

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

The hidden disability you may see every day



Information to help support children and young people in out-of-home care

Why FASD matters

People involved in out-of-home care play a central role in recognising and supporting the needs of children and young people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

When FASD goes unrecognised, children and young people can be left without the right support, misunderstood, or even blamed for the behaviours caused by their disability. People with FASD are more likely to encounter correctional services, with 36% of people in youth detention in Western Australia found to have FASD.

Children and young people with FASD are 17-19 times more likely to be placed in foster care.

What is FASD?

FASD is a lifelong disability caused by exposure to alcohol before birth.

It presents differently for each person, but potential signs of FASD can include:

- Developmental delay
- Sleep disorders
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Impulsive or risk-taking behaviours
- Challenges understanding and learning from past mistakes or consequences
- Difficulty making and keeping friends
- Poor memory.



People with FASD have individual strengths and challenges, but all experience some degree of difficulty in everyday life and will likely need support.

"My child's symptoms include difficulty with emotional regulation, extreme anxiety, speech issues, sensory issues and both academic and social challenges at school... These symptoms present as behaviours such as yelling, throwing things and shutting down."

- Mother of a child with FASD

FASD in out-of-home care

People supporting children and young people in out-of-home care have an important role in identifying undiagnosed cases of FASD and helping facilitate access to early intervention.

Accurate and timely diagnosis of FASD allows appropriate supports to be put in place.

This helps establish successful placements and allows foster carers, guardians, or adoptive parents to be better equipped and informed to meet the needs of the child or young person in their care.



What can you do?

Ask for a referral to a paediatrician and/or FASD-informed health care provider to seek an assessment and diagnosis.

When children and young people enter out-of-home care, approach any behaviour or difficulties with a FASD-informed lens. This means:

- Consider whether substance misuse was a reason for placement
- Seek a FASD assessment and diagnosis if there are concerns.

If a child or young person in your care is at risk of FASD, they may need specific support that considers their individual behaviours and strengths.

Work with FASD-informed organisations and health care providers to develop strategies, and make sure other people who are involved with the child or young person are also FASD-informed.

Learn more about common behavioural symptoms and signs of FASD by visiting the NOFASD website. FASD-informed caregivers are excellent advocates in helping to reduce secondary conditions by pursuing early diagnosis.

"From the time he wakes to going to bed, our day is planned to provide regulatory activities to manage the triggers that affect his life ... everything is about repetition because it can take a long time for the skills to be learned to manage problem behaviour."

- Mother of a child with FASD

Seeking a FASD diagnosis

When seeking an assessment or when waiting for a diagnosis, you can learn more about FASD or get support by phoning the NOFASD Australia Helpline on **1800 860 613** or visiting **nofasd.org.au**.

It is important to know FASD is sometimes initially misdiagnosed as ADHD, autism, or other disorders. Children or young people who are misdiagnosed are at risk of not receiving the right support, making it harder to reach their full potential.

If you are looking for a FASD-informed health care provider who can support you through assessment and diagnosis, you can contact NOFASD Australia using the contact details above.

You can also search on the FASDHub Services Directory to find providers near you at **fasdhub.org.au/services**.

"Having a FASD diagnosis enabled us to see our son differently, to parent differently, to admire our son for his resilience, tenacity, perseverance, and motivation to continue trying, despite the daily hurdles and challenges he faced."

- Mother of a child with FASD





Learn more about alcohol during pregnancy and breastfeeding at **everymomentmatters.org.au**



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Learn more about NOFASD at **nofasd.org.au**

Learn more about FARE at **fare.org.au**

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