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# Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD):

## Information for professionals

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### Information about FASD

FASD is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder that is caused by parental drinking during pregnancy, which harms the foetus by negatively affecting the development of the brain and central nervous system.

About 2-4% of children in the UK are thought to be affected by FASD but this figure is likely to be an underestimation as identification is difficult and the rate of diagnosis is extremely low, possibly because its effects may be masked by or mistaken for other neurodivergent disorders. Children in the care system and who are adopted are disproportionately affected by FASD.

FASD impacts on children's development and behaviour but in an individual way; no 2 children will exhibit the same symptoms, and the neurodevelopmental disorders may vary. However, the following indicators may be observed;

- hypersensitivity to the environment, for example noise, leading to overstimulation
- being overwhelmed when asked to process too much information
- difficulty in following instructions or organising self
- issues with memory
- may exhibit some language disorder and have difficulty interacting verbally with others
- may be unable to regulate behaviour and emotions leading to challenging behaviour
- delay or difficulties in development of motor skills
- in limited cases, specific sentinel facial features.

This makes learning more difficult and in turn will impact on the child's academic achievement. Children affected by FASD also have difficulty transitioning to adulthood and often face poor outcomes in adult life. They are also more vulnerable to exploitation.

However, children affected by FASD can also have considerable strengths; they can be friendly and helpful and are often creative and musical.

### Standards

NICE guidelines set out the following standards for working with children and families affected by FASD:

1. All pregnant women are advised to avoid alcohol during pregnancy.
2. Pregnant women's alcohol intake is monitored in order to measure potential foetal exposure to alcohol.

3. Referral for assessment should be made for children who may have been exposed to alcohol in the womb and where there is evidence of significant physical, developmental or behavioural difficulties.
4. Where parental alcohol exposure is confirmed or all 3 facial features associated with FASD are present, children should be referred for a neurodevelopmental assessment.
5. Children with a diagnosis of FASD should have a management plan to meet their needs (this can include an EHCP).

### **Working with children and families**

- Professionals, particularly midwives, need to discuss the risks of alcohol consumption during pregnancy and stress that there is no safe limit for drinking; the key message should be that abstinence from alcohol is the only way to avoid risk.
- It is essential that there is an accurate record of parental alcohol consumption throughout the pregnancy to support any action taken following the child's birth where FASD may be present.
- Professionals should work with parents in a non-judgemental way and ensure that a thorough assessment of alcohol consumption is carried out looking at patterns and any drivers. Parents should be signposted to [Change Grow Live](#) for help and advice around drinking.
- The possibility of a child being affected by FASD should be discussed with health professionals and a decision made about referring the child for assessment.
- Professionals should provide support and information to families about FASD and its potential impact on children's health, development and behaviour and signpost them to further help and support.
- When working with children, professionals should try to understand their behaviours and consider how they can best communicate their needs. Professionals should also contribute to any management plan or EHCP to support their education.

### **Information for schools**

FASD can impact significantly on a child's behaviour and learning, and children may present with complex needs and challenging behaviour. Schools may need to adopt various strategies to support the child's learning and may require an individual approach tailored for the individual child. The following provide information around learning profiles and strategies for teaching:

[ENGLAND FASD Ed factsheet 1 Common Strengths V1 08/22](#)

[ENGLAND FASD Ed Factsheet 4 flexible strategies V1 08/22](#)

[Understanding-FASD-What-Educators-need-to-know-271119.pdf](#)

### **For more information**

For the latest research on FASD see the Research in Practice on identification and working with [cf\\_fasd\\_fb\\_2005\\_v4.pdf](#)

NICE standards are available at: [Overview | Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder | Quality standards | NICE](#)

For general information for professionals and families visit the National Organisation for FASD website: [Home - National FASD](#) or the FASD Network UK website [What is FASD? - FASD Network UK](#)