

## Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Fact Sheet

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is an umbrella term that covers the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol Related Neuro-developmental Disorders (ARND) is another cluster that mainly involves brain function. Alcohol Related Birth Defects (ARBD) focus on physical differences of internal and external body structure.

Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is included in the spectrum. FAS is not a single birth defect but a cluster of signs and symptoms. Issues caused by FAS include cognitive disabilities, learning disorders and behavioral challenges. Some students have vision and hearing difficulties and some have physical irregularities. The consequences vary among students, but the changes in the body and brain are lifelong.

### Characteristics

- Hypersensitive sensory systems.
- Small in stature.
- Average or low-average IQ scores.
- Small head circumference and small brain size (microcephaly).
- Irregular facial features, including small eyes, a very thin upper lip and a smooth skin surface between the nose and upper lip.

### Behavior

- Simplistically, an FASD is a hidden disability with behavioral expression. Behavior is a form of communication.
- Fidgeting during an assignment may mean, "I don't understand what to do."
- Hitting another student may mean, "I was startled when that kid bumped into me."
- Slamming a book or throwing materials may mean, "I'm overloaded by all this new information."
- Repeating your directions, but not following them may mean, "I know what you said, but I don't know the steps to do that."

- Not beginning a sequencing task may mean, “I don’t know where to start.”
- Becoming upset when the schedule changes may mean, “You upset my routine and now I don’t know what to expect.”
- Leaving the room may mean, “The clock is so loud that I can’t think.”

## **Educational Implications**

Students with an FASD have some degree of brain damage. The brain reacts to damage in similar ways, regardless of the cause. Your student’s performance may be similar to that of students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism and/or traumatic brain injury. He or she may exhibit learning disabilities, such as information processing deficits, organization challenges and short-term memory disorders. Information learned in one context may not transfer to another and material learned one day may be forgotten the next day and remembered later. This pattern is frustrating for students and teachers.

## **Instructional Strategies**

### Foundation

- Establish a sense of safety in your room. Create a calm corner, such as a bean bag chair, large pillows on the floor or a large carton with pillows inside, to allow students to refocus. Do not use this area for “time-out” discipline.
- “Listen” to your student’s behavior. Read his or her body language.

### Structure

- Establish a consistent routine and follow it throughout the school year.
- State rules, expectations and consequences clearly and make them visible. Ensure that they apply to all students. Reinforce appropriate behavior.
- Post a copy of the schedule in an accessible place.
- Allow transition time between the end of one subject and the beginning of the next. For example, announce that math will end in five minutes and once everyone’s desk is clear, you will call them to line up for lunch.
- Allow short breaks when necessary.
- Discuss with your student the best place to sit in class. A location in the front of the room may avoid distractions, but he or she may feel like the “center of attention.”
- Make seating assignments at the beginning of the year and keep them.

## Instruction

- Stand in front of a blank space when speaking for maximum attention. Keep bulletin boards neat. Avoid hanging items from the ceiling.
- Teach topics in context. For example, teach money in the lunch line and teach time by following the daily schedule.
- Provide your notes or a study buddy's notes.
- Divide long-term assignments.

## Communication

- Use simple sentence structures.
- Communicate literally with concrete examples. Repetition helps to increase learning.
- Give one-step directions.
- Highlight key words in written directions.
- Ask your student to repeat and explain directions to check for understanding.
- Use a notebook for communication among parents and you. Send four positive comments for every negative comment.

## Organization

- Use materials or devices that organize responses, such as visual and graphic organizers.
- Teach and reinforce study skills.
- Teach and reinforce the use of an assignment book. Check it regularly.

## Other subjects

- Teach social skills, such as space between people and touching other people.
- Teach indirect language skills, such as facial expressions, tones of voice, idioms, sarcasm and colloquialisms.

## Resources

### [Mayo Clinic](#)

[www.mayoclinic.com/health/fetal-alcohol-syndrome /DS00184](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/fetal-alcohol-syndrome/DS00184)

### [Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome \(MOFAS\)](#)

<http://www.mofas.org/women/frequently-asked-questions/>

### [Department of Health and Human Services](#)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
FASD Center for Excellence

[http://www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov/documents/Reach\\_To\\_Teach\\_Final\\_011107.pdf](http://www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov/documents/Reach_To_Teach_Final_011107.pdf)

### [Minnesota Children and Youth with Special Health Needs](#)

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Fact Sheet

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fh/mcshn/bd/fetal.pdf>

### [MedlinePlus, National Institutes of Health](#)

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/fetalalcoholspectrumdisorders.html>

### [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs)

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

### [National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome \(NOFAS\)](#)

What School System Should Know about Affected Students

<http://www.nofas.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/students-school.pdf>

<http://www.nofas.org/educator/>

### [Department of Health and Human Services](#)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

<http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Reach-to-Teach-Educating-Elementary-and-Middle-School-Children-with-Fetal-Alcohol-Spectrum-Disorders-FASD-/SMA07-4222>

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)