

FOETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD)

The Importance of Respectful Language



It is important that educators frame their understanding of FASD in a ‘no blame and no shame’ context. We now know that complex trauma is a powerful determinant of alcohol use in many communities. In this sense, alcohol is a form of self-medication, and women should not be judged, shamed or stigmatised about alcohol use during pregnancy.

Alcohol causes the harm, not mothers. That said, FASD is a neurodevelopmental and physical disability, as alcohol causes structural, developmental and even cellular damage to the brain in utero. Typically, the most common symptoms of this brain damage seen by educators are behavioural challenges and learning difficulties. Only 10% of children – those exposed in the first trimester of pregnancy – will have identifiable facial feature changes or birth defects associated with FASD. Children with FASD may be slow to respond to stimuli, have difficulty making decisions and have trouble doing tasks independently.

The language we use when talking about those affected by FASD should be respectful, and promote dignity and understanding of those with FASD and their families.

The Manitoba FASD Coalition comprises a group of Canadians concerned about the relationship between stigma and FASD. They have developed a guide to respectful language to provide alternative words or phrases for those commonly used in society, and this has been adapted in the table on the freebie for the Australian context.

Adapted by Get into Neurodiversity for a global audience.

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The table comes out next week as freebie #7