

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder



Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is a pattern of birth defects, learning and behavioural problems affecting individuals whose mothers consumed alcohol during pregnancy. FASD causes a variety of symptoms, including extreme impulsivity, poor judgement, poor memory, difficulty learning basic skills, organizational difficulties, language and speech delays, and gross and fine motor delays. There are some physical facial characteristics that may indicate FASD, but many individuals who are affected do not have these characteristics. Other physical and psychological disorders are common with FASD, including seizures, hearing or vision problems, attention deficit disorder, anxiety and depression.

Implications for Planning and Awareness

- Meet with the student and parents early in the school year to discuss how the school can support this student's needs related to FASD. This could include finding out about:
 - the student's strengths, interests and areas of need
 - the student's specific symptoms
 - any other associated disorders that need to be considered at school
 - successful strategies used at home or in the community that also could be used at school.
- Learn as much as you can about how FASD may affect learning and social and emotional well-being. Reading, asking questions and talking to qualified professionals will build your understanding and help you make decisions to support the student's success at school.
- Collaborate with the school and/or jurisdictional team to identify and coordinate any needed consultation or supports.
- Develop a system for sharing information with relevant staff members about the student's condition and successful strategies.

Your awareness needs to begin with conversations with the student's parents.

Implications for Instruction

- Determine the student's particular learning style, strengths and needs. Students with FASD typically:
 - struggle to learn basic facts, such as multiplication facts
 - have difficulties with memory and organizational skills
 - have strengths in visual arts and music
 - enjoy repetitive work and succeed in structured situations
 - enjoy physical activities
 - respond to smaller teaching groups.
- Provide concrete, hands-on learning activities.



- Keep the student on-task by creating structure, repeating instructions and providing supervision.
- Keep language and directions simple and specific. Check the student's comprehension of problem solving and abstract concepts before proceeding.
- Create consistency and routine in the classroom. Use picture schedules to reinforce this routine.
- Be aware of the student's level of responsiveness to sensory stimuli (e.g., lights, noise, touch) and adjust activities and workspaces accordingly.
- Highlight key concepts, and use graphic organizers and visual schedules.
- Clearly identify the change from one activity or room to another (e.g., "Five more minutes to finish your picture before we go to the gym.").
- Model activities and expected responses. Provide alternate ways to complete assignments and demonstrate learning.
- Break down tasks into smaller, manageable steps.
- Teach organizational strategies; for example:
 - personal daily and weekly/monthly schedule
 - personal list to track assignments
 - checklists for materials
 - designated time and routine for putting materials away after each class
 - colour coding personal belongings.

Implications for Social and Emotional Well-being

- Engage the student and parents in planning for transitions between grade levels and different schools.
- Some students with FASD may have severe emotional problems, including aggression and in some cases sociopathic tendencies (e.g., hurting animals). In collaboration with the school and/or jurisdictional team, develop a positive behaviour support plan, if necessary.
- Be aware that students with FASD often have better expressive language than receptive language. This can be misleading and may lead to social difficulties.
- Work with the student to develop social skills, anger management and impulse control. Consider strategies, such as social stories, role-play and social cueing.
- Be aware of student–peer relationships and provide support and guidance, when necessary. Some students may be unaware or misunderstand incidental information and social nuances.
- Provide structured opportunities for the student to form relationships with peers, such as:
 - using a buddy system for recess, lunch time and other unstructured social times
 - providing organized activities for the student to take part in at recess or lunchtime.
- Although students with FASD often have difficulty making and keeping relationships with peers and adults, they also can be affectionate, trusting and loyal once relationships are established.
- Be aware that some students may have difficulty telling the truth because of impulsivity, memory difficulties, misinterpreting questions or the desire to please. Directly teach the concept of true and false, real and imaginary, and be aware of this tendency.

Parents know their children well and can offer insights on how to support their social and emotional well-being. There is strength in collaborating on strategies that could be used at home, at school and in the community.



- Some students experience difficulties with taking items belonging to others because they don't understand the concept of ownership, and/or don't understand the consequences of their actions. Write students' names on items in the classroom and teach concepts of personal space and ownership and how to borrow and return items.
- Be aware that students with FASD may have very poor judgement and may be easily led by peers. Provide supervision and support to keep the student safe. Consider a buddy system with strong positive role models.

As you consider the implications for this disability, think about the following questions:

1. Do I need further conversations with the parents to better understand this student's strengths and needs? Yes No
2. Do I need targeted professional learning? Yes No
If yes, what specific topics and strategies would I explore?
3. Is consultation with jurisdictional staff required? Yes No
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore?
4. Is consultation with external service providers required (e.g., Regional Educational Consulting Services, Student Health Partnership, Alberta Children's Hospital, Glenrose Hospital)? Yes No
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore?
5. Are further assessments required to assist with planning for this student? Yes No
If yes, what questions do I need answered?
6. Is service to the student from an external provider required? Yes No
If yes, what outcomes would be anticipated?

Links for further information:

Alberta Education. [Teaching Students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.](#)

Alberta Government. [Re: Defining Success: A Team Approach to Supporting Students with FASD.](#)

British Columbia Ministry of Education. "Provincial Outreach Program for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder." <http://www.fasdoutreach.ca/>

Yukon Education. *Making a Difference: Working with Students Who Have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.* http://www.education.gov.yk.ca/pdf/publications/fasd_manual_2007.pdf

Please note:

These websites are for information only and the user is responsible for evaluating the content and appropriate uses of the information.

