

## Introduction

Teachers have a special opportunity every day to bring a new vision of the world to their students. Teachers can help students learn new skills and information, and give them the chance to see their own possibilities and strengths. Some students are easier to teach than others. They may have the readiness skills, confidence, support from home and personal motivation to learn successfully.

Other students need learning activities that are carefully structured and reinforced. Often, such students have a history of school failure, and as a result have developed a negative self-concept. They may not have the benefits of a consistent, nurturing home life. A few students have birth defects that affect their learning. These are the students who require educators' best skills.

Within this group of challenging students are students with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). Each student with FASD has a unique pattern of strengths and weaknesses. Though they have, by definition, neurological patterns of deficit based on their prenatal exposure to alcohol, the specific ways these impairments are demonstrated on a day-to-day basis vary.

*Teaching Students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Building Strengths, Creating Hope* is a revision and expansion of the 1997 Alberta Learning teacher resource, *Teaching Students with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Possible Prenatal Alcohol-related Effects*. Much has been learned since the 1997 publication. This new guide offers teachers information and specific ideas to better meet the learning needs of students with FASD.

Educators now have more information and greater capacity to help students with FASD. Across North America, there are many more physicians and other professionals, such as psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, and social workers, who are trained in effective approaches in assessment, diagnosis and program planning. Many teachers are attending workshops and have greater support to meet the educational needs of these children. Across the nation, members of the judicial system and police are more aware of the issues of the FASD population, and are developing training programs and sharing information. Many parents have also had opportunities to receive education and assistance through support groups and conferences.

The collected knowledge and understanding of these diverse groups have combined to produce overlapping circles of understanding and support which can be woven together to create a net of safety and hope for individuals affected by prenatal exposure to alcohol. Using our resources and collaborative efforts, we can build their strengths and create hope for their futures.

This document is divided into five chapters and a set of appendices.

**Chapter 1: What is FASD?** This chapter provides background and terminology to help educators understand the current medical diagnostic definition of FAS and the term FASD. It also explains the diagnostic process, primary and secondary disabilities, and the strengths and protective factors often seen in students with FASD.

**Chapter 2: Key concepts for planning effective education programs** Chapter 2 provides background on the complexity of this disability. It outlines variations in patterns of prenatal alcohol exposure, contributing factors to learning and behaviour, and the range of strengths and needs evident in this population of students. This chapter also presents basic ideas on how professionals can work together from the point of medical diagnosis to the coordination of services in schools and the larger community.

**Chapter 3: Organizing for instruction** This chapter provides overarching strategies on structuring the learning environment, developing effective routines, building skills for whole-class instruction, teaching social and adaptive skills, and helping students generalize new skills and concepts. These strategies benefit many students, not only those with FASD. This chapter also includes information on developing and implementing individualized program plans (IPPs).

**Chapter 4: Creating a positive classroom climate** Chapter 4 offers suggestions for building a positive classroom climate and maintaining a supportive learning environment. It includes specific strategies for understanding the intent of behaviour, structuring the environment to accommodate active behaviours, ensuring smooth transitions, establishing clear rules and expectations, and using positive reinforcements.

**Chapter 5: Responding to students' needs** This chapter includes strategies related to specific areas of developmental functioning. The strategies are organized by domain, including attention, memory, language and communication, and academic skills. These domains are defined and described, and are followed by suggestions for remediating and compensating for these specific needs.

**Appendix A** includes reproducible blackline masters to use with students, parents and other educators.

**Appendix B** includes sample visuals teachers can customize to use with students.

**Appendix C** includes three inservice activities to familiarize school staff with this resource.

Throughout this document, the words *families* and *parents* refer to all primary caregivers, whether they be biological parents, foster or adoptive parents, group home workers, guardians or extended family members.

*Teaching Students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder* is Book 10 in the *Programming for Students with Special Needs* series. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, other books in the series and other Alberta Learning resources are mentioned in sidebars. Various other resources are also mentioned throughout this document. These titles have been provided as sources of further information on various topics and do not imply Alberta Learning's approval for the use of these resources. Teachers and other district staff should preview resources and assess their appropriateness before using them with students or recommending them to others.