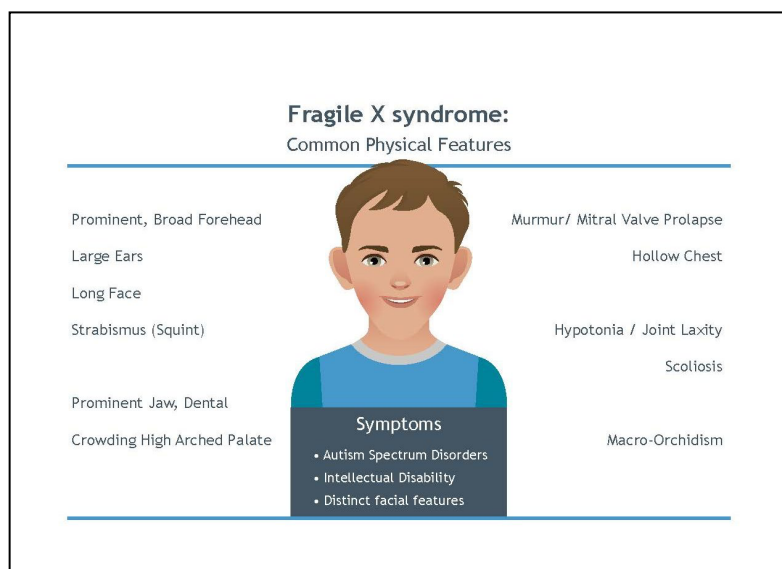


SEND Bulletin No.16



Fragile X syndrome

Fragile X is thought to be the most common inherited form of learning disability. It is usually caused by an X chromosome that carries a mutation of a particular gene. It is a genetic defect and may be inherited.

Fragile X is twice as common in boys as in girls and its effects are milder in girls. It is thought that this is because girls have two X chromosomes and that one can perhaps compensate for the other.

Fragile X affects behaviour, emotions, learning, speech and language. The range of effects is great and it is not possible to predict which of the many potential difficulties an individual with fragile X will have. Indeed, it is possible to have the damaged gene and yet not be affected by it at all. Children with fragile X often have high verbal abilities and a good sense of humour. It is important, however, to ensure that the child with fragile X is not subjected to too many environmental stimuli (such as sounds, movements, smells) simultaneously. Children with fragile X are sometimes given medication to improve their concentration.

Key characteristics

A child with fragile X syndrome may:

- repeat words and phrases, or the last words in a sentence, over and over
- fail to respond to direct questions
- give answers not obviously related to the question
- speak in rapid bursts
- have poor fine and gross motor co-ordination
- dislike work based on writing
- find large, noisy, unstructured group situations distressing
- find it easier to learn in the morning, after a settling-in period
- become distressed by eye contact, touch, questioning in front of others
- react badly to pressures of time
- be over-sensitive to relatively minor upsets and/or have disruptive outbursts
- prefer practical, physical activities

- enjoy repetitive tasks, which may have a calming effect
- have subtle physical characteristics, such as a large head, long face, large jaw, protruding ears, high palate or dental overcrowding.

Support strategies

You may need to:

- provide as much positive attention as possible
- have an organised set of routines and make sure that the pupil is notified of any changes in these routines well in advance
- set up an agreed reward system for good behaviour, rather than using too many sanctions for inappropriate behaviour
- reward specific behaviours and explain this clearly
- praise every small achievement
- make use of visual clues
- give short, simple instructions - only one or two instructions at a time
- let the pupil work in an individual or paired situation, rather than expecting them to work in groups
- be realistic in your expectations, setting short, clearly defined targets.

Support agencies

- Fragile X Society (UK): www.fragilex.org.uk
- National Fragile X Foundation (USA): www.nfxf.org

If you have any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin please e-mail them to me:

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Many thanks

Anne