

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

What is FASD?

If a mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy, they may risk causing harm to their baby. Sometimes this can result in mental and physical problems in the baby, called foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD).

How does FASD Occur?

- FASD can happen when alcohol in the mother's blood passes to their baby through the placenta.
- The baby cannot process alcohol well, which means it can stay in their body for a long time.
- Alcohol can damage their brain and stop them from developing normally.
- Babies who survive may be left with lifelong problems.

What are the Characteristics of FASD?

FASD can cause problems with:

- Movement, balance, vision, and hearing.
- Learning, such as problems with thinking, concentration, and memory.
- Managing emotions and developing social skills.
- Hyperactivity and impulse control.
- Communication, such as problems with speech.
- The joints, muscles, bones, and organs, such as the kidneys and heart.

What should you do if you think a child may have FASD?

- Please only have a conversation with parents if you have a good relationship with them, as this is an extremely sensitive topic which may lead to them feeling accused or blamed for their child's additional needs.
- Encourage parents/carers to speak to a GP or health visitor.
- A doctor or health visitor will need to know if the child was exposed to alcohol during pregnancy to help make a diagnosis of FASD.
- The child may be referred to a specialist team for an assessment if there is a possibility that they have the condition.
- This usually involves physical examinations and blood tests to rule out genetic conditions that have similar characteristics to FASD.

Is there treatment available for FASD?

- The damage to a child's brain and body cannot be reversed, but an early diagnosis and support can make a big difference.
- Once the condition has been diagnosed, a team of healthcare professionals can assess the child's needs and offer appropriate educational and behavioural strategies.

How can FASD be prevented?

- The only way to completely avoid FASD, is for a mother to not consume alcohol during pregnancy.