

WHAT IS FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder or FASD is a neurodevelopmental condition with lifelong cognitive, emotional and behavioral challenges. In addition to effects on the brain, FASD is a full-body diagnosis that can include most other organ systems.

Although alcohol can affect the development of all cells and organs, the brain is particularly vulnerable to the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure. As a result, children and adults with FASD often experience difficulties in dealing with information. They may find it hard to translate hearing into doing, thinking into saying, reading into speaking or feeling into words. They may also have difficulty in applying what they have learned in the past to new experiences or situations. This means they may not be able to see patterns, predict events, or make judgments.

Every person with FASD is affected differently. This is why it is a spectrum disorder. A common misconception persists that someone has to have specific facial features to have a diagnosis. This is incorrect. By some estimates, less than 10% of those on the FASD spectrum have these distinctive facial features. Often, people with FASD are undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. Recent studies estimate that between 1 in 100 and 1 in 10 children in the US may have FASD.

Diagnosis of FASD looks at 4 areas. 1) height and weight, 2) facial feature measurements, 3) head size and brain function, including development and behavior, and 4) history of prenatal alcohol exposure.

The good news is, there are known strategies that can help someone with FASD to build upon their many strengths and to lead happy and fulfilling lives.

A person with an FASD might have:

- Low body weight
- Poor coordination
- Hyperactive behavior
- Difficulty with attention
- Poor memory
- Difficulty in school (especially with math, time, and money)
- Learning disabilities
- Speech and language delays
- Intellectual disability or low IQ
- Poor reasoning and judgment skills
- Sleep and sucking problems as a baby
- Vision or hearing problems
- Problems with the heart, kidneys, or bones
- Shorter-than-average height
- Small head size
- Distinctive facial features, such as a smooth ridge between the nose and upper lip (this ridge is called the philtrum)

Common strengths of people with FASD include:

- Friendly
- Creative
- Loyal
- Musical
- Athletic
- Hard-working

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Parent Education and Support

- It is very important for parents to learn about FASD. Informed parents will be able to support their child to access services and in learning how to advocate for themselves as they mature.

Early Intervention Services and Therapies

- Speech/Language Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy

FASD Specific Interventions

- Good Buddies—a social skills training
- Families Moving Forward—parent support
- Math Interactive Learning Experience (MILE)
- Parents and Children Together (PACT)

*<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/index.html>

Parent Behavior Management Training

- Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)
- Triple P Parenting (triplep-parenting.com)
- Parent to Parent (through CHADD.org)
- The Incredible Years (incredibleyears.com)

Protective Factors and Building Resilience

- Early Diagnosis
- Special Education and Social Services
- Nurturing Home Environment
- Absence of Violence in the Environment
- Hobbies and Activities which provide Avenues of Success

Medication Management

- Individuals with FASD often struggle with executive function skills and impulsivity. Medications used for ADHD can be helpful for these symptoms, as well as medication management of anxiety, depression, aggression, and other symptoms that can co-occur.