

My Favorite Prop: The Invisible Gap

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My favorite prop is free, easy to pack, takes up no room in your suitcase: the "Invisible Gap." This is about 3 ft by 3ft. When you bring it in to the room, ask someone to help you, because it is so huge and heavy. Set it down right there on the table where everyone can "see" it. When you talk about the functional abilities of the person with FASD and mention the gap between the APPARENT ability to function (physical appearance, expressive language skills - way up "here") and the person's ACTUAL ability to function (social skills, emotional maturity, conscience, abstract reasoning, impulse control, and judgment - way down "here"), you can indicate "here" with one hand at the top and one hand at the bottom of the Invisible Gap.

I also talk about expectations - our expectations are up "here" but their ability to perform and be successful might be down "here" and that sets them up to fail - that's when I crash my top hand down to my bottom hand. We need to start "here" (bottom) and help to bring them up to their potential, which might be anywhere in "here" (middle area).

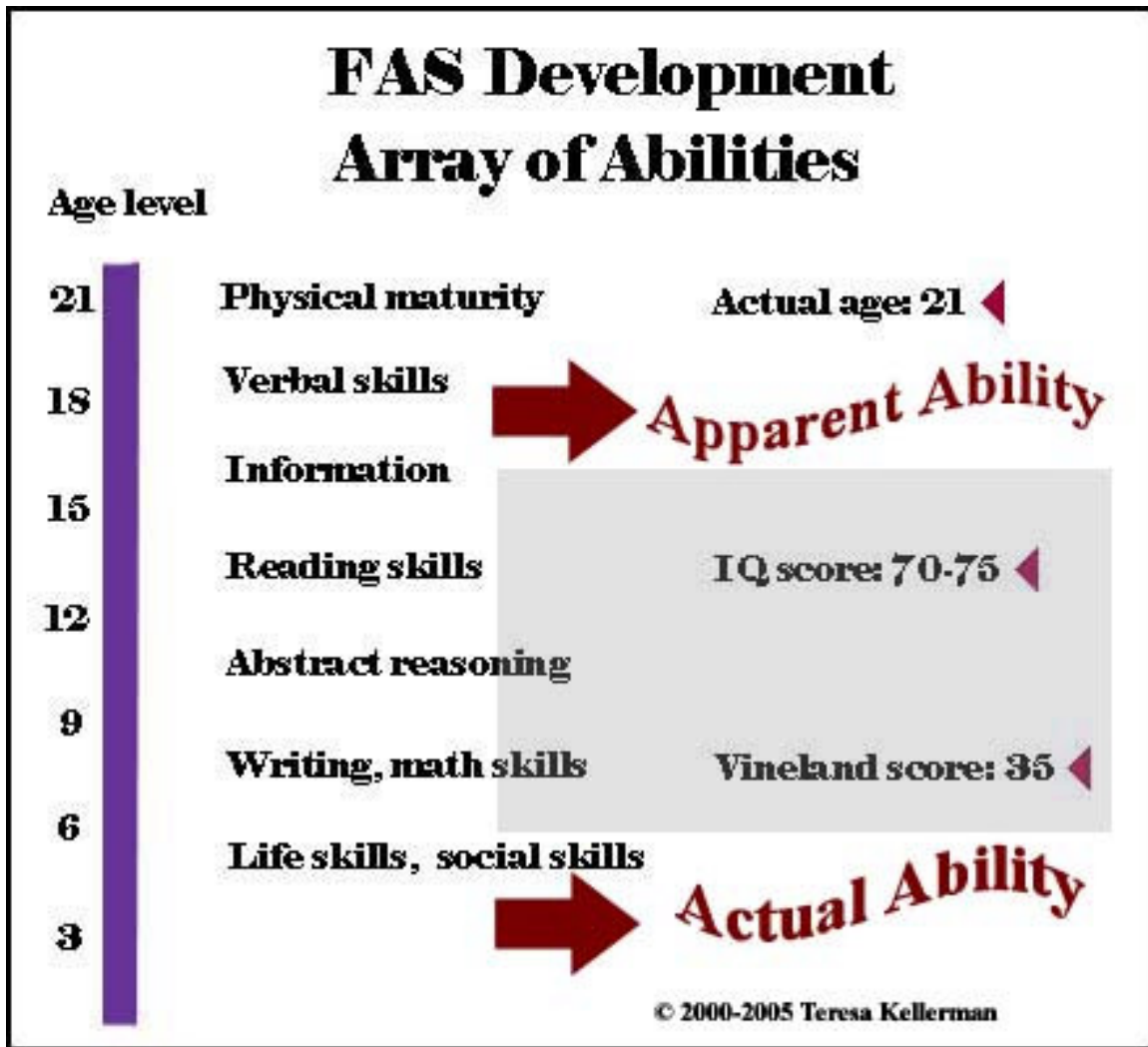
Pick it up, move it around. Remind them that it is there even if you can't see it, and that you might forget it is there. is this invisible gap between apparent ability and actual ability to function that sets FASD apart from other disabilities and what makes FASD so serious and places individuals at such high risk.

The more invisible the gap, the higher the risk of secondary problems - behaviors that may lead to arrest, addiction, injury, or early death. I use this with my presentation slide on Array of Abilities, attached. Other trainers may use this slide as long as they do not alter it in any way. The Invisible Gap in the adult with FASD might stretch from about the 5 year old level to the 15 year old level. The person appears to be as smart as a teen or adult, but may sometimes have the social maturity or judgment of a young child.

I think it is important to help parents and professionals "see" this. Because people don't know what I'm carrying when I bring it in, they pay close attention when I explain what it is. They think it is funny, how I labor over carrying such a heavy invisible object, but they remember it. I let them know that the burden of carrying this Invisible Gap is indeed very heavy for the person with FASD. The more we are aware of it, the more we can help them be successful.

I invite you to carry this Invisible Gap with you. I would appreciate your referring others to the great place on the Internet where you find such creative ideas: www.fasstar.com and be sure to credit the author for any useful ideas or documents you choose to use.

If you could see the Invisible Gap, here is where it would be:



These are test results for a young man with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. He tested the same at age 18, 21, and 24. As he gets older, he gathers more information in his left brain, but still does not have the ability to use that information wisely. As he gets older, he gets better at “acting his age” – but this is just an act. Inside he is still emotionally and socially a young child. But everyone else sees a physically mature, bright, insightful adult. This is an adult who could not survive in the adult world of independence. He requires 24/7 to remain safe and healthy and happy. Without intense supports, he would surely and quickly become a victim of his own disability, with a high risk of arrest, addiction, homelessness, promiscuity, injury, or early death. Factors that help him find success include healthy role models and mentors, healthy diet free of additives, medications that maximize brain function, close supervision, opportunities to achieve his talents, and awareness about his disability that allows him to accept the restrictions that will keep him safe and healthy,