



# National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Helping children & families by fighting the leading known cause of mental retardation & birth defects

## FASD: What the Faith Community Should Know



### Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is an umbrella term describing the range of effects that can occur in an individual whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. These effects may include physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities with possible lifelong implications.

FASD is 100% preventable if women abstain from drinking during pregnancy.

Faith communities offer a unique and underutilized conduit for delivering information to help people make healthy life choices.

Faith communities:

• Have access to important populations for FASD prevention including youth and parents;

- Are service oriented and could be a good source of volunteers;
- Focus on values and social responsibility; and
- Have strong credibility within the greater community.

The majority of children with FASD are born to alcohol abusing or alcoholic women.

- Alcoholism is a disease. People who have the disease have lost control over their drinking and are not able to stop without help.
- Approximately 14 million Americans – 7.4 percent of the population – meet the diagnostic criteria for alcohol abuse or alcoholism.
- Approximately one in four children under 18 years of age in the United States is exposed to alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence in the family.

Individuals with FASD and the families who care for them depend on social networks as a source of support and encouragement.

Spirituality can help individuals with FASD, regardless of their level of understanding or ability to function:

Involvement in a faith community can provide:

- Help in seeking inner forgiveness of the birth mother;
- Basis for accepting self as a good person, "child of God";
- Healthy role models;
- Healthy social environment for nurturing friendships;
- Support when problems occur;
- Inclusion in regular groups that are not focused on disabilities; and
- Encouragement of healthy lifestyles and behaviors.

The faith community can help prevent FASD and support affected families by:

- Incorporating FASD into a weekly sermon;
- Highlighting a family in the community living with FASD in the weekly bulletin;
- Inviting an FASD trainer to a youth group meeting; and
- Sponsoring workshops for parents about how to talk with their children about sensitive subjects, such as alcohol use and sexual activity.

