Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) effects 1 in 100 babies. [Source] Every year, an estimated 40,000 infants show signs of FAS effects. Alcohol is more harmful to a developing fetus than other drugs, such as heroin, marijuana or even cocaine.

With children being removed from homes due to a variety of reasons including substance abuse, there is a chance that a child in foster care may show signs of FAS. Being aware of the signs and understanding how FAS effects a child will allow you to be a better advocate and resource for your child.

FAS Signs & Symptoms

The following are some of the more common signs a child was effected by alcohol while in-utero:

Infants - low birth weight, small head circumference, irritability, poor sleeping cycles, sensitivity to light

Toddlers - memory issues, behavioral problems, no fear, no sense of personal boundaries

Elementary/young adult - lack of fine motor skills, lack of social skills (difficulty making and keeping friends), short attention span, lack of coordination, learning

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Additional Information & Resources

Adopt Med - Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Issues

Adopt Med - Beyond the Diagnosis: Effective Interventions for Children and Adolescents with FASD webinar

Free webinar on effective interventions for children diagnosed with FAS; may take a couple of minutes to load

Adopt Med - Understanding Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder webinar

Free webinar on understanding FAS; may take a couple of minutes to load

disabilities

Teenagers - Lack of impulse control, poor social skills, difficulty understanding concepts

For more information on the signs and symptoms of a child with FAS, please visit the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS) page Living With FASD

Helping Your Child

The following are some suggestions for how to help your child if they are diagnosed with FAS:

Infants - Play soft music when they go to bed and dim the lights. Wrapping your baby snugly in a blanket and rocking them gently also helps. Speak with a nutritionist if they are having trouble gaining or maintaining an appropriate weight. If you notice your child is having trouble walking or crawling, consult an occupational therapist.

Toddlers - If your child is experiencing difficulty with their fine motor skills, work with an occupational therapist. Seek out help from a speech therapist if there are language delays. If your child is easily distracted, make sure to establish a consistent routine. Eliminate distractions by simplifying certain rooms.

Elementary Age/Young Adult - At this age, children diagnosed with FAS may have trouble making and keeping friends. Try setting up play-dates with a child who is a year or two younger. To help your child establish boundary issues, create and maintain consistency and structure. Use gentle reminders and re-direction. If your child is having trouble understanding cause-and-effect, having clear consequences for behaviors and using repetition and consistency when enforcing these consequences is key.

Alberta Education - Teaching Children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Resource List

Kids Health - Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Ministry for Children and Families - Parenting Children Affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: A Guide to Daily Living

NOFAS
General information and resources on FAS

NOFAS - State-by-State Resource Directory

Teenagers - For children who are suffering from anxiety and depression, seek professional help from a therapist. In certain situations or if therapy is not helping, medications may be prescribed. In dealing with anti-social behaviors, seek out family counseling and provide consistency in your home. Make sure there are immediate consequences to any broken rules. Encourage your child to participate in clubs, sports and other activities to help them make friends who share similar interests.

For more suggestions on how to help your child who is diagnosed with FAS, please visit the NOFAS page Living with FASD.