



Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD): Clinical Resources for Social Work Practice

Prenatal alcohol exposure is the **most common preventable cause** of intellectual and developmental delay and disabilities in the United States. Up to **1 in 20 U.S. school children** are living with **fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD)**, a group of lifelong cognitive, behavioral and, in some cases, physical conditions that can occur in a person who was exposed to alcohol before birth. Outcomes from alcohol use during pregnancy and FASDs occur in every social, economic, and demographic group, among social drinkers as well as binge drinkers.

Given the prevalence of FASD and its far-reaching impact across the lifespan, social workers across practice settings are likely to engage with individuals and families affected by FASD. Social workers can support positive health and social outcomes by learning more about FASD, participating in FASD assessment and referrals, providing FASD-informed services, and advocating for individuals and families living with FASD.

Social workers also can help reduce the prevalence of FASD through primary prevention of alcohol use during pregnancy. Social workers are well positioned to put prevention into practice through: screening clients for risky alcohol use (alcohol screening and brief intervention or alcohol SBI), talking to women about **risky alcohol use**, and by clearly communicating the importance of avoiding alcohol during pregnancy. The key message is simple: No amount of alcohol is known to be safe during pregnancy.

FASD, risky drinking, and alcohol use in pregnancy are timely topics for social work focus — **growing rates of heavy alcohol use and binge drinking among women** present serious health consequences. NASW and the **NASW Foundation**, in partnership with The University of Texas at Austin, are working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other leading health organizations to encourage health professionals to **learn more about FASD**, and to incorporate primary prevention tools such as alcohol SBI into routine practice.

Enhance your understanding, competency and practice skills around FASD. A selection of clinically focused resources highly relevant to social work practice are listed below.

FASD Clinical Profile and Prevalence

Key clinical / research reports summarizing FASD, its impact, identification, and populations

Williams, J.F., Smith, V.C. & AAP Committee on Substance Abuse (2015). Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. *Clinical Report. Pediatrics*, 136(5). e1395-e1406. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2015-3113.

PDF: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2015/10/13/peds.2015-3113.full.pdf>

Hagan, J.F., Balachova, T., Bertrand, J. et al. (2016). Neurobehavioral Disorder Associated With Prenatal Alcohol Exposure. *Pediatrics*, 138(4), e20151553. DOI:10.1542/peds.2015-1553

PDF: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2016/09/23/peds.2015-1553.full.pdf>

May, P. A., Chambers, C. D., Kalberg, W. O., Zellner, J., Feldman, H., Buckley, D., . . . Hoyme, H. E. (2018). Prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders in 4 US Communities. *JAMA*, 319(5), 474-482.

doi:10.1001/jama.2017.21896 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2671465>

Turchi, R. M., & Smith, V. C. (2018). The Role of Integrated Care in a Medical Home for Patients with a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. *Pediatrics*, 142(4). doi:10.1542/peds.2018-2333

PDF: <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/142/4/e20182333.full.pdf>

Identifying FASD

Overview of FASD's neurobehavioral characteristics and assessment criteria

Bakhireva, L. N., Garrison, L., Shrestha, S., Sharkis, J., Miranda, R., & Rogers, K. (2018). Challenges of diagnosing fetal alcohol spectrum disorders in foster and adopted children. *Alcohol*, 67, 37-43.

doi:10.1016/j.alcohol.2017.05.004

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0741832916303202?via%3Dihub>

Kable, J. A., O'Connor, M. J., Olson, H. C., Paley, B., Mattson, S. N., Anderson, S. M., & Riley, E. P. (2016). Neurobehavioral Disorder Associated with Prenatal Alcohol Exposure (ND-PAE): Proposed DSM-5 Diagnosis. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 47(2), 335-346. doi:10.1007/s10578-015-0566-7

PDF: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs10578-015-0566-7.pdf>

Mattson, S. N., Bernes, G. A., & Doyle, L. R. (2019). Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: A Review of the Neurobehavioral Deficits Associated With Prenatal Alcohol Exposure. *Alcoholism, Clinical and Experimental Research*, 43(6), 1046-1062. doi:10.1111/acer.14040

PDF: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/acer.14040>

FASD-informed Services for Individuals and Families

Some FASD-informed interventions and caregiver experiences

Domeij, H., Fahlstrom, G., Bertilsson, G., Hultcrantz, M., Munthe-Kaas, H., Gordh, C. N., & Helgesson, G. (2018).

Experiences of living with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders: a systematic review and synthesis of qualitative data. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 60(8), 741-752. doi:10.1111/dmnc.13696

PDF: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/dmnc.13696>

Petrenko, C. L., & Alto, M. E. (2017). Interventions in fetal alcohol spectrum disorders: An international perspective. *European Journal of Medical Genetics*, 60(1), 79-91. doi:10.1016/j.ejmg.2016.10.005

Petrenko, C. L. M., Alto, M. E., Hart, A. R., Freeze, S. M., & Cole, L. L. (2019). "I'm Doing My Part, I Just Need Help From the Community": Intervention Implications of Foster and Adoptive Parents' Experiences Raising Children and Young Adults With FASD. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 25(2), 314-347. doi:10.1177/1074840719847185

PDF: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1074840719847185>

Zamegar, Z., Hambrick, E. P., Pery, B. D., Azen, S. P., & Peterson, C. (2016). Clinical improvements in adopted children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders through neurodevelopmentally informed clinical intervention: A pilot study. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 21(4), 551-567. doi:10.1177/1359104516636438

PDF: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1359104516636438>

Alcohol Use During Pregnancy: Prevalence and Prevention

Denny, C. H., Acero, C. S., Naimi, T. S., & Kim, S. Y. (2019). Consumption of Alcohol Beverages and Binge Drinking Among Pregnant Women Aged 18-44 Years - United States, 2015-2017. *MMWR: Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 68(16), 365-368. doi:10.15585/mmwr.mm6816a1

PDF: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/pdfs/mm6816a1-H.pdf>

Council on Social Work Education. (2018) Women, Risky Drinking and Alcohol-exposed Pregnancies : A Framework for Field Instructors. CSWE Learning Academy [on-line webinar, free CEs]

NASW. (2017). Preventing Alcohol-Exposed Pregnancies: Tools and Strategies for the Social Work Practitioner. Social Work Online CE Institute. [on-line webinar, CEs available]

Velasquez, M.M., Ingersoll, K., Sobell, M., & Sobell, L.C. (2016). *Women and Drinking: Preventing Alcohol-Exposed Pregnancies*. Series: Advances in Psychotherapy–Evidence-based Practices, vol. 34. Boston, MA: Hogrefe Press

Additional Resources

NASW's [Behavioral Health](#) webpage provides links to selected practice tools and professional development resources. NASW's SPS Section Connection articles for specific practice settings are available through your SPS membership archives:

- » "Identifying & Supporting Students Affected by Prenatal Alcohol Exposure," SSW Section Connection, Fall/Winter 2017
- » "Child Welfare Social Workers & Children with Prenatal Substance Exposure: Current Needs & Potential Solutions," CW Section Connection, Spring/Summer 2018; reprinted as NASW Practice Perspective available to public on [NASW website](#)
- » "Women and Risky Drinking: Prevalence, Risks, and Preventing Alcohol-Exposed Pregnancy, ATOD Section Connection, Fall/Winter 2018
- » "Prevention in Practice: A Case for an Interprofessional Approach to Preventing Alcohol-Exposed Pregnancy," Health Section Connection, Spring/Summer 2019

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders \(FASD\) Training and Resources](#)

NASW and the [NASW Foundation](#) in partnership with The University of Texas at Austin Steve Hicks School of Social Work have joined with the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians and other leading medical organizations in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Collaborative for Alcohol-Free Pregnancy](#). This national public health initiative aims to educate health professionals about the importance of talking to women about harmful alcohol use, increase awareness of FASD, and encourage the use proven prevention strategies in practice.

This resource guide was developed by Anita Prewett, MS, MA, The University of Texas at Austin Health Behavior Research and Training Institute, with the assistance of Takia Richardson, MSW, LICSW, LCSW, NASW Senior Practice Associate for Behavioral Health.