

LAKELAND CENTRE FOR  
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## TALKING TO ADULTS ABOUT FASD DIAGNOSIS

### **A guide for professionals**

## **TALKING TO ADULTS ABOUT: FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD) DIAGNOSIS**

In order to have an adult referred to the Lakeland Centre for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder for a diagnosis, the individual will need to be consulted and in agreement to progress with the process. This often puts the person making the referral in a dilemma of how to approach the topic. It is our hope that this guide will assist you in entering into that discussion.

When Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) was first coined as a diagnosis it was intended as a diagnosis in two areas, the adult and their advocates/supports. We are able to offer information and support to the client and their advocates to gain insight on how to be successful in their lives and to prevent future children from being born with FASD. By diagnosing adults we are able to assist the agencies that are or will be involved to understand what is appropriate and effective for their client to be successful.

### **Prior to the meeting:**

- ▶ Determine why you suspect this adult to have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).
- ▶ Remind yourself that you are not in a position to place blame on the birth mother, that you will remain open minded.
- ▶ Remember that agencies and organizations are very intimidating for clients and their supports and it is important to choose the best location to have this discussion, a neutral place may be less threatening.
- ▶ Are you the best person to have this conversation? Is there an advocate that needs to be in attendance? Do you need coworkers or other professionals to be involved?
- ▶ Is there an agency policy on who speaks to the adults about referrals?

### **Entering the Discussion:**

- ▶ Advise the client of some of the behaviours or concerns you have. This could start with: I would like to discuss some of the learning/behaviour problems you are experiencing.
- ▶ Suggest to the client that you would like to work together to figure out these difficulties.
  - Are you experiencing any of these concerns at home? At work? Socially?
  - Were these difficulties present last year? Year before? When did they start?
  - Were there any problems as an infant? As a child? You will want to identify what is a memory and what has been told to them.
  - Do you know if maybe your mother drank alcohol while she was pregnant with you? Maybe she did before she knew she was pregnant. Always leave a door open for the non judgement of the birth mother.
  - Were there any complications at birth that you were told?
- ▶ Ask the client what are the issues that are of interest to them, and why they would want a diagnosis. The client will have a personal interest to continue, this could be in the area of supportive services, agency understanding or a personal desire “to know for sure, one way or the other”.

- ▶ You may choose to review the results of any testing that has been previously completed with the client.
- ▶ It is important to remember that the client already knows that they are different from their peers, that they are not as successful in areas of employment, education or socially. They just didn't know why.
- ▶ Any of these questions may bring about the admission you are looking for with gentle probing.
- ▶ Be sensitive when asking "Did your birth mother drink when she was pregnant and how much did she drink?" This statement is loaded with judgement and will likely bring about defensive and angry responses. It is easier if this is structured as: "Is there a possibility that your birth mother drank alcohol while she was pregnant with you, perhaps before she knew she was expecting?"
- ▶ Praise the client for their courage and honesty. Explain that a diagnosis helps to put appropriate programming and services in place. Let the client know that there are services and supports that can be accessed to help them be successful in their lives.
- ▶ Do not become frustrated if you have to have this discussion more than once with the client.
- ▶ Remember, that some clients may be involved in the addiction cycle and may not be open to having a discussion at this time. If it is a serious concern, please discuss these with the appropriate services.
- ▶ Alcoholism can be a cyclical family problem so as professionals we need to consider family history of alcoholism. There may be a possibility of the clients parents being FASD. If you suspect this then the conversation may take a different path, please consult the centre for the best approach.

**Other Community Resources that may assist:**

AADAC  
 Children Services  
 Human Resources and Employment  
 Mental Health  
 Physician / Public Health

Alberta Justice  
 Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)  
 Mothers to Be Program (if available)  
 Persons with Developmental Disabilities

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