Children's Aid Society of Alabama

FASD Resource Sheet

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) are described as a range of lifelong effects: physical, cognitive and behavioral, that present in those who with prenatal alcohol exposure.



FASD may affect roughly **1 in 20** people in the U.S., a rate higher than autism. Yet, most cases go unrecognized.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2026

While there is no *cure* for FASDs, early intervention services can improve a child's development. For youth in foster care and adoptees that have FASD, there is an added layer of trauma that must be recognized.
Both **FASD and trauma** affect memory, impulse control and emotional regulation. Behaviors like ***lying, stealing, or explosive reactions*** are often **brain-based**, not willful defiance. Traditional **discipline** built around ***cause-and-effect reasoning*** frequently backfires for these youth, ***increasing shame and dysregulation instead of changing behavior.*** Nurturing **belonging** for youth with FASD begins with understanding the condition and how to respond supportively.

What can parents/caregivers do?

- **Address Your Perspective** - Reframe your child's behavior as communication. *Raging, lying or stealing* are often sign of an overwhelmed nervous system or a brain struggling with memory or impulse control. APAC offers a ***free training for parents on this subject***.
- **Connection is the Goal** – Before thinking of "correction" lead with co-regulation techniques: adjusting your tone of voice, how they respond to physical space, validating feelings before addressing behaviors. APAC families and professionals alike requested ***in-depth training*** on this, and it is now available on demand.
- **Help Your Child Visualize Important Information** – Sometimes multiple reinforcements are needed. Create visual schedules, share written reminders, and whenever possible, create consistent routines to support your child's memory and develop skills related to planning.
- **Rethink Cause & Effect Based Consequences** – This type of reasoning doesn't often connect with FASD-affected minds. Lectures can be ineffective, get to know what your child responds to.
- **Repetition is Appreciated** – The need to repeat yourself isn't a sign that things aren't working. Again, the memory center is affected, repetition is a supportive accommodation.
- **Regulate, Regulate, Regulate** – Self-regulation is integral to all of this. Tap into what calms your own nervous system before trying to walk your child through a hard moment.

What can professinals do?

- **Screen for Prenatal Alcohol Exposure in Your Clients -** Integrate this step into your trauma-informed intake procedures. Because FASD is often missed or misdiagnosed as ADHD or oppositional defiant disorder, or its symptoms may be folded into general trauma-related behaviors, identifying FASD can change how a child is supported for the better. FASD United shares a ***free screening tool*** you can use in your practice.
- **Adapt Interventions for Your Clients -** Use clear, "literal" language when communicating. At times, you may find that shorter sessions are more beneficial for certain clients. Include scheduled sensory or movement breaks within the session as needed.
- **Partner With Parents/Caregivers as Co-regulators -** Help parents and caregivers understand ***how*** to co-regulate rather than positioning themselves as *behavior enforcers.* This approach can empower them with the skills to reinforce the brain-based framework you are using as a professional.
- **Gain FASD-Specific Continuing Education -** Many standard trauma-informed approaches do not fully address the neurological aspects of FASD. Becoming trauma-responsive means gaining the skills needed to help close that gap. There are many sources of FASD education, and we've shared ***APAC's on-demand trainings*** on FASD below. Many of these trainings are led by ***Barb Clark***, who shares her first-person perspective as an adult living with FASD and as a mom of children with FASD who have also experienced trauma. She is a noted author nationally recognized expert on this important topic.







