



# Could this be Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder?

What police officers need to know – it's all about the brain...



WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT YOU THINK	WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON
<b>NON-COMPLIANCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resistant and controlling</li> <li>Attention seeking</li> <li>Stubborn</li> <li>Manipulative</li> <li>Deliberately oppositional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anxious or fearful</li> <li>Poor working memory</li> <li>Difficulty translating verbal directions into actions</li> <li>Low IQ or poor receptive language skills. Slow down!</li> <li>Slow brain processing speed. Give them time to think about the question and their reply</li> </ul>
<b>REGULAR REPEAT OFFENDER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manipulative</li> <li>Uncaring of others</li> <li>Unintelligent</li> <li>Doing it on purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cannot link cause with effect and consequences</li> <li>Highly suggestible, easily led by peers</li> <li>Impulsive, limited inhibition response</li> <li>Cannot transfer learning between similar situations</li> <li>Poor working memory</li> <li>Significant number of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and environmental deprivation</li> </ul>
<b>OFTEN LATE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lazy, doesn't care</li> <li>Poor parenting</li> <li>Doing it on purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cannot understand the abstract concept of time</li> <li>Poor working memory</li> <li>Does care, but has cognitive fatigue</li> <li>Feels anxious and overwhelmed</li> <li>Challenges with task initiation and organisation</li> </ul>
<b>NOT SITTING STILL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seeking attention</li> <li>Trying to bother others</li> <li>Doing it on purpose</li> <li>Oppositional and resistant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hyperactive – high comorbidity with ADHD</li> <li>Sensory overload (bright lights and noise)</li> <li>Sign of rising anxiety and dysregulation</li> </ul>
<b>POOR SOCIAL JUDGEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No verbal filter, oversharing</li> <li>No sense of self-preservation</li> <li>Bad parenting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cannot link cause with effect and consequences</li> <li>Highly suggestible, easily led by peers</li> <li>Seeking acceptance and friendship</li> <li>Isolated from pro-social peers</li> <li>Trying to please by giving information they think you would like to hear</li> <li>Dysmaturity – developmental age vs. chronological age</li> </ul>
<b>INAPPROPRIATE PHYSICALITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trying to intimidate</li> <li>Trying to get what they want</li> <li>Being oppositional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not understand social cues and boundaries</li> <li>Hyper- or hypo-sensitive to touch</li> <li>Challenges with proprioception and interoception</li> <li>Hyperactivity and poor social judgement</li> <li>Sign of rising anxiety and dysregulation</li> </ul>

Police may be presented with the FASD-CAN wallet card (below) with an individual's information and contacts.

<b>FASD-CAN</b> Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Care Action Network	
My name is: .....	I have a hidden disability. Please be understanding and patient.
<b>POLICE INFORMATION CARD</b> I have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder [FASD]. It has affected the way my brain works, including my memory, my ability to truly understand what you are saying and what it means (even if I say I do), and to regulate my emotions or make good decisions. I have difficulty understanding things like legal rights, and can be persuaded to admit to doing things I have not done. Please do NOT ask me to waive any of my legal rights. I do not want to talk to a Police Officer about an alleged crime before I have talked to a lawyer. Please contact one of the people listed on the back of this card in these circumstances.	
I have FASD. If you need information or help communicating with me or understanding my behaviour, please contact:  Name: ..... Relationship: ..... Phone: ..... Name: ..... Relationship: ..... Phone: ..... Name: ..... Relationship: ..... Phone: .....	I have a hidden disability. Please be understanding and patient.
<a href="http://www.fasd-can.org.nz">www.fasd-can.org.nz</a>	



## WHAT IS FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a diagnostic term used to describe impacts on the brain and body of individuals who were prenatally exposed to alcohol. FASD is a lifelong disability and it's estimated that between 3-5% of babies born annually in Aotearoa NZ will have FASD.

People with FASD will experience some degree of challenges in their daily living, and will need support with motor skills, physical health, learning, memory, attention, communication, emotional regulation, and social skills to reach their full potential.

FASD results in permanent injury to multiple areas of the brain, but there may be no obvious physical signs. They need support and understanding – working with someone who has FASD requires inter-agency collaboration, which may include communication specialists, psychologists and community supports.

**Every person with FASD is unique and has areas of both strengths and challenges.**

**YOU ARE NOT EXPECTED TO DIAGNOSE FASD BUT YOU CAN RAISE THE QUESTION: "COULD THIS PERSON BE AFFECTED?"**

## INFORMATION FOR POLICE

There are no published studies on the overall prevalence of people with FASD within the criminal justice system (CJS) in Aotearoa NZ.

**FACT:** There are 19x more people with FASD in the CJS in the UK than neurotypical people.


**FACT:** In 2018, the Banksia Hill Detention Centre in Australia assessed and diagnosed young people in this youth custodial setting for FASD. 36% met the diagnosis criteria for FASD.

- **Have you ever apprehended a person** for shoplifting or burglary because they were nearby consuming or selling what they had just stolen?
- **Did they appear unaware of the consequences** of their actions or action was a serious problem?
- **Have they done similar things** again and again?
- **Have you ever taken a statement** from a victim or a witness who was agreeing to everything no matter what the implications?

**If you had known about FASD, would your investigation have progressed differently?**

**COULD ONE OF THESE OFFENDERS, VICTIMS OR WITNESSES BE AFFECTED BY FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER?**

## ~HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT SOMEONE WITH FASD ~

- If someone presents an FASD-CAN Police Information Card (see overleaf), please read it before doing anything else and contact their support person.
-  Stay calm, speak slowly and give them extra time to respond. Use FASD-CAN's 'KISSSSSS' Communication Strategy – this will help avoid many common problems. Scan this QR code to find it on our website.
- Give them physical space to help them self-regulate. Consider the sensory environment – ask them about possible triggers such as bright lights or excessive noise.
- Do not ask leading questions or coach them. People with FASD are much more suggestible than most, and will be eager to leave the situation – they may admit untrue incriminating information. Many miscarriages of justice can and do occur.
- Go to the FASD-CAN website's 'Professionals / Police' page for more information or contact us on [admin@fasd-can.org.nz](mailto:admin@fasd-can.org.nz).