

# Supporting Little Sisters with FASD

## What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is the umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications. The term FASD is not intended for use as a clinical diagnosis.

The FASD disability is a spectrum of disorders and can include Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Partial Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (pFAS) also sometimes referred to as Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE), Alcohol Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND), and Alcohol Related Birth Defects (ARBD).

## Common Strengths of Those with FASD:

- *Strong visual memory*
- *Energetic and gregarious*
- *Learn well by doing, exploring, touching and seeing*
- *Trusting and committed*
- *Are often creative, artistic, and/or musical*
- *Affectionate and good with animals*
- *Spontaneous and curious*
- *Are concrete thinkers*

## Common Deficits Associated with FASD:

Struggle with:

- *Understanding abstract concepts (ie: time, values, ownership, money)*
- *Cause & effect reasoning (ie: I did this so this is the result)*
- *Generalization of learning (ie: transferring learning in one social situation to another)*
- *Poor short term memory*
- *Language & information processing (ie: sarcasm or expressions)*
- *Lack of internal time clock (ie: a sense of “how long”)*

## A Helpful Resource:

- Asante Centre: Check out their website at [www.asantecentre.org](http://www.asantecentre.org). They are governed by the FASD Society for BC. The website offers research, a list of upcoming seminars, a glossary of terms as well as links to other helpful resources.

*"I had to learn to say 'pick up your coat and hang it in the cupboard,' rather than simply say 'pick up your coat.' Otherwise, my daughter would pick up the coat and put it down again."*

-Mother of a 15yr old

## Ten Tips to Support Your Little Sister:

*Please remember that the following suggestions and tips may work very well for some children but may prove ineffective for others. Because alcohol damage varies from child to child, and because all children, including those affected by FASD, have distinct personalities, preferences and temperaments, it is always best to discuss what your Little Sister's parent/ guardian has found to work well. Over time, you will also get to know your Little Sister better and will discover from her what does and does not work.*

*It is also important to keep in mind that we all have good and bad days, so what may work well one day, may not work on another. Just do the best that you can and ask for support when you need it. Your Little Sister knows you aren't perfect!*

1. **Consistency**- keeping a regular schedule as much as possible will help your Little to know what to expect and give her a sense of control over her environment.
2. **Routines**- Develop small routines or traditions with your Little such as finishing each outing with a hot chocolate then going home. "Sameness" to you can feel like "safeness" to your Little and will decrease their anxiety.
3. **Plan Transitions**- If you are going to change activities, give her warning and a bit of time to transition in between.
4. **Concrete**- Try to avoid words with double meanings, idioms etc. For example, you might say "That's driving me up the wall!" and your Little may actually look up at the wall.
5. **Repetition**- When you are trying a new skill together, you may have to re-learn it several times before it sticks due to challenges with short term memory.
6. **Simplicity**- giving directions or explanations are best done with short and simple sentences.
7. **Offer Your Little Choices**- Rather than asking "what do you want to do today?", try giving two or three options so that they don't become overwhelmed.
8. **Anticipate Challenges**- if your Little gets easily over stimulated in crowds or by loud noises, plan your activities with this in mind or discuss this in advance so that she knows that she can talk to you if she is beginning to feel overwhelmed.
9. **Praise**- those with FASD often struggle with not being able to understand or "get things right". It can make a big difference to her self esteem to have someone that offers both frequent and specific praise for things that she does well.
10. **Seek Support**- if there is something that doesn't make sense, talk to your Little's parent or guardian or your Big Sister's counsellor. If you are feeling frustrated and could use a listening ear, call your Big Sister's counsellor. That's what we're here for!

### **"Simplicity is freedom from over-stimulation to the child with FAS"**

**-Rathbun, Antonia, FAS/Drug Effects Clinical Program, Portland Oregon.**

1. Much of the information used in this document (including quotes) was adapted from: George, Anne (1993) *Guide for Parents, Teachers and Others Caring for Children with FAS/FAE or NAS*. Vancouver, BC.