

How to Talk with Your Child About Their FASD

Receiving a Diagnosis

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) refer to a range of effects caused by prenatal alcohol exposure.¹ There are multiple diagnoses under the fetal alcohol spectrum, including:^{2,3}

- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)
- Partial FAS (pFAS)
- Alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND)
- Alcohol-related birth defects (ARBD)
- Neurobehavioral disorder associated with prenatal alcohol exposure (ND-PAE)

If your child has received one of these diagnoses, you may be feeling a variety of feelings, such as relief, anger or confusion. Know that you are not alone and that there are resources and supports available for both you and your child.

Difficult Feelings

Talking about your child's FASD diagnosis can be hard for both you and your child. These conversations can be especially difficult if you are the child's birth mom. Many birth moms worry about being judged by their children and others, in addition to feeling guilt and self-judgment. However, most families find that having open and honest conversations about FASD allow for more compassion for both themselves and their children.⁴

There are also support groups available where you can talk with other birth moms. Many parents find empowerment and healing in sharing their story with others.⁵

Tips for Talking with Your Child

In addition to processing your own feelings, it can be hard to figure out how to explain the diagnosis to your child. While there is no one right way to talk with your child about their FASD, here are some tips based on what has worked for other families:⁶

- Talk about FASD as early as possible and continue the conversation as they get older, using words they can understand.
- Explain that FASD affects the brain and can cause problems with things like memory, making decisions, controlling emotions, learning, and making and/or keeping friends.
- Share that this diagnosis will help parents, doctors, and teachers to better support them in the areas where they struggle.

- Encourage your child to focus on their strengths, emphasizing the things they can do well. Celebrate and support what your child enjoys and excels at;⁷ this will help build competency and self-esteem.⁸
- Explain that there are many reasons why a pregnancy may be exposed to alcohol, and that no one drinks to intentionally hurt their child. Having an alcohol-exposed pregnancy does not mean that they love their child any less.
- Understand that your child may have trouble accepting their diagnosis, feeling confused, embarrassed, or angry at first. This is normal and okay. Be patient and validating as they work through their feelings.
- Let them know they are not alone: as many as 1 in 20 children have an FASD.⁹ There are groups where they can meet other young people with FASD.
- Remind them that you love them and are there to support them.

Sources:

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