

Tip Sheets

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy.



Alcohol is a teratogen. Teratogens are substances

that might interfere with the normal development of a fetus. There are many teratogens in the world, including substances of abuse, lead, certain medications, and toxins. Of all the substances of abuse that women may use during pregnancy, alcohol has the most serious, long-lasting effects.

These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications. The term FASD is not intended for clinical diagnosis. It refers to a spectrum of disorders that include fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), fetal alcohol effects (FAE), alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND), and alcohol-related birth defects (ARBD).

Physical Characteristics

- Low birth weight
- Small size for age
- Small head for age
- Failure to thrive
- Large or malformed ears
- Underdeveloped fingernails or toenails
- Short neck
- Poor eye coordination
- Hearing problems
- Joint and bone abnormalities
- Facial malformations

Emotional Characteristics

- Lack of bonding and difficulty sharing
- Easily over stimulated
- Rage and/or temper tantrums
- Low threshold for frustration
- Lack of stranger anxiety
- Lack of cooperative play
- Difficulty sharing
- Unable to separate fantasy from reality

Behavioral Characteristics

- Hyperactivity
- Stubbornness
- Impulsiveness
- Passiveness
- Irritability
- Sleep difficulties
- Hypersensitivity to sound and/or touch
- Teasing or bullying of others
- Difficulty with change
- Difficulty with organization
- Withdrawal or depression
- Problems with truancy
- Problems with sexuality

Learning Difficulties

- Developmental delays
- Problems with memory
- Poor mathematical skills
- Attention deficits
- Difficulty with abstract concepts
- Difficulty learning from past experiences
- Difficulty understanding cause and effect
- Speech delays, stuttering, and stammering

Talents and Qualities Related to FASD

- Tactile and cuddly
- Friendly and happy
- Good sense of humor
- Trusting
- Loving
- Loyal
- Determined
- Spontaneous
- Helpful
- Persistent
- Highly verbal
- Rich fantasy life
- Good with younger children
- Atypical strengths
- Creative intelligence
- Good visual memory

Including Children with FASD

- Provide a structured, uncluttered, and calm environment.
- Use short, simple, concrete instructions.
- Provide time for a child to process language.
- Supplement abstract, oral information with visual representations.
- Help a child physically practice a routine you are teaching.
- Provide clues for behavior, language, and interaction by organizing the environment.
- Be aware of how transitions might impact a child and help plan for new activities.
- Provide encouragement.
- Do not hesitate to repeat, repeat, repeat. Children with FASD may have short- or long-term memory loss.

Behavior Guidance Strategies for Children with FASD

- Ignoring behavior can be effective when no one is hurt.
- Using a prearranged gesture or signal, like a touch or hand sign, can help a child understand to stop.
- Redirecting activity or offering another option can sometimes alter behavior.
- Reward the completion of tasks and good behavior with a token system.
- Try to minimize distractions in the environment, such as clutter, noise, and light.
- Show options with story boards and pictures.
- Problem solve in concrete ways, not abstract.
- Look at repetitive training over and over.

No one type of discipline has any long-term value. The best discipline is to keep the child from ever needing discipline. Some children with FASDs are unable to learn from past experiences so they are bound to repeat the same mistakes over and over again. Learning to live and abide by society's rules, laws, and expectations is a lifelong process.



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Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

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