

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Language Guide

This guide is intended to provide alternative words or phrases for those commonly found in news media and other public communications. We propose these be used in an effort to promote the dignity of those living with FASD and their families.

People living with FASD

Instead of:	Please Use:	Why?
Suffering with	Individual living with FASD	Many people who have FASD find these words offensive because they imply that they are not living happy, productive lives. People who live with disabilities would like others to focus on their strengths and positive attributes. Those living with FASD don't perceive themselves in these negative ways and aren't looking for people to feel sorry for them.
Damaged by		
FASD kids		The FASD community prefers to use "person first" language. This means that you talk about a person that has a disability (as well as many other traits) rather than presenting the disability as the whole of who they are. Another example would be "a person with an addiction" rather than an "addict".
(Innocent) Victims Or Injured		These words imply that there has been a perpetrator and is very negative towards mothers. Many individuals with FASD do not blame their mothers, and they don't want others to. Birth mothers do not seek to harm their children. This language jeopardizes both women's willingness to seek help and children's future relationships with their mothers.
Afflicted by	Affected by/Impacted by	This presents a more neutral tone to their disability. The term afflicted presumes that the person does not lead a happy, productive life.
External brain	Use with caution. Could also use: Support person/ circle/ network/coach	The term external brain was created recently to give people an understanding that someone with FASD may require coaching at times to help with certain brain functions, like memory or problem solving. However, it has since been rejected by some as offensive

		because it implies that they need a whole new brain to be “normal”. A support person is a more accurate and neutral term.
Mentally disabled	Intellectual disability	This language is used in the United States, and can be found in their literature, but is not seen as acceptable in Canada as a way to describe people.

Women who drank during pregnancy

Instead of:	Please Use:	Why?
Poor choices Or Irresponsible		Shaming women with these words does not promote prevention efforts, but rather makes women afraid to seek services that may help them.
Alcoholics/addicts	Women who use alcohol or drugs	Research tells us that women do not intentionally seek to harm their unborn children. Some women may be unaware of their pregnancy when drinking heavily. Some women have addictions and mental health problems and find quitting extremely difficult despite pregnancy. Some women have partners who encourage them to drink while pregnant.
Child abusers Or Don't care about their children Or Bad parents	Parent	
Admitted to alcohol use	Confirmed alcohol use	The term admitted implies that this a confession of wrongdoing and has a moral judgement overtone. The term confirmed is neutral.

Topic in general

Instead of:	Please Use:	Why?
100% preventable	Preventable	This oversimplifies a complex issue. While theoretically possible, totally eradicating alcohol use during pregnancy, like all other alcohol related harms such as drunk driving and addiction, is not a likely reality. This oversimplification removes all context in a woman's life and defines the issue as a single, easy choice. In turn, this erodes the public's understanding and compassion for an issue with multiple factors for many women.
"Just one drink"	Binge drinking or drinking 1 to 2 units of alcohol on a regular basis are patterns of highest risk to the developing fetus.	There is no evidence that one drink during an entire pregnancy causes significant harm.
Focussing the majority of the story on the challenges of living with FASD	A balanced approach or focus on how supports or adaptations have made good things possible	The public understands that FASD is not a good thing. A continual focus on this creates stereotypes and stigma that challenges are the main attributes of people with FASD.
Focussing on facial differences	Focus on the intellectual or neurobehavioural disability	Anyone diagnosed with FASD has a neurobehavioural disability; the impact of this can range from person to person. Only a small percentage of individuals with FASD have any physical signs. Focus on physical features implies that someone with those has a more severe form of FASD which is not true.
FAS, pFAS, ARND, FAE	FASD	As of 2015, there are only two diagnostic categories for Canada (2015); FASD with facial features and FASD without facial features. The term FASD is understood to encompass any alcohol-related diagnosis from the past. The other acronyms will no longer be used for diagnostic purposes.
Secondary disabilities	Secondary challenges/impacts/risks	This term was created in the US several decades ago to describe the adverse life experiences that were documented to occur for individuals with FASD at a disproportionate rate (mental health issues, addictions, criminality, poor school engagement etc.). New science is suggesting that mental health concerns and addictions may be a primary part of the FASD disability. Other challenges, while concerning, are not biologically driven and should not be termed

		a disability (eg. homelessness) nor are they specific to FASD; concerns like school drop out and criminality are more likely to occur for any individual who is not provided adequate supports and understanding.
FASD is caused by maternal alcohol use/maternal alcohol exposure	FASD is caused by prenatal alcohol exposure/ when a developing baby is exposed to alcohol	When describing or defining FASD, the least stigmatizing approach is to move emphasis away from the behavior of the birth mother and shift that emphasis to the substance of alcohol.