

# INTERNATIONAL FASD DAY

# 9

# SEPTEMBER

## WHAT IS FASD?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is an umbrella term referring to a range of conditions, which occurs when an unborn baby (or fetus) is exposed to alcohol during pregnancy.

A pregnant woman does not need to be a heavy drinker or alcoholic to have a child with FASD. Research indicates that even small to moderate amounts of alcohol can cause damage to the unborn baby.

## INTERNATIONAL FASD DAY

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 individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (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 Cape Town, South Africa.

### WHY 9 SEPTEMBER?

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

### WHAT HAPPENS ON 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 or button badges, if available (order from FARR at R25 per packet of 9 knots or R55 per packet of 9 button badges, all with flags containing the FASD prevention message)
- Share a short FASD prevention message (No amount of alcohol is safe any time during pregnancy.);
- 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 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 or button badge for the day and to share the message with at least 9 other people.

## FASD PREVENTION MESSAGE:

*No amount of alcohol is safe at any time during pregnancy.*



## FASD PREVALENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The World Health Organization estimates the global FASD prevalence rate to be less than 1%. In South Africa, research done by the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR) in 5 of the 9 provinces, revealed rates as

high as 276 per 1000 (27.6%) in some communities in the Northern Cape Province (Louw et al., 2024). The Western Cape Province has areas with rates as high as 31% as reported by other researchers (May et al., 2022).



FASD is a permanent and life-long condition which can not be cured. An individual diagnosed with FASD will always have some form of brain damage presenting in developmental delays, learning barriers and behavioural challenges. The individual might also have other organ damage.

**FASD occurs in any cultural, religious, and socio-economic group.**

## WHAT ARE SOME SYMPTOMS OF FASD?



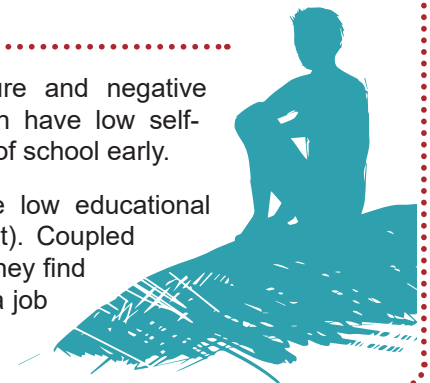
Children with FASD often find it difficult to adjust and progress at school. This is because they may have difficulty with short term memory, attention, hyperactivity, impulsivity, emotional-regulation, abstract thinking, understanding cause and effect of decisions and actions, etc.



Teenagers with FASD regularly present with heightened risk-taking behaviour, not fully realising the possible outcomes of their actions.

As they regularly experience failure and negative feedback, children with FASD often have low self-esteem, give up trying and drop out of school early.

Adults living with FASD may have low educational levels (due to early school drop-out). Coupled with their FASD related challenges they find it difficult to live independently, find a job and stay in employment.



## On International FASD Day, 9 September, the FASD knot is worn to remind society to support pregnant women not to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

The FASD knot symbolises:

The **umbilical cord (rope)** through which the fetus should receive nutritious food, not alcohol.

The **frayed ends of the knot** is a reminder of the damage that can be caused to the central nervous system (brain) and other organs if alcohol is used during pregnancy.

The **circle** represents the womb (uterus) of the pregnant woman which should provide a safe environment for the unborn baby free of alcohol.

The **knot** indicates the support that partners, family and friends should provide to the pregnant woman to help her to have an alcohol-free pregnancy.



For more information contact the Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR)

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