

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

If you don't think you see people with FASD, think again.

FASD is often missed or misdiagnosed. It affects outcomes across the lifespan and across service systems.



FASD is a lifelong, brain-based disability affecting core brain functions.



MENTAL HEALTH • BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

- Treatment may fail when it depends on memory, insight, self-monitoring and carry over into daily life.
- May be interpreted as manipulation or treatment resistance, or misdiagnosed as mood or personality disorders.



CHILD WELFARE • FOSTER CARE • ADOPTION

- Brain-based needs may be treated as behavior problems, driving placement instability and caregiver burnout.
- FASD-related needs may be attributed solely to trauma or attachment problems, or blamed on defiance or poor parenting.



SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK • SPECIAL EDUCATION

- Students may be disciplined for skills they cannot consistently access, while academic and functional gaps grow.
- May be labeled ADHD, ODD or anxiety, or interpreted as truancy or "not trying."



HOMELESSNESS • HOUSING SERVICES

- Executive-function challenges can lead to missed appointments, lost paperwork, rule violations and housing loss.
- May be labeled irresponsibility, lack of motivation or unwillingness to follow rules.



JUSTICE • PROBATION • FORENSIC SERVICES

- Memory problems, impulsivity and difficulty learning from consequences can lead to repeated violations.
- May be interpreted as lying, deliberate rule-breaking or lack of remorse.



SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES

- Treatment plans may fail when they require planning, remembering strategies and independently managing triggers.
- Repeated relapse may be seen as lack of motivation rather than need for adapted supports.



HEALTHCARE • HOSPITAL SOCIAL WORK

- A person may seem to understand but still be unable to manage medications, appointments, referrals or discharge plans.
- Missed care may be mistaken for poor compliance or lack of concern about health.



FAMILY • CAREGIVER SUPPORT

- Families often function as the person's external planner, organizer and regulator.
- Their advocacy may be mistaken for overparenting, enabling or poor boundaries.



DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY • ADULT TRANSITION SERVICES

- People may appear too capable for support while still struggling with everyday functioning and independence.
- Support needs may be mistaken for immaturity, laziness or unwillingness to "grow up."

YOU ARE SURROUNDED

People with FASD are in every system.

THE COMMON THREAD



What looks like: Noncompliance • Defiance • Manipulation • Laziness • Treatment resistance • Poor parenting • Lack of motivation

May actually involve: Memory • Executive functioning • Processing speed • Impulse control • Adaptive functioning • Emotional regulation • Sensory • Difficulty generalizing learning • Poor understanding of abstract concepts

RECOGNIZING FASD-RELATED BRAIN DIFFERENCES CAN REDUCE FRUSTRATION AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES.