



FASD-CAN

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
Care Action Network

FASD Developmental Age Profile: Educator Quick-Start Guide

(for use with our simplified Developmental Age Profile Worksheet)

This quick-start guide accompanies provides busy kaiako/teachers and learning support assistants with a clear 3-step decision framework to assign functional developmental ages across all 9 neurodevelopmental (brain) domains that are assessed during an FASD diagnosis.



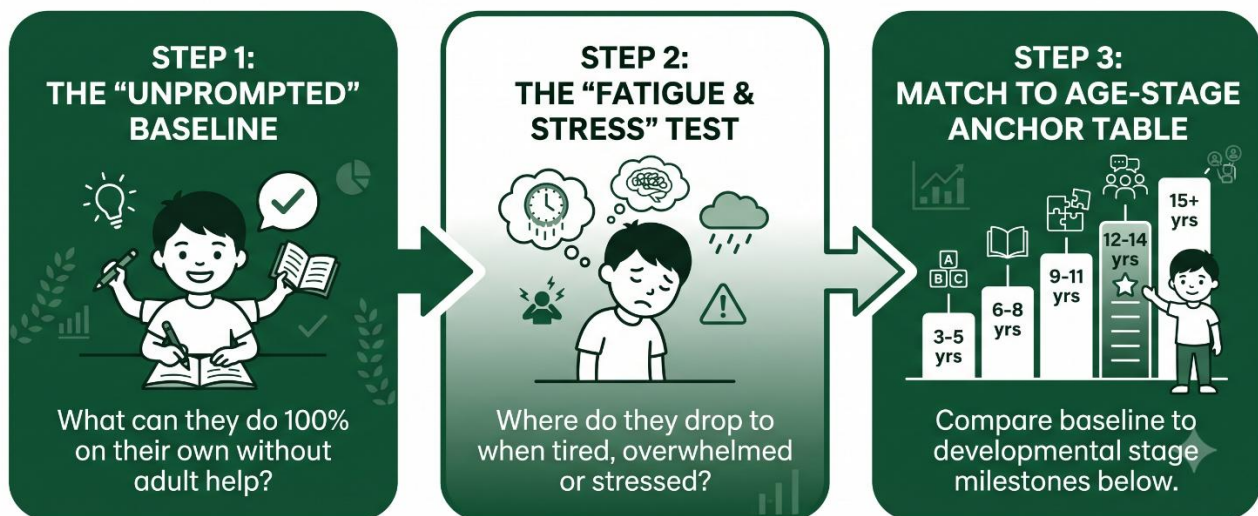
How to Assign a Functional Developmental Age in 3 Steps

When completing the worksheet for an ākonga (student) with FASD, **do not rely on their expressive speaking ability or chronological age**. Instead, apply these three calibration rules to determine their functional age bracket.

How to Assign a Functional Developmental Age in 3 Steps



Do not rely on expressive speaking or chronological age. Use these calibration rules.



Rule 1: The 'Unprompted' Baseline

Assign the age level at which the ākonga can execute the skill **completely independently**. If an ākonga requires an adult standing next to them to prompt step one, open their book, or remind them to keep focused, their functional age in that specific skill is where they can operate *without* that adult safety net.

Rule 2: The 'Fatigue & Stress' Test

Under stress, anxiety, sensory noise, or late afternoon fatigue, the FASD nervous system drops back to its true baseline. Observe what happens when cognitive energy runs out: *Do they react like a 4-year-old having a sensory meltdown, or a 10-year-old taking a deep breath?* Factor this baseline into your age selection.





Rule 3: Receptive Over Expressive

Always plot the age based on **what they comprehend and execute**, never on what they say. High verbal fluency (using adult vocabulary or TV quotes) frequently masks severe underlying gaps in receptive language, working memory, and cognitive processing.

 Developmental Stage Anchor Matrix (Quick Calibration Reference)

Use this matrix to cross-reference unprompted observations across all 9 neurodevelopmental (brain) domains defined under the *Aotearoa FASD Diagnostic Guidelines 2024*:

Functional skill/issue	Early Childhood (3–5 Years)	Early Primary (6–8 Years)	Middle Primary (9–11 Years)	Intermediate/ Early Secondary (12–14 Years)	Senior Youth / Adult (15+ Years)
1. Receptive Language	1-step spoken directions; highly literal; relies on gestures to understand.	Follows 1–2 step instructions; takes sarcasm literally; high surface speech masks low comprehension.	Follows 2-step spoken sequences; begins understanding simple humour and context.	Understands 3-step directions; requires brief processing pause (10-15 seconds).	Independent comprehension of complex multi-step verbal streams and nuanced communication.
2. Expressive Language	Uses emotional outbursts or 1–2 words to communicate unmet physical/ Emotional needs.	Simple spoken sentences; repeats TV catchphrases or adult idioms without full meaning.	Uses conversational speech; struggles to retell complex stories in logical sequence under stress.	Fluent conversational chatter; retrieves words well when calm; stumbles under pressure.	Highly fluent, flexible expressive vocabulary and structured narrative communication.
3. Comprehension	Literal understanding of immediate physical objects and direct visual actions.	Comprehends simple direct stories; interprets idioms, sarcasm, and metaphors literally.	Grasps simple implied meaning with context; understands familiar story lines.	Comprehends familiar abstract concepts when guided; needs visual anchors for new concepts.	Independent abstract comprehension, critical thinking, and inferential reasoning.
4. Working Memory	Holds 1 item in mind; drops directions as soon as action begins.	Holds 1–2 items briefly; drops step two of a verbal instruction when step one starts.	Holds 2 steps in mind; relies on visual wall anchors to complete familiar routines.	Holds 2–3 steps with visual prompts; mental workbench overflows under time pressure.	Independent mental manipulation of multi-step instructions and long-term project goals.





Functional skill/issue	Early Childhood (3–5 Years)	Early Primary (6–8 Years)	Middle Primary (9–11 Years)	Intermediate/ Early Secondary (12–14 Years)	Senior Youth / Adult (15+ Years)
5. Reading	Pre-reading stage; recognizes letter shapes and familiar picture signs.	Early phonetic decoding; reads simple short-vowel words; basic decoding outpaces meaning.	Reads simple narrative text; decodes fluently but may struggle with inferential 'why' questions.	Decodes multi-clause text; functional reading breaks down on abstract or complex topics.	Independent reading comprehension, critical analysis, and functional text application.
6. Writing	Scribbling; pre-writing lines; cannot form distinct letters	Short 1-line sentences; heavy graphomotor fatigue after 2-3 minutes of writing.	Writes short multi-sentence paragraphs; noticeable gap between rich oral ideas and minimal text.	Structures basic essays with keyboard/ scribe assistance; physical writing causes hand fatigue.	Fluent handwriting and digital typing endurance; independent essay and report composition.
7. Spelling	Letter-sound associations; spells name with visual guidance.	Purely phonetic spelling guesses (e.g., 'fren' for 'friend', 'wuz' for 'was').	Retains basic sight words; inconsistent day-to-day spelling ('on/off' retention switch).	Spells familiar vocabulary correctly; spelling accuracy drops sharply under cognitive fatigue.	Independent, consistent spelling accuracy across varied and complex vocabulary.
8. Mathematical Skills	Counts concrete physical objects up to 10; no mental quantity concept.	Concrete addition/ subtraction with physical counters; finger-counting for simple sums.	Basic canteen coin math; reads digital hour clocks; understands simple fractions with shapes.	Handles simple budgets with visual anchors; calculates canteen change with guidance.	Independent abstract math, budget management, financial safeguarding, and scheduling.
9. Sustained Attention	2-3 minutes unprompted focus on structured tasks; easily pulled by minor sounds.	5-8 minutes focus on preferred activities; distracted by visual classroom movement.	10-15 minutes focus in quiet spaces; handles chunked auditory learning steps.	20-30 minutes sustained focus; manages moderate open-plan noise with clear task goals.	Independent sustained 40+ minutes focus, sensory filtering in busy settings, and high endurance.





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10. Fine Motor / Graphomotor	Palmer pen grip; needs total adult help for clothing buttons, zippers, and gear.	Early tripod grip; hand fatigue after 2 lines; struggles with craft scissors and lunchtime packaging.	Writes short paragraphs before ‘hand cramping’; manages shoes, buttons, and gear independently.	Fluent handwriting mechanics; handles science lab and art tools with care.	Full graphomotor endurance, precise motor planning, and independent tool coordination.
11. Gross Motor / Balance / Spatial awareness	Frequent clumsiness; trips over gear; needs adult help for changing and footwear.	Early balance; trips over classroom obstacles; bumps into peers in line; misjudges physical space.	Moderate coordination in group sports; navigates crowded hallways with minor bumps.	Good spatial navigation; participates smoothly in physical activities and team sports.	Precise spatial awareness, force modulation, and independent physical coordination.
12. Cause & Effect Reasoning	Cannot link action to natural outcome; genuinely surprised by predictable results.	Understands direct physical cause/effect when demonstrated immediately after the event.	Understands predictable classroom consequences with help; connects action to result when calm.	Reasons through familiar cause-and-effect sequences; generates basic alternative plan when guided.	Independent consequential reasoning, pattern recognition, and generalised rule application.
13. Cognitive processing speed	Prolonged pause time required (15+ seconds); slow mental pace; overwhelmed by standard verbal streams.	Needs 10-15 seconds pause time; takes significantly longer to scan pages; panicked by time limits.	Processes routine visual/spoken tasks at steady pace; time limits cause anxiety and spikes in error.	Steady processing when calm; mental processing slows noticeably under multi-task demands.	Efficient cognitive processing speed across varied settings, time limits, and complex demands.
14. Inhibition/ Impulse control	Immediate urge-driven actions; blurts out, grabs objects, cannot pause before acting.	Frequent blurt-outs; touches gear unprompted; struggles to wait turns or suppress physical urges.	Pauses briefly with visual cues; impulsive blurt-outs or physical reactions resurface under stress.	Baseline self-control in structured settings; needs prompts to manage temptation or peer distraction.	Independent impulse suppression, delay of gratification, and physical/verbal urge control.
15. Planning/ Organisation/	Total adult dependency to	Stalls/freezes at start-up; desk in	Follows familiar visual	Manages familiar multi-	Manages familiar multi-





Functional skill/issue	Early Childhood (3–5 Years)	Early Primary (6–8 Years)	Middle Primary (9–11 Years)	Intermediate/ Early Secondary (12–14 Years)	Senior Youth / Adult (15+ Years)
Task initiation	set up, sequence, or start basic tasks; gets lost instantly.	disarray; requires one-on-one adult activation to begin step one.	checklists to start work; struggles to map steps for new/complex tasks.	step routines with visual prompts; loses track of gear on long projects.	step routines with visual prompts; loses track of gear on long projects.
16. Interpersonal relationships/ Social problem-solving	Parallel play; reacts to peer conflict with tears or pushing; no personal space boundaries.	Gravitates toward younger playmates; misinterprets peer intent; needs adult mediation for disputes.	Joins group games with rules; struggles with losing or compromise; seeks adult help for conflict.	Forms peer connections in structured settings; needs guidance for complex group dynamics.	Independent social navigation, peer compromise, personal space boundaries, and conflict resolution.
17. Gullibility / Naivety	Naive trust in all adults and peers; no awareness of personal or social danger.	Easily coaxed by peers to break rules; misinterprets peer teasing or sarcasm as true friendship.	Identifies obvious tricks or fake promises with adult guidance; vulnerable to peer pressure.	Detects peer manipulation in familiar situations; identifies obvious community safety risks.	Independent social discernment, online safety, and protection against peer exploitation.
18. Time Concepts	No clock or schedule concept; operates purely in the immediate 'here and now'.	Reads digital hour clocks; understands 'today' vs 'tomorrow'; no feel for duration (5 mins vs 1 hour).	Understands 15 minute blocks; follows visual daily schedules; needs visual timers for pacing.	Reads timetables; estimates task duration with prompts; understands weekly calendar events.	Independent time management, schedule navigation, long-term planning, and meeting deadlines.
19. Frustration Tolerance / Anxiety	Severe meltdowns or crying over minor learning errors; immediate stress reaction.	Low frustration threshold; tears, refusal, or withdrawal when challenged by difficult work.	Uses break corner or fidgets with adult reminder; follows classroom rules when calm.	Tolerates minor learning errors; self-initiates quiet breaks when sensory or academic stress rises.	Independent frustration tolerance, adaptive stress management, and baseline emotional stability.
20. Co-Regulation Needs	Total reliance on a calm, grounded adult presence to soothe and	Requires adult proximity and soft vocal tone to de-escalate and calm down.	Self-soothes using visual break cards or quiet spaces	Recognises sensory overload; seeks adult co-	Independent emotional self-regulation, stress recovery, and





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	reset the nervous system.		when prompted by an adult.	regulation or quiet space independently when overwhelmed.	autonomous self-soothing.

💡 Practical Examples: Applying the Calibration Rules

Case 1: High School Context: Liam, chronological age: 15.

- **In Conversation:** Liam speaks fluently, uses adult slang, and talks about complex video games (*Skill 2: Expressive Language = 15 Years*).
- **When Given Instructions:** When the teacher says, "Open your workbooks to page 20, read section B, and answer questions 1 to 3," Liam sits motionless, stares at his desk, and eventually starts drawing on his hand.
- **With Adult Support:** When a teacher sits alongside Liam, opens his book to page 20, points to question 1, and gives him a single instruction, he completes the answer easily.
- **Applying the Calibration Rules:**
 1. Without one-on-one adult activation, Liam cannot process the multi-step instruction or retain the steps on his active mental workbench (*Rule 1: Unprompted Baseline*).
 2. His unprompted capacity to process multi-step spoken directions and retain sequential steps matches an Early Primary (6–7 years) level (*Rule 3: Receptive over Expressive*).
 3. **Assigned Worksheet Values:** *Skill 1: Receptive Language = 6 Years; Skill 4: Working Memory = 6 Years; Skill 2: Expressive Language = 15 Years.*

Case 2: Middle Primary Context: Mia, chronological age: 10.

- **In Reading Class:** Mia reads aloud smoothly from an 11-year-old level chapter book with great pronunciation (*Skill 5: Reading = 11 Years*).
- **In Practical Application:** When asked to answer written questions about why a character felt sad, or when told to buy a \$2 snack at the canteen with a \$5 note, Mia becomes distressed. At the canteen, she hands over the note and walks away without waiting for change. When her pencil lead breaks during maths, she tearfully throws her book on the floor.
- **Applying the Calibration Rules:**
 1. Her mechanical reading aloud masks a low working comprehension for abstract 'why' concepts (*Rule 3: Receptive over Expressive*).
 2. Without adult scaffolding, her unprompted ability to manage simple canteen currency matches an Early Primary level (*Skill 8: Mathematical Skills = 6 Years*).
 3. Under minor academic frustration, her nervous system drops to an Early Childhood baseline (*Rule 2: Fatigue & Stress Test*).
 4. **Assigned Worksheet Values:** *Skill 5: Reading (Decoding) = 11 Years; Skill 3: Comprehension = 7 Years; Skill 8: Mathematical Skills = 6 Years; Skill 15: Frustration Tolerance = 4 Years.*

Case 3: Early Primary / New Entrant Context (Noah, chronological Age: 6)

- **In Free Play & Dialogue:** Noah speaks in energetic, detailed sentences about his favourite cartoon characters and cartoon storylines (*Skill 2: Expressive Language = 6 Years*).





- **During Transitions & Routine Instructions:** When the teacher calls out to the mat, "Put your sun hats in your bags, push your chairs in, and come sit on the carpet," Noah drops his hat on the floor, grabs a toy from a peer's tray, and wanders toward the outdoor doorway.
- **Under Group Expectations:** Sitting on the carpet during story time, Noah constantly touches peers, grabs at the teacher's big book, and calls out repeatedly. When a peer asks him to stop touching their shoes, Noah pushes them and screams. When redirected gently by the teacher, he curls up into a ball under a table and refuses to move.
- **Applying the Calibration Rules:**
 1. Noah's high conversational chatter hides a working capacity that drops to an early childhood baseline when processing multi-step verbal routines (*Rule 3: Receptive over Expressive*).
 2. Without an adult standing directly beside him to chunk directions one step at a time, he cannot hold directions in mind or initiate task sequences (*Rule 1: Unprompted Baseline*).
 3. Under minor social boundary friction or sensory crowding, his nervous system drops into total emotional meltdown (*Rule 2: Fatigue & Stress Test*).
 4. **Assigned Worksheet Values:** Skill 2: Expressive Language = 6 Years; Skill 1: Receptive Language = 3–4 Years; Skill 4: Working Memory = 3 Years; Skill 14: Inhibition / Impulse Control = 3 Years; Skill 15: Planning / Organisation / Task Initiation = 3 Years; Skill 16: Interpersonal / Social = 3–4 Years; Skill 19: Frustration Tolerance / Anxiety = 3 Years; Skill 20: Co-Regulation Needs = 3–4 Years.

Summary Checklist Before Finalising the Profile

- [] **Unprompted Independence:** Are all 20 ratings based on what the ākonga can execute 100% on their own without an adult standing over them?
- [] **Receptive vs. Expressive Separation:** Has Receptive Language (Skill 1) been evaluated separately from high verbal fluency (Skill 2: Expressive Language)?
- [] **Memory & Confabulation Alignment:** Are memory retrieval limits and gap-filling ('honest lying') captured under Working Memory (Skill 4) rather than marked as deliberate disobedience?
- [] **Attention & Reasoning Integration:** Are focus duration, cause-and-effect reasoning, and time concepts (Skills 9, 12, 14) evaluated as brain-based capacity limits rather than a refusal to engage?
- [] **Executive & Processing Integration:** Are processing pace, impulse control, task initiation, and time concepts (Skills 13, 14, 15, 18) evaluated as brain-based capacity limits rather than a refusal to engage?
- [] **'Spiky Profile' Verification:** Does the completed worksheet reflect distinct highs and drops across the 20 items, avoiding a flat line across chronological age?
- [] **Accommodations Alignment:** Are low functional age scores matched to practical visual scaffolds, co-regulation strategies, and environmental supports on the Individual Education Plan (IEP)?

Educator Disclaimer

This developmental functional age profile is an educational observation and accommodation guide designed to assist kaiako, learning support staff, and school teams in understanding an ākonga's functional developmental age within daily school environments. It is a practical tool to inform classroom adaptations, environmental scaffolding, and individual learning plans. **This document is not a clinical diagnostic instrument, formal psychometric assessment, or medical evaluation, and cannot be used to diagnose FASD or replace clinical assessment under the Aotearoa FASD Diagnostic Guidelines 2024.**

For more information on this topic see our expanded worksheet and explanatory guidelines on our website.



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