

9 SEPTEMBER INTERNATIONAL FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD) DAY

Prevent Stigma and Shame by focussing on love and hope!

Join us in commemorating International FASD day on the 9th of September. Help us spread awareness about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and the risks to the fetus (unborn baby) from alcohol exposure during pregnancy.

On this day we want to share the message that any prenatal exposure to alcohol can have serious negative consequences for the fetus. The only risk-free choice is to abstain from drinking alcohol during the entire 9 months of pregnancy. We also want to share our support for individuals living with FASD and highlight their unique strengths and abilities. In doing so, we also pay tribute to their parents, family members and caregivers.

Together we want to surround pregnant women with love and support and help them make healthy choices for themselves and their babies.

Join us in breaking the silence on the 9th of September

#FASDUthandoNethemba
#FASDLoveHope

Background

In the late nineties, a group of biological and adoptive/foster parents in Canada and New Zealand got together to decide how best to create awareness and share information regarding the support 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 packets of 9 knots from FARR, with flags containing the FASD prevention message, as well as an Info Sheet).
- Share a short FASD prevention message (see the standard message below).

- 09h08: Observe one minute of silence to think about individuals affected by FASD and their family/caregivers, as well as one's responsibility towards the support of a pregnant friend or family member. Also reflect on how you can go about sharing 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, such as colleagues/friends/family.

(If it is not possible to meet at 09h00, meet at any other time of the day and follow the procedure above.)

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 fetus (unborn baby) 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 fetus;
- 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: Symbolizes the womb (uterus) of the pregnant woman which should provide a safe environment for the fetus, 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 well-known form of these disorders, is the most common cause of permanent intellectual disability in the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) 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 is at least 6%.

FASD is caused when a fetus is exposed to alcohol. The alcohol reaches the fetus through the bloodstream of the mother and can cause damage to any of the fetal 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 is a lifelong condition and cannot be cured by medication.

FASD is prevalent in all cultural, religious and socio-economic groups. There are still many myths around FASD. Some people still believe, incorrectly, that a woman must be an alcoholic to have a child with FASD. Research has shown that even light to medium alcohol exposure has the potential to cause harm. Therefore, the prevention message that must be spread is:

***No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy.
FASD causes permanent damage but can be prevented by alcohol free pregnancies.***

FASD knots and Information Sheets:

- Can be ordered from the FARR Head Office in Bellville, Cape Town.
- Orders can be placed with Estelle at: info@farrsa.org.za or phone her at: (021) 686-2646.
- The FASD knots, flags with information and safety pins (to wear) cost R20 per packet (9 knots and messages included per packet). This excludes postage or courier costs