



DCDSB Understanding & Supporting All Learners

What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a term used to describe a range of disabilities that may affect people whose mothers consumed alcohol during pregnancy. There are different diagnoses which are included as being on the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum, but all individuals with FASD have differences in the functioning of their brains. These differences can result in problems, including: mild-to-severe delays in thinking (e.g., reasoning ability, memory, attention, executive functioning etc.), difficulties with physical skills (fine and/or large muscle skills), as well as emotional immaturity, social and behavioural difficulties, and poor self-regulation of attention, mood, behaviour and impulses. These disabilities are life-long.

How FASD can impact learning

Each student with FASD will present with a unique profile of strengths and needs. You may observe some of the following, each of which may range from mild to severe:

- Slower learning ability and/or language skills
- Fine and/or large muscle motor co-ordination problems
- Attention problems (inattentive and fidgety)
- Memory problems (short term and long term retention of material)
- Slower processing of information (either verbal and/or visual)
- Difficulties understanding abstract ideas or concepts (in language and/or math)
- Difficulties with sensory input (e.g., bright lighting, loud noises, certain textures, etc.)
- Difficulty linking their actions and the consequences
- Social development delays (more immature) which can make it difficult to establish and maintain relationships with others
- Communication challenges- difficulty understanding language and not understanding the impact of their words

Helpful Resources

Trying Differently Rather Than Harder by Diane Malbin (2002)

Broken Cord by Michael Dorris (1989)

<http://www.teachspeced.ca/alcohol-related-neuro-developmental-disorder>

https://www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/fasd/fasdeducators_en.pf

<http://www.fasdontario.ca/cms/resources/publications/>

FASD Durham Committee – Strategies for Assisting Individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder – www.rfecydurham.com/fasd.htm

Strategies to support those with FASD

- Consult with school staff, as needed
- Concentrate on strengths and talents
- Adjust expectations to your child or teen's developmental level
- Teach concepts repetitively, so that a skill becomes automatic
- Link new concepts to information the student already knows
- Use concrete language and examples to help make abstract concepts easier to learn
- Break tasks into smaller steps with appropriate rest breaks to help keep your child focused
- Ensure consistent, stable routines and structure
- Visual reminders, such as a very simple visual schedule or daily task chart, will help your child remember tasks and their routines
- Provide extra time, even for routine tasks, your child may process information much more slowly than others their age
- Provide assistance with organization of tasks and work materials
- Implement behavioural consequences which are consistent, straightforward and clear
- Directly teach social skills (modelling them and rehearsing will be helpful)

This resource is not intended for diagnostic purposes. It is to be used as a reference for your own understanding and to provide information about the different kinds of difficulties you may encounter in your classroom.

