

# FASD

## in Aotearoa/NZ workplace



**FASD-CAN**

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder  
Care Action Network

*"With shared strength, guidance and wisdom,  
those with FASD can grow and achieve"*

### WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS EXPECT?

#### MAY DISPLAY THESE STRENGTHS:

- Good verbal communication - often very chatty and engaging
- Loyal and friendly
- Generous and helpful
- Perseverance
- Creative, artistic, musical
- Practical aptitude
- Good with animals, young children and the elderly

#### MAY HAVE THESE CHALLENGES:

- Memory challenges
- Language processing/comprehension deficits
- Easily overwhelmed or over-stimulated
- Poor impulse control and decision making skills
- Inability to understand abstract concepts - maths, time, money
- Poor organisational skills and inability to think too far ahead or understand consequences
- Easily distracted, short attention span
- Quickly frustrated with difficult emotions
- Fatigue
- Concrete thinkers - take literal meaning



### WHAT IS FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder with a range of physical, learning and behavioural deficits caused through pre-natal exposure to alcohol.

Some individuals can have facial and other physical features, however these are only present in a small percentage of the FASD population (estimated 10%). The most significant impact of alcohol consumed during pregnancy is on brain function. The cognitive, intellectual, learning and behavioural deficits are the biggest challenge for those with FASD and these are life-long.

The IQ of FASD individuals varies and can sit within the normal range. They may be articulate and persuasive and have strengths in certain areas. These attributes can hide the underlying disability and therefore expectations can be out of step with their capabilities. Within the workplace, support, understanding and tolerance will aid integration and production employment.

The prevalence of FASD is unknown in Aotearoa/NZ. However, international studies have indicated a prevalence of 2%-5% of live births.

## What can employers do to help?

Provide a structured work environment with very few changes day to day. Those with FASD can be inflexible in their thinking and they find it difficult to quickly adapt to change.

Provide a position with routine.

Keep instructions specific, simple and explain step by step. Do not give a string of instructions.

Ensure training is hands-on. **SHOW** - don't just tell. Use the **TIPS** teaching philosophy as a guide to coaching on the job.

- **Tell** - explain what you want them to do
- **Illustrate** - show them what you want them to do
- **Practise** - let them practise the task in front of you
- **Support** - close supervision, check often to ensure they're understanding

Expect to repeat basic instructions often.

Provide visual cues to help them with task completion.

Help with time management by use of bells or buzzers for break start and stop times.

Put with a 'work buddy' who can quietly give guidance in terms of social interactions and work place health and safety expectations. Avoid having them work alongside bad influences (they are vulnerable and easily led).

Focus on strengths. Praise often.

Allow flexibility in scheduling if signs of stress or fatigue are evident. Part time hours may be more suitable especially in the beginning.

Keep communications simple and concrete. Do not use phrases or words with double meanings, for example 'the ball is in your court'.

Limit choices, help with decision making.

## FINAL WORD

Working and feeling useful and respected is an important part of life for everybody but perhaps more so for those with FASD. Too often these rangatahi/youth are leaving school with no qualifications. They may not have been adequately supported in the education sector and leave with a real sense of failure.

If you can believe and focus on their strengths, understand and accommodate their deficits, then you could help restore some of the self esteem and alter their life outcome.

If you can, it is also helpful to keep in touch with family/caregivers so that small problems do not become big problems. FASD is a spectrum and very individual.

## RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

*In your workplace add ...*

1 cup of education

1 cup of structure and routine

1 cup of practical, hands-on training and coaching

Add plenty of repetition and praise

1 good handful of supervision

Mix well with the spoon of understanding and tolerance

Mauri Ora

[www.fasd-can.org.nz](http://www.fasd-can.org.nz)

