



# FASD and Employment

## *A guide for employers*

*Reprinted in "Hidden Disabilities and Conditions: Creating an Inclusive Workplace" (2021), by Ted Smith*

### **What is FASD?**

FASD results when prenatal alcohol exposure affects the developing brain and body. FASD is a spectrum. Each person with FASD is affected differently. While more than 400 conditions can co-occur, FASD is at its core a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition. All people with FASD have many strengths. Early diagnosis and appropriate support are essential, especially for executive functioning.

### **Employing someone with FASD**

All people with FASD are different and will therefore have varying needs. People with FASD often have many wonderful qualities such as being outgoing and friendly. People with FASD are often determined and want to work hard and please those around them. Like everyone else people with FASD have different skills and talents, common areas of excellence include being artistic or musical, working with animals and children and computer skills.

Employers should undertake FASD training to understand more about the condition and to support understanding that FASD difficulties are not intentional but a recognised part of their neurodevelopmental disorder and to be supportive and flexible.

It is important to ask the individual how FASD affects them and what strategies work for them. It may help some people with FASD to bring materials with them to such a meeting to aid their memory or to bring a support person. It is important to consider that they may feel frustrated by the impact FASD has on them. They may additionally be managing fatigue as well as anxiety and poor self-esteem. People with FASD may benefit from having the same shift pattern rather than changes, especially ones with short notice. Some people with FASD may benefit from a 'Buddy' system so they have somebody to go to whilst working who may be able to offer prompts such as with transitions during the day like break time.

Once a person with FASD has mastered what was expected in their job role it is prudent not to expect that they can necessarily add to this. It may lead to the person becoming over-whelmed and less able to function.

People with FASD are often friendly and sociable and can express themselves well. However, their understanding of spoken or written language may be lower than it seems. They may take literally what has been said. People with FASD may struggle to pick up on non-verbal cues from others. Unwritten rules, including ones around shared areas such as the kitchen may not be obvious to someone with FASD.

***People with FASD can do well with appropriate support in the workplace.***

## What can help?

- Staff training on FASD to promote awareness and inclusivity
- Use simple, clear and concrete language
- Use visual aids
- Unwritten rules made concrete by using a sign in clear accessible language and where possible with an accompanying picture
- Have a communication book where work to be done each day is broken down into step-by-step instructions and any priorities are clear and concrete
- Video instructions and being able to record meetings to allow for rechecking what was said.

### Induction and training

People with FASD learn differently and due to difficulties with processing information and memory may benefit from a longer induction/training process and that the tasks are demonstrated rather than described, with a written version to refer back to. Job shadowing. A visual map of the work environment can be useful.

### Weekly support meetings

Discussion about what is coming up that week and a written step-by-step plan.

### Working environment

Having a fixed desk where the person can have things kept in the same place would benefit somebody with FASD. The stress of finding a desk, or not knowing where things are can heighten stress and anxiety and affect productivity.

People with FASD may get overwhelmed by sensory experiences such as uniform, bright lighting and noisy environments. Allowing flexibility over uniform, aids such as earphones and sensory breaks can help.

### Breakout room

Having a quiet area when a person with FASD can go to when they are overwhelmed is crucial so that they can regulate before returning to their task.

### Memory

As memory can be affected, people with FASD may benefit from memory aids such as job sheets, picture aids, verbal prompts (one at a time).

### Executive functioning

Executive functioning skills can be affected including: starting a task, sequencing which affects linking previous and new tasks, changing from one task to another task and being easily distracted. It can be difficult to plan and organise tasks, to keep track of time and to control impulsivity.

### What else can help?

An understanding employer, a 'buddy' system who can offer prompts, help with organising work tasks.

### Applications

Voice recognition software such as Dragon

[Brain in hand](#) app to aid executive function

[Grammarly](#)