

FASD: UNDERSTANDING SUPPORT NEEDS

Getting proper assessment and identifying brain functioning is key.



A missed appointment, incomplete explanation, or unfilled prescription may look like carelessness or a lack of concern.

But the breakdown may have occurred anywhere along the way.



ASSESSMENTS HELP US UNDERSTAND:



WHY a task is difficult



WHAT brain functions create barriers



HOW those functions interact



WHERE the process breaks down



WHAT support will make the task accessible



Appropriate support begins with understanding where the process breaks down—not judging the outcome.



FASD: The hidden work of managing medical care

Example: From recognizing a health concern to following treatment

Managing medical care can look simple from the outside: notice a problem, make an appointment, explain what is happening, understand the provider, and follow the treatment plan. In reality, each step depends on many brain functions working together, including body awareness, judgment, initiation, memory, language, processing speed, sequencing, time awareness, planning, cognitive flexibility, and generalization.

Difficulty in one area can affect everything that follows. A person may not recognize that a symptom is important. They may know they need to call but not initiate the call. They may make the appointment and forget it, arrive without the information they meant to bring, struggle to explain what has been happening, or understand instructions in the office but be unable to remember or apply them later.

This is why simply adding reminders may not solve the problem - even if IQ or verbal ability is high

An alarm can signal that something needs to happen, but it does not necessarily tell the person what to do next, why it matters, how to begin, what information is needed, or how to adjust when something changes. Calendars, apps, medication boxes, checklists, patient portals, and repeated reminders can all be useful, but each one also requires the person to remember, interpret, organize, and act on information.

When too many independent systems are added, the supports themselves can become another layer of executive-function work. The person may become overwhelmed, miss important information, or stop responding to reminders altogether.

For some people with FASD, effective support often requires another person to help hold the process together. That may mean helping schedule the appointment, anticipating transportation problems, reviewing symptoms beforehand, attending the visit when appropriate, simplifying instructions, setting up medication, checking that the next step happened, and helping restart the process when something goes off track. Human support also allows someone to recognize when capacity has changed. Fatigue, illness, stress, unfamiliar situations, sensory overload, or changes in routine can make a task that was manageable yesterday much harder today.

Without this understanding, missed appointments, unfilled prescriptions, or incomplete treatment may be interpreted as carelessness or lack of concern. But the breakdown may have occurred much earlier in the process. Effective support begins with understanding where the process breaks down and matching support to that need. Assessment can help identify which brain functions are creating difficulty. But assessment alone is not enough. The people and systems around the person must use that information to anticipate barriers, reduce unnecessary demands, and provide the level of support needed for successful healthcare.

For some people with FASD, the most effective system is a reliable person who helps anticipate, organize, connect, and follow through.