

# FASD

## Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

*(Information for this newsletter is taken from SAMHSA FASD Center for Excellence at [fasdcenter.samhsa.gov](http://fasdcenter.samhsa.gov))*

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) is an umbrella term that describes the range of effects that can happen in a baby whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral and/or learning disabilities that can last a lifetime.

The only cause of FASD is alcohol use during pregnancy. When a pregnant woman drinks, the alcohol crosses the placenta into the fetal blood system. Thus, alcohol reaches the baby, its developing tissues and organs. This is how brain damage occurs which can lead to mental retardation, social and mental health problems, learning disabilities and other challenges. FASD is the leading known cause of mental retardation.

No alcohol use is safe during pregnancy. In addition, the type of alcohol (beer, wine, hard liquor, wine cooler, etc) does not appear to make a difference.

FASD can co-occur with mental illness, but often there is failure to recognize and diagnosis the disorders.

Signs and symptoms of FASD are similar to various mental health disorders. In many cases the signs



### *FASD Possible Physical Effects*

- *Brain damage*
- *Facial abnormalities*
- *Growth deficiencies*
- *Problems with the heart, kidneys and liver*
- *Vision and hearing problems*
- *Skeletal defects*
- *Dental abnormalities*

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and symptoms of an FASD go unrecognized or are misdiagnosed as a mental illness.

FASD can co-occur with many disorders such as:

- Major depressive disorder
- Psychotic disorders
- Autism or Asperger's syndrome
- Bipolar disorder
- Personality disorders
- Substance use disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Conduct disorder
- Reactive attachment disorder
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Traumatic brain injury



Students with FASD generally struggle in school. They have difficulties with visual and auditory processing and difficulty with reading comprehension. They are usually sensitive to sensory input (noise, visual, hearing) and have attention problems, including ADHD. Children with FASD often have problems with their peers; they do not understand the social "language" of other children. They have problems with following simple directions or rules. They also have difficulty with math and abstract reasoning. They have an inability to understand cause and effect and difficulty organizing task and their school materials.

Because of auditory problems students with FASD may not respond to traditional teaching methods. They may act out in frustration because they do not understand what is going on. They may have a "melt down" due to sensory overload and may fidget a lot.

Most do not learn from punishment

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because they cannot generalize rules. They also may have impulse control problems and lack social skills such as listening, asking for help, waiting their turn and sharing.

Every child is different, and much of what works with a student with FASD is learned through trial and error. Below are some general tips for working with a student with FASD:

- Use literal terms. Avoid words with double meanings, slang or idioms. Do not use metaphors or similes.
- Be consistent. Use the same words for key phrases and oral direction.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat. You may need to reteach information multiple times.
- Follow a routine. Routines help students with FASD know what to expect and decrease their anxiety
- Keep it simple. Children with FASD learn better in a simple environment with few distractions.
- Be specific. Say exactly what you mean. Give directions step by step. Show the student what to do.
- Provide structure. Structure helps the child with FASD make sense of their world.
- Supervise. Students with FASD can be naïve and gullible and lack social skills. They need constant supervision to develop patterns of appropriate behavior.



### **RESOURCES:**

- SAMHSA FASD Center for Excellence  
[fasdcenter.samhsa.gov](http://fasdcenter.samhsa.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of FAS  
[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fas](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fas)
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism  
[www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)
- National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS) [www.nofas.org](http://www.nofas.org)

# SIBSHOPS!

Come join the fun! Sibshops are recreational workshops for brothers and sisters (ages 8-13) who have a sibling with a special need or disability. Allies with Families hold Sibshops in communities throughout the Wasatch Front. And they are FREE!

**Call us today to register for an upcoming Sibshop! You'll love it!**

## **HELP WANTED: YOUTH ACTION POSSE**

Youth Action Posse of Utah is a group of young people who have experienced mental health concerns that work together to bring positive change in the community.

With more than ten council members and a Leadership Committee, POSSE aims to strengthen youth leadership within mental health services and the community through training, events, and youth representation. POSSE offers many opportunities for youth and young people to get involved in mental health advocacy and build leadership skills through peer-to-peer mentoring and active participation in the community.

Some examples of events that POSSE members participate in are:

- Annual Youth Leadership Conference (organized by POSSE)
- Legislative Chill on the Hill (organized by NAMI)
- Holiday Service Projects (organized by POSSE and other Behavioral Health Organizations)

If you are interested in learning more about POSSE, please contact the Youth Support Coordinator, Jackie, at her office at 801-433-2595, cell at 801-548-5562, or e-mail at [Jackie@allieswithfamilies.org](mailto:Jackie@allieswithfamilies.org).