



# Michigan Coalition for Fetal Alcohol Resources, Education and Support (MCFARES)

Established in 2003



## Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Basics

### **FASD is:**

- a complex, permanent neurodevelopmental disorder.
- caused by exposure to alcohol, a teratogen, during embryonic and fetal development.
- present in up to 5% of the general population (1 in 20) and up to 70% of those in foster care.
- diagnosed at a rate of 1 in 1000; thus, only 2 to 3% with the disorder get a proper diagnosis.

### **Exposure to alcohol in utero leads to:**

- permanent brain damage
- birth defects
- 400+ possible co-occurring conditions

### **FASD can look a lot like other childhood disorders like:**

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)
- Learning Disability (LD)
- Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)
- Trauma (complex PTSD)
- Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)

### **Diagnosis of FASD can be difficult.**

- Exceptionally high misdiagnosis rate due to overlap of characteristics with other disorders.
- Exposure is common at the beginning of pregnancy, before most women know they are pregnant.
  - Almost 50% of women don't know they are pregnant until week 5.
  - 23% don't know they are pregnant until week 7 or later.
  - Damage begins starting at week 3.
- Commonly viewed as a disorder of the poor, even though the most likely to drink during pregnancy are college-educated women.
- Most (80-90%) with the disorder have no facial or other sentinel features.
- Most (84%) have a normal IQ, despite having significant developmental challenges.



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### **Lack of early awareness, diagnosis, and proper treatments lead to the potential for poorer long-term outcomes.**

One study of secondary effects of FASD (Streissguth, 1996) found:

- 94% had a mental health condition.
- 70% had a disrupted school experience (suspensions, expulsions).
- 60% were in trouble with the law, ages 12 and up.
- 80% couldn't keep a job.
- 80% could not live independently.

### **There are ways to address FASD and improve outcomes:**

- FASD is technically 100% preventable. Awareness is key.
- Training and supports are needed for families caring for an individual with FASD
- Training is needed for teachers, community leaders, politicians, criminal justice workers, foster care workers, etc. Very few community workers are aware of FASD.
- Supports and interventions are needed for those with the disorder. There is little available systemically at this time.

### **Resources available for those interested in learning more about FASD:**

Michigan Coalition for Fetal Alcohol Research, Education, and Support (MCFARES) website:

[www.mcfares.org](http://www.mcfares.org)

National Organization for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS) website: [www.nofas.org](http://www.nofas.org)

Please email Emily Rusnak, Vice President of MCFARES, at [rusnakes@gmail.com](mailto:rusnakes@gmail.com) if you would like citations or resources for the above information.

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