FASD INFORMATION SERIES

EDUCATION & FASD

A Primer

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If you work in education, you work with **students and families** impacted by **FASD**. Students may face **obstacles** in **accessing** an FASD assessment and diagnosis, interventions and supports. **Services and supports** can be **shaped by factors** such as familial employment, rurality, housing stability, access to health care, and discrimination.

School can be challenging. Today's **schools** do **not** respond to many **students' needs** and interests. School can present a **new set of challenges** for children, young people, and families impacted by FASD. These may include learning and social challenges. **FASD** is **more prevalent** than other common developmental disabilities combined, but it is often **overlooked** in our schools and educational systems.

Challenges with the Educational System

Educational **experiences vary** and depend on the school or learning centre, classrooms, teachers, support workers, other staff, and policies. Teachers, educational professionals, and schools that are **FASD-aware and inclusive** offer tailored activities and tasks. Many of the **challenges** encountered by students and families in the school system are **due to structural conditions** that are beyond teachers and school administrators' control. Families can complete every FASD training and obtain every resource on FASD, however, **without** the same level of **preparation and collaborative support** from teachers, schools, and other professionals and sectors (e.g., health, community), children and young people impacted by FASD may continue to **experience struggles** in educational settings.

Large and increasing **classroom sizes** and **shrinking human resources** (e.g., insufficient support teachers) can leave students with neurodiversities behind. System-wide **obstacles** can occur because of government reductions in education investments.

Accessing an Early FASD Diagnosis

Teachers can be part of **FASD assessment**, by identifying or **referring students** for FASD **screening** and **providing information** to the diagnostic team. An **early diagnosis** can lead to the **best access** to supports as children enter school, and a diagnosis at any age is beneficial. During the diagnostic process, individualized collaborative strategies and supports are developed.

The Spectrum of FASD

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (**FASD**) is a **spectrum diagnosis**. FASD has **distinct impacts**, so everyone experiences it differently. FASD should be recognized and supported as a multidimensional condition.

Individuals with FASD have unique sets of **strengths and needs**. Collaborative multi-disciplinary, strengths-based, and trauma-informed approaches can enhance meaningful experiences and minimize many challenges.

Understanding FASD as a spectrum diagnosis can help us overcome and reduce stigma and focus on strengths.

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Tackling Challenges Through Strength-Based Approaches

When children enter school, **stigmatization** can be more pronounced, and **students with FASD** may be more likely to **face challenges** in and out of the classroom setting. Parents and caregivers of children with FASD may face stigmatization from the school, and other families.

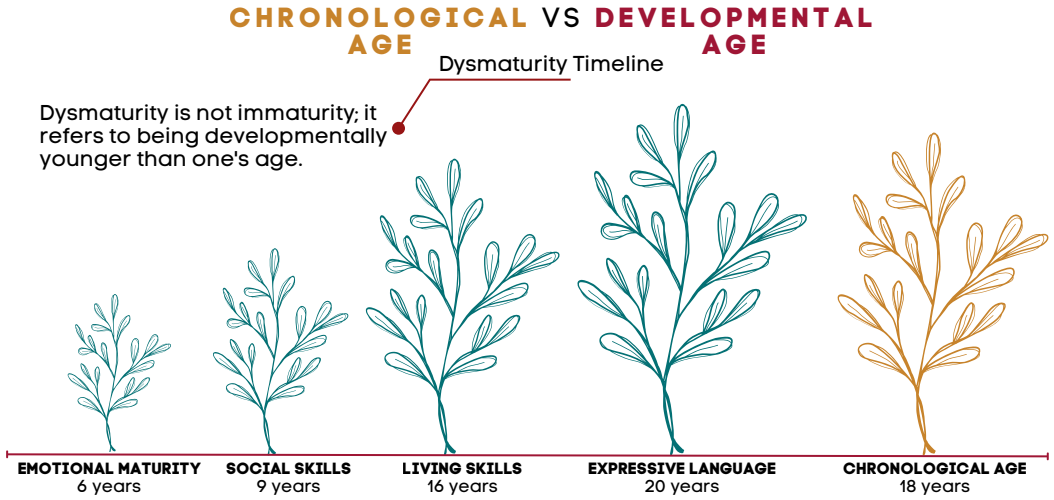
Educational institutions, such as schools, post-secondary institutions, workplaces, and extracurricular programs, can **prioritize strength-based approaches**, which focus on **identifying and building** individuals' **existing talents, skills, and capacities** to foster confidence, growth, and positive development.

FASD-Informed Education

An FASD-informed approach recognizes that **FASD is a spectrum** with **varied strengths and needs**, that may be associated with past or current experiences of abuse, violence, victimization, or trauma. To implement this into the classroom, teachers can **create a safer environment** with **person-centered** and **strengths-based** accommodations, be **non-judgemental** and **non-stigmatizing**, use person-first **clear language**, use **one instruction** or step at a time, **check for understanding**, provide **visual reminders**, and use **modeling**, coaching and hands-on learning techniques.

Chronological vs. Developmental Age

As humans age, we are granted increased independence as well as increased responsibilities. These expectations become much more demanding and complex as young people enter early adulthood. For individuals impacted by neurodiversities such as FASD, a person's **chronological age** and current level of **functioning** may **not match** their developmental or functional age. Aside from being knowledgeable of FASD, schools and educators can offer students **accommodations** and strategies **based** on their **functional needs**. These include modified approaches to teaching and assessing progress.



Getting Informed

Complete FASD Training

Access Resources for FASD in the Classroom

Learn About Diagnostic Services in Your Area

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