

WEDNESDAY 22ND APRIL 2020 SESSION 12 STAYING CONNECTED AND CURIOUS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Knowledge and understanding of attachment and trauma Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

FASD Key Points

- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders is an umbrella term for several diagnosis that are all related to prenatal exposure to alcohol.
- Alcohol crosses the placenta to the developing baby and the alcohol reaches the developing baby very quickly. Its blood alcohol level is the same as the mother's.
- *"Of all the substances of abuse ... alcohol produces by far the most serious neurobehavioural effects in the foetus."* US Institute of Medicine. This includes nicotine, cocaine, marijuana etc.
- Alcohol exposure in utero is the world's leading cause of neurodevelopmental (brain and nervous system) damage, learning disabilities and behavioural problems.
- There is no risk-free time during pregnancy, no safe type of alcohol or risk-free amount - which is why all four UK Chief Medical Officers advise that no alcohol should be consumed during pregnancy or if likely to conceive (including in the weeks/months before pregnancy is confirmed).
- FASD is physically invisible in 90 per cent of the people affected and can be difficult to confirm, which means it is often misdiagnosed or simply overlooked.
- Statistics suggest that there are between 500 and 1,000 undiagnosed FASD cases for every one officially confirmed across the UK and NI. FASD can be described as a public health epidemic hiding in plain sight. It affects every classroom in every school in every town in the UK, but will in most cases be undiagnosed.
- Because the presenting behaviours and characteristics of FASD mimic so many other conditions, there is grave risk of misdiagnosis, particularly of AD(H)D.
- FASD is a disability that lasts through the entire lifespan and there is no treatment. It cannot be cured reversed or outgrown, as it permanently compromises lives and life chances, e.g. by school failure, substance abuse, as well as being troubled and in trouble.
- However, when the condition is understood by families and schools etc, behaviour can be supported and improved through appropriate strategies.

Pause for reflection

Are you shocked or surprised by any of the key facts about FASD? Why or why not?

Sex, alcohol and the COVID-19 pandemic

Please read the attached article by Jonathon Sher, published 17th April 2020, also available at

https://www.holyrood.com/comment/view,sex-alcohol-and-the-covid19pandemic_15379.htm

While the article is focused on FASD in Scotland, the key points are relevant across the UK, and indeed, the wider world.

Questions for reflection

1. Most children with FASD do not have the physical characteristics seen in Foetal Alcohol **Syndrome**. Given the statistics, it is likely that all schools, indeed all classes, will have children with undiagnosed FASD. How can you increase your knowledge and understanding of FASD so that you are more likely to recognise it?
2. How can schools support accurate diagnosis, thus avoiding misdiagnosis, particularly of AD(H)D, which leads to inappropriate signposting, strategies and medication?
3. How can schools broach this very sensitive area with parents and carers?
4. How can schools raise awareness of FASD across the whole school and maybe even local community?
5. **Covid-19 relevance** Alcohol sales have spiked across the UK during the past month. The combination of being locked down, feeling continuous high levels of anxiety, stress and fear, as well as the common tendency to turn to both sex and alcohol for comfort and relief makes increasingly risky behaviour likely. How can you get the message from today's reading out to your school families? Effective communication of the messages in the article will significantly reduce the possibility of a spike in cases of FASD next year.

Don't forget your self-care today, how can you pamper yourself? (We're going to be making child-friendly pampering face masks tomorrow!) Enjoy the blue skies and be sure to walk in a green space. Have a good day, keep safe and healthy and ring or email me to chat if that would help. **Jenny x**