

## FOETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD)

### How Does Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Affect Learning?



**There is an established research and knowledge base about the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure on brain structure and function, including memory, cognition, executive functioning (forming, planning and carrying out complex or goal-directed activities), gross and fine motor control, sensory processing, language, and behaviour.**

Children and young people with FASD experience a range of developmental, learning, behavioural, social, emotional and sensory difficulties, which create barriers to learning. These have effects not only within the educational context, but also on the acquisition of crucial social and other life skills. Although they may have working/short-term memory difficulties, rote learning and long-term memory can be strengths. It is thus important to identify personal strengths, as these will become the foundations on which to develop personalised curricula, to encourage and develop further strengths, and to build emotional resilience.

While there are many barriers and challenges to learning for children and young people with FASD, it is important to frame these challenges in a strengths-based educational context. Many children with FASD have learning strengths around literacy and practical subjects, such as visual arts, performing arts, sport and technologies.



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It is important that educators cater to the specific needs of each individual child and build personalised learning plans for this diverse group of students. Children and young people with FASD, who may or may not have a diagnosis, require supportive practises, such as personalised learning and care plans and close monitoring and evaluation of behaviours. The best starting point is to ascertain their individual strengths and build from there.

Best practise teaching for children and young people with FASD focuses on engagement and social and emotional learning. It is important to provide learning opportunities that allow students to experience success. It has been shown that success and strengths-based approaches build emotional resilience, which is especially vital to enable children and young people with FASD to grow and better understand the boundaries of their abilities and disabilities.

In Australia, FASD is under-recognised and often goes undiagnosed. It is often referred to as a 'hidden harm'.

**Professor Elizabeth Elliott**

*Adapted by Get into Neurodiversity for a global audience.*

*Source:* Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre is proudly supported by the Australian Government.



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