

Contact our dedicated FASD Advisors via our Helpline 0300 666 0006 (option 2) (Tues-Fri, 10am to 2.30pm) or by emailing fasdhub.scotland@adoptionuk.org.uk

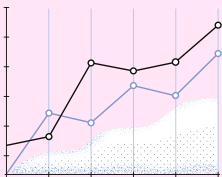
FASD stands for **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder**. FASD is a **lifelong** condition that affects the **brain and body** of people who were exposed to **alcohol in the womb**. All individuals with FASD have both **strengths and challenges**, and will need **supports** to help them **succeed** with many different areas of their daily lives. With early diagnosis, and the right supports all individuals with FASD **can be successful throughout life** ([Can FASD](#)). Each learner with FASD will have very different needs. However, there are some support strategies that could be adapted to suit all learners with prenatal alcohol exposure and might help to make education a more positive experience for all.

Communication with Family

It is important to build a trusting relationship with the child/young person's family. Many learners with FASD mask their symptoms to fit in with their peers and the effort of this as well as cognitive fatigue and sensory overload may result in a huge outburst of distressed behaviour when they get home (the Coke Bottle Effect). It can be difficult for education staff to understand some of the daily challenges families face when the child's presentation is so different at school. More frequent communication can help because sometimes even a minor incident or disruption to the expected routine at school can have a huge impact at home. Some may benefit from a home-school diary or a plan in place for a member of staff to communicate more regularly through email, phone or an App. It is also very important not to expect parents to implement consequences for events at school or vice-versa as this is likely to have a more detrimental than beneficial effect.



Developmental Stage vs. Chronological Age



Developmental dysmaturity is a feature of FASD. Developmental stage can vary significantly across different brain domains, and in comparison to chronological age. Adult expectations should reflect an understanding of the child's age and stage in different areas, recognising that this can also vary from day to day and in different environments. Think how you would respond to a much younger child and remember that a teenager could in reality be more akin to a younger child developmentally and emotionally. This is particularly important when managing behaviour or consequences, as awareness and learning through cause and effect might be limited.

A Trusting Relationship

Central to the success of all other supports is enabling the learner to develop a safe, trusting relationship with a key adult at school/nursery. This should be someone who will be available to provide support and reassurance as much as possible and can 'check-in' with them regularly, even when everything seems to be going well. Remember that the staff working closely with a learner with FASD may also benefit from support, and ideally should have regular opportunities to reflect on the positives and challenges, and plan the best way forward with supportive colleagues.



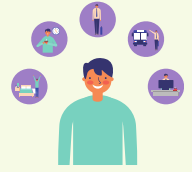
Think Brain not Blame



FASD is a complex lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder, yet often a hidden disability. There are ten areas of neurodevelopmental difference (brain domains) that should be assessed within the diagnosis process for FASD. It is important to adjust your perceptions and expectations accordingly. Rather than viewing the learner as refusing to do something, it might be more accurate to consider that they can't even if in some circumstances they appear to be able to. A more positive view could be to think of different abilities rather than the disability, and focus on the learner's strengths. Accommodation and de-escalation are often much more effective than reactive measures and consequences which often don't work as individuals with FASD frequently struggle with consequential learning. Strategies should be based around engagement, agreement and redirection of the learner where possible.

A Nurturing Learning Environment

In order to make progress with learning it is essential learners with FASD feel safe and secure in the school and the classroom environment. A strengths-based, calm and nurturing approach is recommended, with particular focus on recognition that 'all behaviour is communication.' Learners with FASD can be over impulsive and struggle with self-regulation. Structure, routine and consistency are important, but also flexibility to adapt approaches according to changing needs. Education Scotland nurture resources is useful reference/tool kit and can be found here: [Nurture Resources](#)



'Maslow before Bloom'



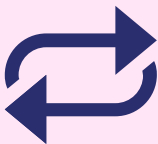
As the title suggests, it is essential that the learner's basic wellbeing needs are met before expecting higher order thinking skills and learning to take place. The basic physical and emotional wellbeing needs in Maslow's hierarchy need to be secure before skills within Bloom's taxonomy can be expected. The learner must feel safe and be relaxed in order to learn effectively. There are many factors that may make it more challenging for an individual with FASD to feel safe. These include the likelihood of disrupted sleep, limited diet and/or sensory processing issues which must be taken into account (and could vary from day to day) when supporting the learner.

Concrete and Visual Supports

Individuals with FASD may have differences in auditory processing and receptive language challenges, therefore experience delays in processing and responding to instructions. This has been likened to being '10-second children in a 1-second world'. Therefore, allowing additional time for processing is essential. Many learners with FASD will respond best to concrete, visual prompts or supports preferably in real-life contexts. For example, a visual timetable, visual supports for emotional regulation, or Now and Next boards. Teaching skills in the environment they will be used is important to help with the ability to generalise and transfer new skills to different contexts.



Supporting Memory Differences



Many individuals with FASD have differences in memory. They are concrete learners who remember better when they use their senses - touch, sight, taste and hearing. Repetition and over-learning can be useful. However, just repetition alone is not enough. It is also advisable to slow down verbal instructions, take a step back, use visual supports and consider different strategies to engage the learner where they are at. It is also essential that adults remain patient, and remember that abilities can vary from day to day and over time, so a skill taught previously might not always be retained. If the right approach is found the learner with FASD can learn, despite their memory challenges. [What Educators Need](#) to know is a useful resource to inform memory strategies.

Supporting Sensory Differences

Under or over-responsiveness to input in any of the sensory systems can have a huge impact within the school environment, and again could vary from day to day. If the learner does not already have an individual sensory profile parents/carers could help to complete one, or advise about activities or resources that can help to meet their child's sensory needs such as fidget toys, chew buddies or ear defenders. If there are particular activities or parts of the school day that are difficult for a learner, consider whether this could be linked to sensory processing differences and how the environment could be adapted accordingly. Activities involving heavy work and big muscle groups can be particularly useful in regulating the whole system, so regular movement breaks, both planned and spontaneous, are an excellent strategy to promote regulation.



Sensory processing & overload (hyper or hypo)



Even when things appear to be going very well, it is likely that the learner with FASD could benefit from increased supervision to check understanding, for reflection and support, particularly during social situations. This is a good opportunity to provide regular positive feedback. When scaffolding is taken away problems can start to build. It is useful to remember the phrase *ability does not cancel out the disability*. With the right support individuals with FASD can be successful.

Supervision

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