers should ride with a parent, and should be well-bundled in layers to stay warm and cushion their tumbles.



Skiing

Downhill and cross-country skiing are family favorites during the winter months. Some children start skiing as young as age 2 or 3, but the best age is probably about 5, when kids are more coordinated and less afraid of falling. Young downhill skiers can hit the bunny slopes or green circle trails but should have an adult with them. Ski lessons can help your child learn the ropes. It's wise to invest in a helmet in case of falls or collisions.



Snowboarding

As with skiing, little ones can start snowboarding young, but few children strap on a board before age 5 or 6. Snowboarding is most popular among tweens and teens because they have the strength and skills to stay upright and try more tricks. Lessons and safety gear, including a helmet, knee pads, wrist guards, and hip pads, are recommended because snowboarders of all ages have their share of spills.



Snow Angels

Fluffy snow? Check. Snow suit? Check. That's all the gear kids of any age need to lie down and create a snow angel just like they would do a jumping jack. Make this simple activity extra fun by using materials to decorate your angel, such as food coloring to draw on a face, and old clothes and accessories to dress it up. Why should snowmen have all the fun?

Winter Activities

Remember to brush up on winter sports safety. Have the hot cocoa ready when everyone comes back inside!

by Erin Dower

<http://fun.familyeducation.com>



Ice Skating

This slippery activity will be tricky for newcomers. But once they get the hang of it, they might get addicted. Age 4 or 5 is a nice time to begin skating or take lessons. Most children wear figure skates or hockey skates to start out. After they get more into skating, they can try the sports of speed skating, ice dancing, figure skating, or hockey. Have beginners wear a helmet, and offer them a hand to help with balance.

Ice Fishing

Kids who have gotten hooked on fishing during the warm weather months might love to try ice fishing with a parent. Young children will probably get bored waiting for the fish to bite, so keep your outing short or just bring your older children. Always be sure that the ice is safe – at least 4 inches thick – and that temperatures have been below freezing for several days straight. Children, and even adults, should never ice fish alone in case of an emergency on the ice.



Building a Snowman

Babies and big kids alike will love to make a snowman in the yard, especially around the holidays. After stacking a few big snowballs to make the body, kids can use their imagination to find fruits, vegetables, sticks, berries, clothes, and other materials to bring their snowman to life. Younger kids can try this printable snowman activity and snowman craft.



Building an Igloo

Children who have graduated from building snowmen can spend hours constructing an igloo or snow fort. Kids can use a shovel or their hands to build one of these arctic domes. Then they can learn to say “Seasons Greetings” in Eskimo and other languages with this holiday printable.



"It's a story not told often enough: the forgotten child, left to the resource-poor system, but the heart of the book does not bleed. Andy is sentient, not a victim, but more an observer, and her narrative unravels gently, awaiting its readers..."

– The Globe and Mail

"In this gritty YA novel, author Kristine Scarrow explores the hard life of a "throwaway girl." Sweet and vulnerable Andy doesn't matter to anyone — yet she shines with hope and resilience. As you travel with her through terrifying experiences and unbearable loss, you'll grow to love her in the way she's always longed to be loved. Scarrow takes on tough themes with her lucid prose, opening the reader's heart to Andy and the dark world she inhabits."

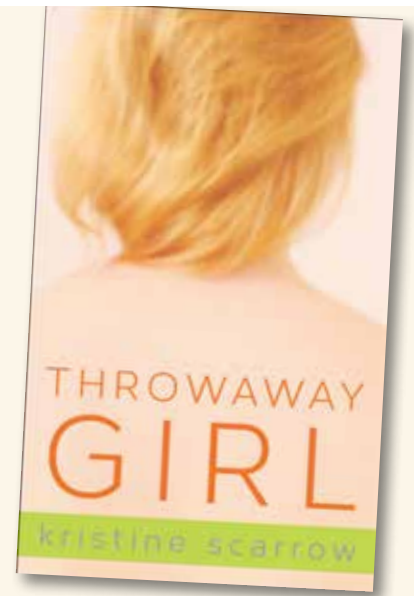
– YA novelist Alice Kuipers

Throwaway Girl

by Kristine Scarrow

Andy Burton knows a thing or two about survival. Since she was removed from her mother's home and placed in foster care when she was nine, she's had to deal with abuse, hunger, and homelessness. But now that she's eighteen, she's about to leave Haywood House, the group home for girls where she's lived for the past four years, and the closest thing to a real home she's ever known.

Will Andy be able to carve out a better life for herself and find the happiness she is searching for?



Kristine Scarrow has a BA in psychology and has worked in the foster care system. She is also a freelance writer and editor. Kristine lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

The book has been commended as a "Top Grade: CanLit for the Classroom" selection for 2014.

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