

ABOUT FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD)



Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is an umbrella term that describes a range of neurological impairments caused by exposure to alcohol before birth. FASD is an irreversible disability that ideally needs multidisciplinary support. It can affect learning, behaviour, emotion, and cognitive and physiological characteristics in learners.

Each learner living with FASD is a unique individual with their own culture, language and experiences. This will need to be considered to inform adjustments to their educational program and learning environment to support their needs. When you understand the impact of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder on the individual learner, you'll be better able to adjust to their needs.



**Government
of South Australia**

Department for Education

How FASD affects learning

Learners may have:

- behaviour that is not developmentally consistent with peers, and may be seen as immature
- impulsivity
- sensory issues and be overstimulated or understimulated
- attention difficulties
- hyperactivity
- memory problems
- slower processing speed
- difficulty with abstracting and predicting skills
- difficulties with problem-solving skills
- difficulties with judgement, for example, they will follow their peers into both good and bad decisions.

Diagnosis

- FASD is a complex disability with growing research and understanding about it.
- Ideally a multidisciplinary team will assess learners for difficulties resulting in diagnosis. The alcohol exposure can be complex and diverse and there is no typical pattern of impairment in FASD. This can make diagnosis difficult and lengthy.
- About 2% of all Australian babies may be born with some form of FASD. It's believed to be under-diagnosed.

Strengths of learners living with FASD

Learners living with FASD have various strengths such as being:

- highly verbal
- willing
- determined, persistent
- helpful
- generous
- good with younger children
- athletic
- artistic, musical, mechanical
- friendly, outgoing or affectionate.

FASD ADJUSTMENTS



No fault, blame or judgement should be placed on the family or educators. Teaching or caring for learners living with FASD has many challenges. Compassion and support should always be given. It's important to understand your learner and consider their language, culture, understanding, developmental level, social understanding and emotional capability.

EXAMPLES OF ADJUSTMENTS



Environment and communication

- Engage learners with exaggerated facial expressions and gestures.
- Keep instructions as short as possible and reinforce them with visual prompts.
- Provide tactile examples of what is being taught, like clocks for teaching time.
- Consider routines and seating arrangements for learners.
- Avoid clutter and unnecessary visuals.
- Allow opportunities for learners to avoid big crowds at break times.
- Provide a calming space for learners with tools such as headphones, music, masks, scents, tents and swing chairs.



Memory, organisation and executive functioning

- There may be a lack of understanding or distraction when a learner is non-compliant with instructions or learning.
- Expect to repeat instructions and rules frequently and use consistent language.
- Make visual timetables with pictures of the student doing activities.
- Check for understanding by getting the learner to repeat instruction in their own words.
- Label baskets or containers with a word and a picture to support the development of patterns and connections.
- Allow time for information to be processed and stay quiet during this time.



Attachment

- Know and talk about the learner's interests with them to increase their sense of belonging and engagement.
- Have constant contact with parents for upcoming events and outlining the learner's positive achievements.
- Partner the learner with other learners who are good role models.