

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Information Sheet

The term fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) refers to the range of effects that can happen to a person whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is part of the spectrum. Issues caused by FAS include cognitive disabilities, learning disorders and behavioral challenges. Some students have vision and hearing difficulties and some have physical irregularities. Consequences vary among students, but the changes to the body and brain last a lifetime.

Symptoms and Signs

- Easily distracted
- Short attention span
- Poor coordination
- Issues with large- and fine-motor skills
- Need for lots of one-on-one attention
- Low self-esteem
- Difficulty keeping up in school
- Low impulse control

Educational Implications

Students with an FASD have some degree of brain damage. A student's performance may be similar to that of students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism and/or traumatic brain injury. There may be information processing deficits, organization challenges and short-term memory disorders.

Literal communication with concrete, contextual examples is more effective than abstract examples for some students.

Visual and graphic organizers can help a student organize responses.

Study skills, including an assignment book, can accommodate a student's issues with short-term memory and organization.

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 a peer may mean, "I was startled when that kid bumped into me."

- Throwing materials may mean, “I’m overloaded by all this new information.”

Educational Options

Those students whose fetal alcohol syndrome adversely affects their educational performance may benefit from special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To qualify under IDEA, a student must meet eligibility criteria in one of thirteen specific disability categories. Under IDEA, a student with a disability is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and an individualized education program, including individual goals, objectives, related services, accommodations and modifications.

Students that do not qualify for services under IDEA may qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. To qualify under Section 504, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (for example learning, breathing, thinking, concentrating, walking, bodily functions). Under Section 504, a student is entitled to equal opportunity, and may qualify for a Section 504 plan that provides regular or special education and related aids and services.

A student with a health condition who does not require special instruction and related services can receive, as appropriate, a wide range of supports in the general education classroom, including accommodations, individualized health plans (IHP), emergency care plans (ECP) and local education agency supports.