

FASD training for foster parents



addressing the issue

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) are common. Each year, an estimated one in 20 first graders have an FASD—that's more prevalent than autism (1). Although that's a high number, the percentage of children with an FASD who are entering protective services and still have spent time in foster care are significantly higher.

Because so many children in foster care may have an FASD, and because foster parents need and want the tools to effectively parent the children in their care, ongoing required training on this topic is essential. This training would prevent children from being moved unnecessarily within the foster care system and would increase identification and diagnosis of this disability. Informed foster parents lead to informed communities and other professionals.

recommendation

Currently, newly licensed foster parents must have FASD training in their first year. Instead, the Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (MOFAS) recommends one hour of training for all non-emergency foster parents as part of their 12 hours of required training each year. This training would provide a basic overview of FASD, effective parenting strategies, resource information, and referrals for support.

sources

1) PA May, CD Chambers, et. al, "Prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders in 4 US Communities," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2018.

2 & 3) S. J.. Atley, PhD, J.Stachowiak, RN, MN, S. Clarren, MD, Ch Clausen, RN, MN, (2002) Application of the fetal alcohol syndrome facial photographic screening tool in a foster care population, *Journal of Pediatrics*, Volume 141, Number 5.

4) Whitaker, R. C.; Orzol, S. M.; Kahn, R. S. 2006. Maternal Mental Health, Substance Use and Domestic Violence in the Year After Delivery and Subsequent Behavior Problems in Children at Age 3 Years. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 63: 551-560.

the reality

10x

The prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in the foster care system is 10 times higher than in the general population (2).

75%

As many as 75% of children in foster care have a family history of mental illness, drug, and/or alcohol abuse making them at higher risk for an FASD (3).

2-3x

Young children with maternal risk factors of substance use, mental health conditions, and domestic violence exposure are 2-3 times more likely to experience aggression, anxiety, depression, and hyperactivity than children without these risk factors (4).

trauma

Lack of understanding, frustration, and ineffectiveness as a foster parent can lead to multiple placements, thus increasing childhood trauma.

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personal story

words from a foster mom



valerie's story

My name is Valerie Smith, and I have years of experience serving and raising children with special needs. The children I served had dealt with severe levels of abuse and neglect, and many had varying and multiple diagnoses. I have been a personal care assistant (PCA) for 27 years. Over the past 23 years I have provided therapeutic foster care, shelter care, and overnight respite care. I have served 326 children as a foster care provider. Many of the children I have served had drug and alcohol related birth defects or were living with an FASD.

It was not until I adopted my two boys who are also impacted by FASD that I finally got connected with MOFAS and received FASD training. There are so many kids in the system that are impacted by FASD. If you are not knowledgeable about what the kids are dealing with, then you are not able to help them properly and truly understand their needs. Before adopting my boys I was given information on FASD, but it was never as thorough as an actual training. Hit and miss information does not work. You can't just give people a couple of paragraphs to read when there is so much more to understanding FASD.

why FASD training is important

With MOFAS conveniently located in the Twin Cities, I don't know why the counties and private agencies I was working with never had trainings offered to foster parents, PCAs, and respite care providers. I took the time to ask for help. I have 27 years of medical experience and still found I needed to seek out FASD training in order to really help the children I was working with and fostering. I wanted to be more aware and more educated so that I could become a better person and caregiver.

The information that I learn from MOFAS trainings I take back to my community. I educate the people who surround my boys. I talk with their teachers, their bus drivers, therapists, and everyone else who is involved with my children. These children are human beings. They want to be a part of society, they don't want to be pointed out or shut out, and these trainings help pave the road to make sure they can lead a good life and fulfill their potential.