

9 SEPTEMBER INTERNATIONAL FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD) DAY

Background

In the late nineties, a group of biological and adoptive/foster parents in Canada and New Zealand collaborated to decide how best to create awareness and share information regarding the management of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) across the globe. They were concerned about the lack of information regarding FASD. An online parental support group was formed and this eventually led to the establishment of an International FASD day. The first International FASD Day was held on 9 September 1999 (09/09/1999) and was also commemorated in South Africa.

Why 9 September?

The symbolism of 9 is very important, as a woman is normally pregnant for 9 months. The number 9 is therefore fully utilised (the 9th day of the 9th month at 09h00).

What happens on the 9 September?

Members of the public who are interested in raising awareness regarding FASD are requested to share the prevention message with small groups of friends/colleagues or other community members in doing the following:

- Meet on 9 September at 09h00
- Hand out FASD knots, if available (order from FARR at R20 for packets containing 9 knots and flags containing the FASD prevention message)
- Share a short FASD prevention message (*See below: "What is the FASD prevention message");
- 09h08: Observe one minute of silence to think about individuals affected by FASD and their family/caregivers, as well as how one can go about to share this message with friends and family;
- 09h09: Break the silence by ringing a bell (or bells, e.g. church, school or hand bells) thereby calling people to take action in creating awareness about FASD, especially regarding the importance of alcohol-free pregnancies;
- Encourage participants to wear the FASD knot for the day and to share the message with at least 9 other people.

What is the FASD knot?

The knot consists of a white rope tied in a specific way, known as the reef knot or the fisherman's knot. The knot is worn on your chest to raise awareness about FASD.

The knot symbolises the following:

- The rope: symbolises the umbilical cord whereby the unborn baby (fetus) is supposed to receive nutritious food and not alcohol;
- The worn ends of the rope: is a reminder of the damage that prenatal alcohol use can cause to the central nervous system (brain) and other organs of the unborn baby;

- The knot: This type of knot (fisherman/reef) is so strong that it will not break if traction is put on it, it will only pull tighter. This symbolizes the strong support that we are supposed to give pregnant women to abstain from alcohol use;
- The circle inside the knot symbolises the womb (uterus) of the pregnant women which should provide a safe environment for the unborn baby free of alcohol.



FASD Awareness Knot

***What is the FASD prevention message?**

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) as the most severe form of these disorders, is the most common cause of permanent mental disability in the world. According to the World Health Association the prevalence of FASD in the world is projected to be 1,5%. South Africa has the highest reported FASD prevalence rates in the world, with rates as high as 28% in some communities. It is estimated that our country's overall rate might be as high as 6%.

FASD is caused when a pregnant woman uses alcohol during pregnancy. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the most severe form of this condition. It is prevalent in all cultural, religious and socio-economic groups. The alcohol consumed by the pregnant women is absorbed through her bloodstream and reaches the unborn baby (fetus). The alcohol is poisonous (toxic) for the unborn baby and it may damage any of the unborn baby's organs. The brain is the most vulnerable organ. For this reason, all children with FASD have some form of permanent brain damage, presenting as developmental delays, learning and behavioural problems. This condition is permanent and cannot be cured by medication.

There are still many myths around FASD. Some people still believe that a woman must be an alcoholic to have a child with FASD. Therefore the prevention message that must be spread is:

***No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy.
FASD causes permanent damage, but it is 100% preventable.***

FASD knots and Information Sheets

These can be ordered from the FARR Head Office in Bellville, Cape Town:

Please place your order with Estelle at info@farrsa.org.za or phone her at 021-6862646;
The FASD knots and flags with information, as well as safety pins (to wear) cost R20 per packet (9 knots and messages per packet);
The above excludes postages or courier costs;

Please allow at least a week or two from ordering to delivery.

Enquiries: Foundation for Alcohol Related Research/FARR
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