

Has your child or other loved one just been identified or diagnosed as having a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)?

If you think your child has one of the conditions under the fetal alcohol spectrum, you will be feeling a range of emotions. As a biological mother of two boys with FASD, I can say with utter conviction that for me, the time in my life that you are currently facing was the most difficult I have ever experienced. Even though my children and I were all relieved to eventually know that they had a disability and were not just being stubborn or naughty, it was also a devastating time for me personally. You may not feel the way I did. It will depend on your upbringing, your past experiences, your belief system, and your current family situation. Nevertheless I have been asked to write down the words I would have given anything to read when I first saw the words 'fetal alcohol spectrum disorder'.

Maybe you are an alcoholic and maybe you aren't, maybe you knew the consequences of drinking alcohol during pregnancy and maybe you didn't. For now it doesn't matter, what does matter is how you are going to manage if today is the day you discover the reason for your child's behaviours.



Today is all you need to be concerned about because this is a condition that you *must* take *one day at a time*. Just when you think you are at your wit's end, it gets better. This is a one day at a time condition because nothing will ever stay the same. The good times will last while the strategies, interventions and medication remain in place, then something happens, usually a little thing – definitely something that you or I could manage easily, and then it all falls apart.....but only for awhile. It's a condition of ups and downs, for your child, for you and for the rest of your family - but you probably already know having lived with these circumstances for as long as you have. But take heart at least if you are able to get a diagnosis, you will know the reasons for this behaviour and it will no doubt be a relief. You have a starting point now and you can put into place a management plan even if, at this stage, it is just you and your GP. The more you know about this condition, the more you will understand the behaviour that your child is experiencing and the better

you will understand what strategies and interventions need to be put into place.

But what about you? Are you going to be able to manage knowing that this condition has a direct cause – alcohol in pregnancy? When I first found out, I was heartbroken. I love my children profoundly and couldn't get past the fact that their condition was a result of something I had done even if it was unintentional. The fact that I consumed alcohol while I was pregnant without understanding the implication didn't make a scrap of difference to me. I felt guilty beyond words, beyond anything I had ever before experienced. But that was my first mistake. Because by feeling that way I had two conditions to cope with rather than one. I had my boys' problems as well as my own guilt. It did not help my children and it did not help my husband and it certainly did *not* help me.

My heart goes out to you. I love you for the strong and courageous woman you are. You want to do what is best for your loved one. Whatever it was that drew you to believe your child might have been prenatally exposed to alcohol, you are doing the right thing by trying to obtain a diagnosis. You may have to go to a few health professionals to find one who really understands FASD not just someone who SAYS they understand FASD, but you will need an understanding medical professional for whatever medication your child might need. Medicating the symptoms is very important. My sons between them are medicated for temporal lobe epilepsy, depression, anxiety and paranoia. Sometimes people with FASD will not respond to medication in the way that is expected – for instance if they take a sedative it might result in hyperactivity and vice versa – this is something you will always have to watch as it is common amongst people with FASD.

Even with the best care in the world, you will still need to be vigilant of your mental and physical health because the strain of caring for a loved one with FASD can take its toll. Have a every couple well and try sufficient are not counselling - respite if you to family and FASD so they your child has and is not



massage of weeks, eat and get sleep. If you coping, seek ask for need it. Talk friends about know that a disability behaving that

way because he or she is naughty or because your parenting techniques are at fault. Remember you are not to blame for this condition – alcohol is. Parenting a child with FASD is very difficult and needs to be different to parenting a child who has not been prenatally exposed to alcohol. You will work out what works best for you and your family but if you need simple intervention strategies have a look at <http://rffada.org>. This is the website of the Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association and there is a lot of information you can access from that site. If you need something that isn't there, email me on elizabeth@rffada.org and I will help.



Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorders Association (rffada)
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I know your life hasn't been easy, I know that because you are reading this. Remember though, that everything you have experienced in the past will stand you in good stead for what you need to get through. The best way to deal with this condition is to know as much as you can about it. Like any disability or medical condition, the key to its successful management is knowledge.

The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, or a hell of heaven.--**John Milton**

The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly. --**Buddha**

Courage is a special kind of knowledge: the knowledge of how to fear what ought to be feared and how not to fear what ought not to be feared. --- **David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), Prime Minister of Israel**

Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts. ---**Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965), Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, author, Nobel Prize winner**

I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish that He didn't trust me so much.--- **Mother Teresa**

The rffada has developed training on FASD which is being delivered by a Registered Training Organisation called Training Connections Australia. The units available are....

Unit	Description	Unit	Description
1	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder	5	Strategies for Employment Consultants
2	Strategies for Frontline Workers	5a	Case Management Fundamentals
2a	Strategies for Drug and Alcohol Workers	6	Strategies for Criminal Justice Personnel
2b	Strategies for Mental Health Workers	7	Alcohol and Pregnancy for Students and Young People
3	Living with FASD for parents and carers	8	Strategies for Homelessness Providers
4	Strategies for Teachers and Educators	9	FASD for Indigenous Participants