

# FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS (FASDs)

## What are FASDs?

- A spectrum of disorders caused by a mother's intake of alcohol at any time during pregnancy
- Alcohol intake damages the development of structures in the baby's body such as the brain and other internal organs
- This damage is lifelong and irreversible

## How are children diagnosed?

- Diagnosis requires a team of doctors, speech-language pathologists (SLPs), and behavior specialists
- The team considers the following factors:
  - Lower than average height and weight
  - Abnormal facial features
  - Results of scans (e.g., CT, MRI) of the brain and nervous system
  - Child's degree of exposure to alcohol during pregnancy

## Signs and Symptoms

- Small head size and low body-weight
- Abnormal facial features
  - Thin upper lip
  - Short nose
  - Irregularly-shaped eyes
- Poor hand-eye coordination
- Limited attention span and hyperactivity
- Difficulty learning new concepts
- General delay in development and use of language
  - Small vocabulary
  - Difficulty with socializing and/or telling stories
- Intellectual disability
- Limited memory skills



Children exhibiting facial features typical of FASDs



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## What can be done to help?

- Mothers should stop drinking as soon as they attempt to become pregnant or know that they are pregnant
- Contact your physician if your child exhibits any signs or symptoms of FASD
- If a child is diagnosed with an FASD:
  - Special education services can address their intellectual disabilities and improve reading skills
  - Speech therapy can support their speech and language skills
  - Behavioral and psychological therapy can improve attention, memory, and social skills
- Parents and professionals must ensure that the child has a safe and emotionally supportive environment in order to encourage proper social and emotional development
- Early intervention will maximize the chances of services being effective
- Proper medication can address other medical needs and complications

## Information for SLPs

- SLPs should encourage the integration of skills from special education and other services in speech and language intervention.
  - Activities that allow children to create and tell their own stories
  - Active reading-asking questions and encouraging input from the child
  - Activities in small groups which incorporate higher-order thinking and language
- Visual aids and concrete language may aid in comprehension



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