

FASD Assessment & Diagnosis in Aotearoa / New Zealand

The Nine Neurodevelopmental Domains (April 2024)

General intellectual abilities (cognition)

Accepted models of intelligence are often defined to include capacity for abstraction, solve problems and acquire new skills.

Motor skills

Motor skills include general motor abilities and areas of fine motor, gross motor and graphomotor (handwriting) skills and/or visual motor integration.

Memory

Memory includes ability to encode, store and retrieve information and can be a highly challenging area for people with FASD. This may include memory of personal events and experiences or factual information. A comprehensive assessment of memory must provide an understanding of an individual's memory challenges to identify disorders and to inform targeted supports.

Communication (language skills)

Communication is the means by which we receive and convey ideas, thoughts, feelings etc. to other people. Communication is highly sensitive and varies according to the context in which it takes place (e.g., setting, who we are communicating with, power dynamics, topic, motivations, emotions and many other variables). Culture and communication are intrinsically linked.

Literacy and/or numeracy

Reading, writing, and spelling and/or maths skills.

Attention

There are many models of attention, however a commonly used framework is to conceptualise attention as having the following components: selective (focusing on a particular stimulus), sustained attention (attending for longer periods of time with resistance to distractions) and distractibility (susceptibility to distractions).

Executive functioning

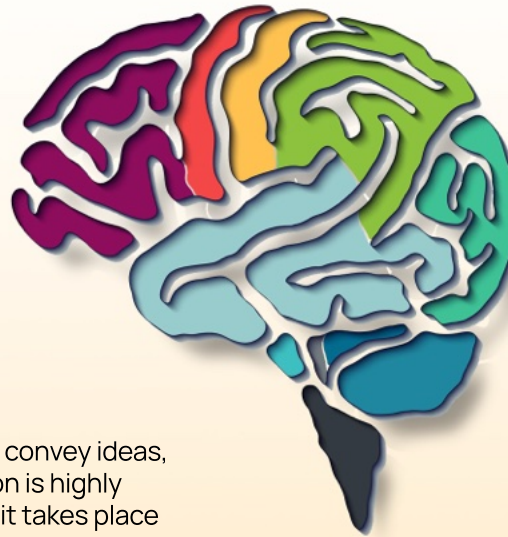
There is no universally accepted definition or models of executive functioning. Executive functions are traditionally defined as higher-order cognitive functions including initiation, inhibition, mental flexibility, novel problem solving, planning, emotion regulation, and self-awareness, all of which are needed for adaptive goal-directed life functioning.

Adaptive/social functioning

Collection of skills that people learn to enable them to function in their daily lives in accordance with cultural and societal expectations. This can include concepts of money and time, personal care, occupational skills, safety, health care, travel/transportation, schedules/routines, interpersonal skills, gullibility, naivety, suggestibility, or social problem solving.

Emotional and/or behavioural regulation

Difficulties with emotional regulation include mood (depression or anxiety); emotional regulation (irritability, low frustration tolerance, mood lability, suicidal ideation) and behavioural regulation (rule-breaking behaviour such as confabulation, taking others' belongings), oppositional / reactive / aggressive (meltdowns).



June 2025: This information has been adapted with thanks from The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Diagnostic Guidelines for Aotearoa (New Zealand) 2024. Expanded information can be found in the guidelines in Section 2, page 78, table 3. Scan QR code to go to the Guidelines via FASD-CAN's website.



FASD-CAN
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
Care Action Network