



LET'S LEARN TOGETHER

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) are a range of diagnosable conditions caused by prenatal alcohol exposure.

FASDs are widely misunderstood and often unrecognized by many systems.



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While we are still gathering statistics in Hawai'i, FASD affects an estimated 1 in 20 Americans. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), prenatal alcohol exposure is a leading cause of birth defects in the United States.



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It is estimated that nearly 80% of infants in foster care have been prenatally exposed to substances. Youth diagnosed with an FASD are 9x more likely to be in foster care than those without FASD.

Folks in child welfare, foster care, and adoption need comprehensive FASD training and education to support this population best.

Kambeitz, C., Klug, M.G., Greenmyer, J. et al. Association of adverse childhood experiences and neurodevelopmental disorders in people with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) and non-FASD controls. BMC Pediatrics. 2019;19:498.



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Only around 10% of those diagnosed with FASD have the associated facial features. Assuming a person should look like their disability is stigmatizing.

In Hawai'i we can have Aloha and not assume we know what someone might be struggling with.



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Diagnoses under the FASD umbrella can include:

- Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)
- Partial fetal alcohol syndrome (pFAS)
- Neurobehavioral disorders associated with prenatal alcohol exposure (ND-PAE)
- Alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorders (ARND)
- Alcohol-related birth defects (ARBD)
- Static Encephalopathy/Alcohol Exposed (SE/AE)



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Both alcoholism and FASD remain highly stigmatized disorders. Stigma and shame causes a rise in the number of FASD births. Blaming never helps, it always hurts. The stigma of drinking during pregnancy prevents women from talking openly to their healthcare providers, increases relapse and higher levels of alcohol exposure. It also prevents women from asking for help and being honest with their doctors and thier children's pediatrician. Ultimately the stigma can prevent a correct diagnosis.



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Stigma around FASD affects individuals, families, and those who drank during pregnancy. It can lead to shame, isolation, missed diagnoses, and a lack of support. When people fear judgment, they're less likely to seek help or speak openly. Reducing stigma means opening the door to understanding, compassion, and the resources to help people thrive.