

Resource Article

Growing Up in an Alcoholic Home-

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Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) includes a wide range of physical, mental, and emotional disorders. It is caused when a pregnant mother drinks alcohol. Just 1 alcoholic drink can damage an unborn baby. It is not your responsibility to diagnose FAS, and it is not a curable condition. A child or teen affected by FAS will not outgrow it. However, if you are aware of the symptoms, you can take some steps to help these children and teens and, in the process, decrease your frustration.

Symptoms

A child or teen with FAS has distinctive facial features. She may have small eyes; a thin upper lip; a short, upturned nose; and smooth skin between the nose and upper lip. Some children and teens also have finger and joint deformities, heart problems, and mental retardation.

In addition to physical signs, children and teens with FAS may also show behavioral signs. These include:

- Short attention span
- Extreme nervousness and anxiety
- Hyperactivity
- Poor impulse control
- Poor social skills
- Poor memory
- Difficulty remembering the consequences of unwise choices
- Lack of common sense
- Frustration with transitions
- Inability to understand abstract things

In addition, the children and teens with FAS may have trouble making decisions, being aware of time, and controlling impulsiveness. They may not be able to distinguish between public and private behaviors. You may notice that you often ask the child or teen if she thought about her behavior before doing it. She may not seem to remember what you have taught her about appropriate behavior.

Techniques for Teachers and Parents

While the behaviors of a child or teen with FAS can be difficult to manage, there are things you can do to help. Consider using these techniques:

- Give the child or teen individual attention.
- Realize that the child or teen may not perform at the expected level.
- Place the child or teen near the front of the room to help her focus well.
- Have the child or teen perform 1 task at a time, and ask him to repeat your instructions.
- Encourage success, and reward good behavior immediately.

- Deliver consequences immediately, and remind the child or teen about the behavior that caused the consequences.
- Help the child or teen to solve problems by reviewing what caused the problem. Suggest ways she can prevent the problem from occurring again.
- Be specific. Say exactly what you mean. Remember that a child or teen with FAS has difficulty with abstract and general information. He may not be able to figure out what to do next. Use step-by-step directions, such as “First you do this. Then you do this.”

A child or teen with FAS may be one of your greatest challenges. Try to remember that she is not being difficult on purpose. Her brain is damaged. She will need a lot of help learning how to live to her best ability. Your care, understanding, and guidance can make a great difference in her life.