Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) and autism spectrum disorders (ASD) have a number of overlapping characteristics. They are both neurodevelopmental disabilities that can affect brain function, development, behavior, and social interaction. Not only do children with FASD often display a number of autistic-like characteristics, but children with high levels of prenatal alcohol exposure are at an increased risk for autism. One study found that as many as 72% of children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome also met criteria for autism. However, there are a number of differences between the two spectrum disorders. Below we have outlined some of the common characteristics associated with both FASD and ASD. Please note that both FASD and ASD are spectrum disorders, meaning that each case is unique and people on either spectrum may display some, all, or none of these characteristics.

### Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

- Affects about 1 in 20 children
- One known cause: prenatal alcohol exposure
- Lifelong effects
- Outcomes can be improved by early intervention
- Sensitivity to light, touch, taste, smells, or sound
- Associated with microcephaly
- Often comfortable initiating conversations and joining social activities
- Difficulty with change in routines or transitioning from one task to another
- Deficits with speech and language skills
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity
- Short attention span
- May have difficulty in school
- Listed as a medical condition in the ICD-10 (International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems)
- Not included in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)

### Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

- Affects about 1 in 59 children
- Has no single known cause
- Lifelong effects
- Outcomes can be improved by early intervention
- Sensitivity to light, touch, taste, smells, or sound
- Associated with macrocephaly
- Often avoid social situations
- Difficulty with change in routines or transitioning from one task to another
- Increased risk of epilepsy and seizures
- Deficits with speech and language skills
- Repeat words or phrases over and over (known as echolalia)
- Uses repetitive motions (such as flapping hands, rocking body, or spinning in circles)
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsivity
- Short attention span
- May have difficulty in school
- Listed as a medical condition in the ICD-10 (International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems)
- Included in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)

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Sources: