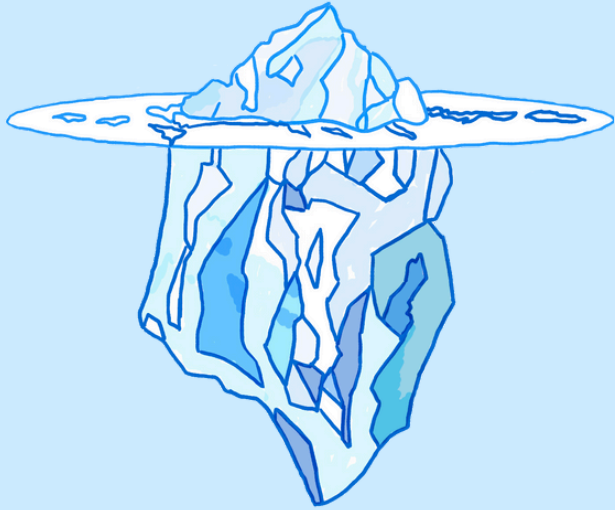


Aggressive behaviour in FASD is like an iceberg.



The behaviours we see are only the tip of the iceberg. What contributes to aggression in FASD, including brain-based differences, requires us to look past the surface.

The answer might be different than what we assume.

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Quotes from Caregivers

"Dealing with other people is more challenging than dealing with my kid."

"I wish others understood there is more going on underneath the surface."

"It is much deeper than aggression."

FASD AND AGGRESSION

Balancing the Story



women & children's health research institute

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA



Funded by the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation and Women and Children's Health Research Institute



SARAH E. BEEBY

CARING FOR OUR CAREGIVERS

- Stable home environments are essential to foster positive outcomes in children with FASD (1), and the well-being of caregivers is a key factor in ensuring this success (2).
- Caregivers play a vital role in supporting children's development by creating spaces that nurture social, emotional, and behavioural growth (3).
- However, aggressive behaviour can disrupt these supportive environments, adding stress and challenges for caregivers and negatively impacting family functioning and well-being (4, 5).

What can we do?

1. Create safety.

Aggression can endanger both the individual and others. Our first priority is to support caregivers in responding in ways that establish a safe environment for everyone involved.

2. Hear and believe them.

Caregivers of individuals with FASD want others to understand the brain-based differences that can lead to aggressive behaviours. This isn't about excusing the behaviour; it's about recognizing the need for support.

Listening without assumptions allows us to provide meaningful help.

3. Support them.

Caregivers provide 24/7 support for their kiddos but often face burnout, stigma, and blame when responding to aggressive behaviours and advocating for their child's needs (4, 5). Let's stop blaming caregivers and work with them to ensure they have the necessary resources.

ASK YOURSELF THREE QUESTIONS

1 How Can I Keep Everyone Safe?

Aggression is serious and can be dangerous to the individual behaving aggressively and those around them. Prioritize safety first.

2 How are my assumptions influencing my responses?

Aggression doesn't mean a child is "bad" or a family is "failing." Stigma surrounding FASD, often places blame on children and families, limiting compassion. Negative assumptions overlook the potential for success with proper support, shifting responsibility away from communities and ignoring structural inequalities faced by individuals with FASD (6, 7).

Reflect: is stigma around aggression and FASD influencing what you assume?

3 What is their brain telling me?

Brain-based differences in FASD can lead to cognitive and emotional challenges, increasing susceptibility to aggressive behaviours (8)—but this doesn't mean aggression is inevitable. By considering what their brains are communicating, we can adapt environments to support healthier expressions of these challenges.

Stay curious about this behaviour

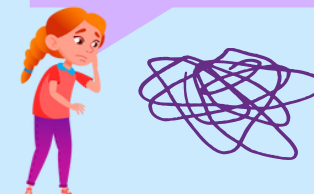
BRAIN-BASED DIFFERENCES



1 Prenatal alcohol exposure alters brain development, leading to unique brain differences in individuals with FASD (9).

Nobody understands what I am trying to say and I get so frustrated.

Sometimes I get so upset, I don't even know what happened afterwards. I struggle to express myself.



2

Individuals with FASD may have a more sensitive stress response, experiencing heightened emotions and greater difficulty managing them (8).

3

Cognitive differences can generate frustration and feeling threatened more easily (8).

Balancing Challenges and Strengths

People with FASD strive for the same successes as others but may face additional obstacles. They possess unique strengths alongside their challenges (10). For instance, while they may experience social difficulties, such as judgment and isolation, they are often highly socially motivated, with a strong capacity for connection that is a significant strength (10, 11).

Challenges (12):

- Language
- Impulsivity
- Planning
- Peer relationships

Strengths (10, 13):

- Capacity to connect
- Perseverance
- Unique identities and desire for expression

