

Tips for Carers in Recognising Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

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Mental Health Carers NSW

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What is FASD?

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) refer to a range of conditions which can occur as a result of exposure of an unborn child to alcohol during pregnancy. The characteristic features of FASD include physical, developmental and/or neurobehavioral difficulties and can have lifelong implications for the individual. The presentation of FASD is unique in each individual and can vary greatly.

Recognising FASD

The symptoms of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) can vary widely between individuals so that no two individuals living with FASD will have the same symptoms or needs.

People living with FASD often have some of the following characteristics:

- learning difficulties
- Impulsiveness
- difficulty relating actions to consequence
- difficulties in developing and maintaining social relationship
- difficulties in managing time, money and schedules
- attention deficit/hyperactivity
- ability to repeat instructions, but inability to put them into action
- memory problems

FASD in Children

Children with FASD often have some form of developmental delay. Infants with FASD are often slow to master developmental milestones such as walking, talking and imitating sounds. Older children may experience difficulties with reading, writing and mathematics. Children with FASD tend to be higher maintenance and experience difficulty in learning age appropriate behaviours. Some of the behaviours of children with FASD can be misinterpreted as defiance.

Children with FASD often:

- are easily frustrated
- find it difficult to adjust to a new environment
- find it difficult following rules
- repeatedly forget to do basic tasks due to memory difficulties
- cannot retain information that they have learnt
- have poor impulse control and attention deficits
- have poor social skills and may prefer to spend time with younger children instead of adults or their peers
- have poor gross and fine motor control skills

FASD in Adults

In adults, FASD can lead to difficulties in becoming self-sufficient, independent living and employment. Adults with FASD sound more competent than they are and will work very hard to have others think that they are capable, often hiding their histories of not functioning. Because of deficits in executive function they usually don't think that they need help and will not ask for help.

FASD in adults is often not identified or understood by family, carers or services. As a result, adults with FASD are often pressured to 'be responsible' and behave appropriately when they do not have the capacity to do so.

Adults with FASD are more likely to:

- Have an incomplete education
- Be involved in the criminal justice system
- Be dependent on their family
- Experience poverty and homelessness
- Have issues with alcohol and other substance abuse
- Have an unplanned and early pregnancy
- Have difficulty parenting
- Experience feelings of worthlessness, depression, suicidal thoughts and panic

For more information see: <http://www.nofasd.org.au/resources/fact-sheets>

Tips for Supporting Someone with FASD

Use both verbal and non-verbal Communication: Using simple verbal communication along with non-verbal communication can help people with FASD to understand you. Use literal language because people with FASD may find sarcasm, metaphors and similes difficult to understand.

Provide Positive Feedback: Children and adults with FASD respond well to positive feedback and praise.

Provide structure: This can help children or adults with FASD keep organised, focused and busy. You can do this by providing a calendar or diary and helping with planning. Children and adults with FASD can find changes in routine difficult and can benefit from extra support during these times.

Simplify the environment: People with FASD can experience over stimulation from too much sensory clutter. Removing clutter, shutting down extraneous noise and reducing lighting can help with this.

Break down tasks into simple steps: Because of memory difficulties people with FASD can find it difficult to follow complicated tasks or complete multiple tasks at once.

Breaking down tasks and goals into simple achievable steps can make them more manageable. For children with FASD using visual tools, such as pictures of people cleaning their teeth or getting ready for school, and organising these into a sequence can be helpful.

Distract or Divert Attention when a person does something inappropriately: A person with FASD may not be able recognise that what they are doing is inappropriate or to understand why what they are doing is wrong. Rather than punishing the person for their behaviour divert their attention away from what they are doing to something else. This strategy can help to manage and reduce difficult behaviours.

Use immediate rewards or consequences: Use short-term clear and consistent consequences and rewards specifically related to the target behaviour. Unless it is an immediate privilege or withdrawal of a privilege children with FASD will usually not link the reward or consequence to their behaviour.

For more information see: <http://www.nofasd.org.au/resources/fact-sheets>

Getting a Diagnosis

Getting a diagnosis can be a positive in that it can help to understand the reasons for a person's behaviour and enable individuals and their carers to access support. Studies show that an early diagnosis along with being raised in a stable environment can lead to improved life outcomes for people with FASD. However it is never too late and support at all ages has positive outcomes. If you would like to choose to get a diagnosis for FASD talk to your GP and ask for a referral to a specialist service that diagnoses FASD.

Useful Services

NOFASD Australia:

Services include:

- Recourses and Fact Sheets
- an online and telephone support and advocacy service
- Support groups

Call: 1300 306 238 (local call costs, only from any landline in Australia)

Email: admin@nofasd.org.au

Website: www.nofasd.org.au/resources/fasd-support-groups

The CICADA Centre:

CICADA stands for the Care and Intervention for Children and Adolescents affected by Drugs and Alcohol. Services include diagnosis and clinical care for children and young people with FASD. In addition the family service supports children, adolescents and families which have a parent with a disability.

Where: Corner Hawkesbury Road and Hainsworth Street Locked Bag 4001 Westmead NSW 2145

Call: (02) 9845 0000

Website: www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/files/attachments/adm3620_cicada_brochure_6pp_dl_fa.pdf

NDIS & FASD

The National Disability Insurance Scheme will provide support to some people with FASD. It is currently only available in some areas in Australia but is set to become available nationally. To be eligible for the NDIS individuals or their carer needs to show that the applicant has a permanent impairment or condition that stops them from doing everyday things without assistance. For children under 7 years of age, parents or carers need to show that their child has a developmental delay that means that they usually need more help with self-care, communication, learning or motor skills than another child of the same age.

If the NDIS is available in your area you can apply for it by contacting the National Disability Insurance Agency at 1800 800 110. You may complete your access request over the phone or fill out an access request form.

For more information see: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/html/sites/default/files/documents/our-sites/NDIS-NSW-roll-out-Participant-pack.pdf>



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