

# PREVENTING, IDENTIFYING & TREATING FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS (FASD)



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# Overview of CDC Initiative:

**Collaborative for  
Alcohol-Free Pregnancy**



## CDC-funded FASD Practice & Implementation Centers (PICs) and National Partnerships Goals:

- Prevent alcohol-exposed pregnancies
- Promote proper identification/referral for those with FASD
- Strengthen “**research to practice**” linkages through partnerships between PICs and national organizations for:
  - Physicians (Family Medicine, Ob/Gyn, Pediatrics)
  - Nurses, Social Workers, Medical Assistants
- Achieving sustainable **practice-level** and **systems-level** change through an interprofessional, collaborative model
- <https://nccd.cdc.gov/FASD/>

# BEHAVIORAL / FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS, TREATMENT, & INTERVENTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH PRENATAL ALCOHOL EXPOSURE

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## Part III



# Learning Objectives

- I. **Describe** and identify common characteristics and challenges for individuals with prenatal alcohol exposure
- II. **Recognize** individual strengths
- III. **Identify** treatment and intervention options to support an individual with a FASD throughout the lifespan
- IV. **Incorporate** strategies for improving outcomes for persons with a FASD

# Behavioral / Functional Characteristics and Challenges for an Individual with Prenatal Alcohol Exposure

# Alcohol During Pregnancy Can Create a Brain That...

...can't read the emotions or  
body language of other  
people

...thinks like the  
brain of someone much  
younger

...forgets  
information

...responds  
slowly



...can't link cause  
and effect

...thinks in a  
disorganized way

...has trouble moving  
information from one  
situation to another

...has difficulty with  
time and money

...uses poor  
judgment

# Common Challenges for Individuals with Prenatal Alcohol Exposure

Very literal  
thinking

Slower  
processing  
pace

Difficulty  
learning from  
experience

Disruption in  
cause / effect  
thinking

Rigid thinking

Difficulty  
reading body  
language

Memory  
problems

Sensory  
integration  
challenges

Poor  
judgment

# Typical Characteristics for individuals with FASD

Typical primary characteristics in children, adolescents, and adults include:

Ability to repeat instructions, but inability to put them into action

Cognitive processing deficits (may think more slowly)

Developmental lags (may act younger than chronological age)

Difficulty storing and retrieving information

Difficulty with abstractions, such as math, money management, time concepts

Impulsivity, distractibility, disorganization

Inability to predict outcomes or understand consequences

Inconsistent performance ("on" and "off") days

Slow auditory processing (may only understand every third word of normally paced conversation)

Diane Malbin –  
FASCETS.org



# Reconceptualizing the Behavior of an Individual with FASD

| From Seeing          |   | To Understanding         |
|----------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Won't                | ⇒ | Can't                    |
| Lazy                 | ⇒ | Tries Hard               |
| Lies                 | ⇒ | Fills in                 |
| Doesn't Try          | ⇒ | Exhausted or can't start |
| Doesn't care         | ⇒ | Can't show feeling       |
| Refuses to sit still | ⇒ | Over stimulated          |
| Fussy, demanding     | ⇒ | Sensitive                |
| Resisting            | ⇒ | Doesn't understand       |

-Diane Malbin, FASCETS website

# Recognizing and reframing strengths

What strengths might an individual have  
(despite appearances)?

- Survival skills- (might look manipulative)
- Verbally expressive- (talks, doesn't listen)
- Curious- (doesn't focus on task in front of them)
- Wants to please- (peer pressure)
- Sense of humor- (laughs inappropriately)
- Persistence- (perseveration)
- Patience- (standing around)
- Passion- (anger)



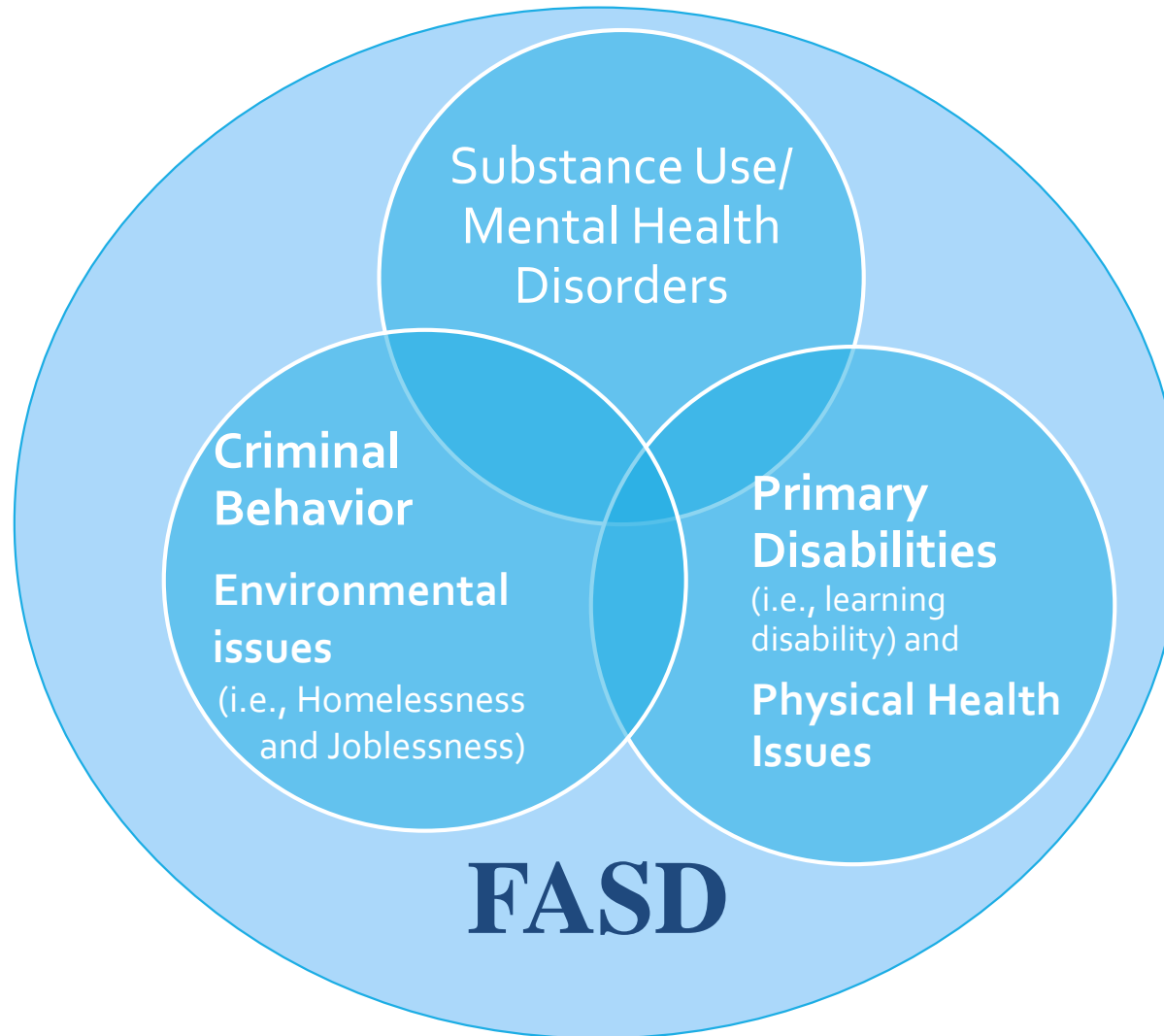
# Encourage Strengths

- Highly verbal
- Bright in some areas
- Artistic, musical, mechanical
- Athletic
- Friendly, outgoing, affectionate
- Determined
- Persistent
- Willing
- Helpful
- Generous
- Many are good with younger children or the elderly



# LIFESPAN TREATMENTS AND INTERVENTIONS FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH FASD

# FASD Impacts All Aspects of a Person's Life



# Interventions & Support Through the Lifespan

## Early Intervention Services

- Research supports that early intervention services (speech and language, OT and/or PT, etc.) can improve child development
- Individuals With Disabilities Education Act - I.D.E.A. allows anyone who qualifies to receive services
- Speech therapy and language delays often do not require a formal diagnosis to receive treatment

# Interventions & Support through the lifespan

## Protective Factors

- Early diagnosis and recognition
- Involvement in social services
- Loving, nurturing, and stable home environment
- Absence of violence

Types of treatment **will change throughout the lifespan**

# Types of Lifespan Treatments / Interventions

- Medical Care
- Medications
- Behavior and Education Therapy
  - Friendship training “Good Buddies” (Mary O’Connor and colleagues)
  - Specialized math tutoring (Claire Coles – dozlearn.com)
  - Executive functioning training & Parents and Children Together (Ira Chasnoff <https://www.alertprogram.com/>)
  - Parent-child interaction therapy (P-CIT)
  - Modified mental health or substance use treatment
  - Supportive therapy



# Types of Lifespan Treatments / Interventions

- **Parenting Training**
  - Parenting and behavior management training (Heather Carmichael Olson – Families Moving Forward - <https://depts.washington.edu/fmffasd/>)
- **Linkage and Advocacy** with child welfare, corrections and education, as needed
- **Alternative Approaches**

| What We See                                                                          | What We Think                                                                                                                    | What May Be Really Going On                                                                                                       | What We Can Do                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doesn't follow rules</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Noncompliance</li> <li>Attention Seeking</li> <li>Stubborn</li> <li>Purposeful</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty translating verbal directions into action</li> <li>Cognitive deficit</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check for understanding</li> <li>Repeat instructions</li> <li>Simplify tasks</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repeatedly makes the same mistakes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manipulative</li> <li>Doing it on purpose</li> <li>Willful</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not able to link cause and effect</li> <li>Difficulty generalizing</li> </ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide assistance with organization</li> <li>Structure choices</li> </ul>              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor social judgment</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attention Seeking</li> <li>Poorly parented</li> <li>Impulsive</li> </ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not able to interpret social cues</li> <li>Desire to be liked</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role play</li> <li>Identify safe external support/s</li> <li>Safety planning</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Easily agitated</li> </ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor self control</li> <li>Deviant</li> </ul>                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frustrated</li> <li>Disappointed</li> <li>Mental health issue</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teach self advocacy</li> <li>Identify and practice coping techniques</li> </ul>         |

# Strategies for Improving Outcomes for Persons With an FASD

- Identify strengths in the individual, family, and providers
- Find something that the person likes to do and does well and help make arrangements
- Create “chill out” spaces in each setting
- Use literal language
- Use person first language
- Recognize that FASD impacts an individual throughout the lifespan, not just during childhood



# Strategies for Improving Outcomes for Persons With an FASD

- Have short sessions as frequently as possible
- Be careful about verbal approaches as verbal receptive language is most often much more impaired than expressive language
  - Use multiple senses (e.g. role playing and computer learning)
  - Act out instructions when possible
  - Provide visual cues
  - Limit distracting stimuli
- Simplify and review routines, schedules, & rules frequently

# Additional Strategies

- Check for true understanding
  - Do not just ask “do you understand” and “do you have any questions”
  - Ask questions such as “what does that mean?” “How would you do that?”
  - “Could you tell me what you just heard that I said and what that means? Sometimes I am not as clear as I should be and I want to be sure I was clear in what I asked you (or told you)”
- Prepare the individual for changes in schedule

Dubovsky, 2016

## *Part III Conclusions*

- Individuals with FASD may have difficulty with cognitive processing and functional skills.
- Reframe challenges and support the strengths of persons with an FASD
- Early intervention can improve a child's health and development
  - Interventions will change as the person develops.
- FASD impacts a person across the lifespan and undiagnosed individuals may encounter adverse life outcomes as a result.
- Typical intervention and service approaches may need to be modified for an individual with FASD.

# ADDRESSING STIGMA & BARRIERS

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## Part IV



# Learning Objectives

- I. **Explain & recognize** how stigma relates to FASD and alcohol consumption among women
- II. **Identify** how stigma & bias impact the ways providers approach, communicate, and interact with women who use alcohol
- III. **Identify** how to address barriers to care for prevention of alcohol-exposed pregnancies (AEPs)



# Understanding FASD & Stigma

- Experiences of biological mothers:
  - Guilt, denial, shame, anger and trauma are common
- Factors contributing to alcohol use during pregnancy may include:
  - intimate partner violence, mental health conditions, experiences from previous pregnancies, etc.
- Undetected pregnancies
- **Different cultures may perceive things differently**
- Stigma creates barriers that hinder FASD prevention and care



NOFAS Circle of Hope  
(source of support for mothers)

# Stigma, Social Messages & Misinformation

## A PERFECT STORM

- Many pregnancies are unplanned
- Social acceptance of alcohol
- Uncomfortable topics to discuss
- Limited access to family planning services



- Child is born; may be small with some health concerns
- Diagnosis is not made, necessary support services may not be provided
- Protective factors can be difficult to obtain for child
- Limited support or education for families

# Addressing Barriers

- Recognize that stigma impacts the ways providers approach, communicate, and interact with women who use alcohol
- Implement routine alcohol screening with ALL clients
- Use appropriate and respectful language regarding alcohol consumption during pregnancy
- Establish an effective referral process

## *Part IV Conclusions*

- Stigma regarding alcohol use creates barriers for FASD prevention & care.
- It is important to take into consideration cultural differences regarding alcohol consumption.
- Routine alcohol screening and an empathetic provider can effectively help reduce barriers for communication and treatment.

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