

UNDERSTANDING FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD) IN THE CLASSROOM

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS SHAPE OUTCOMES



WHAT IS FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is:

- A lifelong neurodevelopmental disability (NDD) caused by prenatal alcohol exposure (PAE)¹.
- A constellation of symptoms (cognitive, behavioural, and physical)¹.
- A leading developmental disability in Canada, more common than Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, and Tourette's – combined^{1,2}.

While FASD is common, each student has unique strengths and support needs.

EFFECTS ON LEARNING

FASD can impact things like:

- Executive functioning (planning, organization, impulse control)³.
- Memory (inconsistent recall of information)³.
- Processing speeds (needing more time to understand/respond)³.



Students can often know something one day, but not the next.

BEHAVIOURS AS COMMUNICATION

Challenging behaviours may reflect the student:

- Feeling overwhelmed⁴.
- Experiencing sensory overload³.
- Being confused or lacking information³.

Students are seldom intentionally misbehaving.

EVIDENCE-BASED CLASSROOM SUPPORTS

Effective strategies can include:

- Clear, simple step-by-step instructions³.
- Calm, predictable routines⁴.
- Reducing sensory overload where possible³.
- Extra processing time³.
- Collaborating with caregivers and other professionals⁴.



It's okay not to know everything – what matters is leading with curiosity, humility, and care.

WHY UNDERSTANDING FASD MATTERS

Understanding FASD helps:

- Educators tailor classroom supports to students' individual strengths and needs⁴.
- Provide early support that prevents adverse outcomes (e.g., mental health challenges, justice system involvement, not completing school)⁵.
- Reduce stigma and improve outcomes for families¹.

