

## How does FASD impact individuals?

### A Factsheet for Service Providers (No.2)

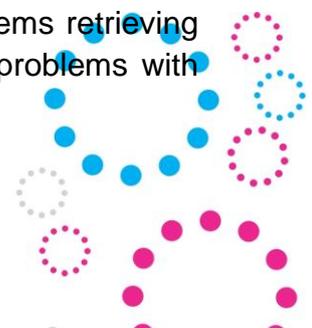
#### Is each person impacted the same way?

If a baby is exposed to alcohol in utero, they may or may not be born with FASD. Based on current data, estimates indicate that 1 in every 13 women who consume alcohol during pregnancy will have a child with FASD. If a baby is born with FASD, they will experience variations in the severity of disability. For these reasons, it is difficult to predict exactly how an individual is impacted by FASD.

#### What can I expect working with someone with FASD?

Although each person will experience FASD differently. In FASD, ten domains of neurodevelopment have been identified that reflect areas of brain function known to be affected by prenatal alcohol exposure (Australian Guide to the Diagnosis of FASD, 2016).

- **Brain structure/neurology:** Includes abnormal head circumference, structural brain abnormalities, seizure disorder not due to known postnatal causes and/or significant neurological diagnoses otherwise unexplained. A baby with FASD may be born with a head that is significantly smaller than a normal sized baby of the same gender and age, children may have brains that have not developed properly, and/or may have seizures, vision or hearing problems or cerebral palsy.
- **Motor skills:** Gross and fine motor skills can be impacted, including running, rollerblading, bike riding, ball games, gymnastics, static or moving balance, writing/pencil holding, tying shoes, using scissors and opening packages. Children may have poor coordination (hand/eye and total body) and sensory input (regarding needed force/pressure) and abnormal muscle tone that affects balance. They may also have an immature grasp when using pencils and scissors.
- **Cognition:** Cognition is defined by the process of knowing, perception, awareness and judgement. Issues may include learning difficulties, deficits in school performance, poor impulse control, problems in social perception, deficits in higher level receptive and expressive language, poor capacity for abstract thinking, deficits in mathematical skills, and problems with memory, attention, judgment or organisation. (Children may seem above average in one area and well below average in another.)
- **Language:** Language can be impacted by both expressive and receptive communication skills. Expressive language skills may develop at a slower rate than normal. They may have problems using complex language and problems retrieving words from memory. Receptive communication deficits may include problems with



following instructions, comprehension, discrimination, generalisation, abstraction and sequencing.

- **Academic achievement:** Deficits in comprehension, abstract thinking, comprehension and communication affect the ability to adapt as children progress through school and can impact academic achievement in multiple areas (e.g., math, science, vocabulary, direction/temporal concepts and arts).
- **Memory:** Includes encoding, storage and retrieval processes. Children may have problems with each of these processes. They may have remembered or done something many times before and be unable to or remember to do it on a given day.
- **Attention:** Includes difficulty maintaining focus of attention. Children may be easily distracted by visual and auditory stimulation that may not even be noticed by the other students. They may have problems self-regulating when they are overstimulated or tired.
- **Executive function, including impulse control and hyperactivity:** Describes a group of higher order cognitive processes including: inhibition, thinking flexibility, planning, cause and effect, judgement and organisation. Children may experience decreased capacity in these processes (e.g., decreased common sense) and repeat the same mistakes. They often do not recognise consequences, learn from past experiences or generalise possible outcomes from one behaviour to another. Individuals with FASD are likely to have impairments in executive function.
- **Affect regulation:** People with FASD may express emotion more readily, swing from being sad to happy quickly and may be unsure as to why they feel a particular way. Affect regulation issues may also involve an increased chance of experiencing anxiety or depression, panic attacks, separation anxiety or disorders of attachment.
- **Adaptive behaviour, social skills and social communication:** Includes functioning independently and acquiring new daily living skills. Children have decreased capacity to develop/acquire new social, practical and conceptual skills to help them better respond to daily demands.

### **Where I can find out more information about FASD?**

NOFASD Australia is the National Peak Body for parents, carers and individuals impacted by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Founded in 1999 and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, we provide the essential bridge linking those with lived experience with researchers and clinicians.

NOFASD Australia provide a helpline for people impacted by FASD and those wanting information on how to support individuals with FASD. We also maintain an up-to-date comprehensive website with curated resources and links.

If you would like additional information about FASD or to read more about FASD and the NDIS, please visit the [NOFASD Australia website](#).

Source: Australian Guide to the Diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) [https://www.fasdhub.org.au/siteassets/pdfs/australian-guide-to-diagnosis-of-fasd\\_all-appendices.pdf](https://www.fasdhub.org.au/siteassets/pdfs/australian-guide-to-diagnosis-of-fasd_all-appendices.pdf)

