

LAKELAND CENTRE FOR  
FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER



TALKING TO PARENTS ABOUT A FASD DIAGNOSIS  
FOR THEIR CHILD

**A guide for professionals**

## **TALKING TO PARENTS ABOUT A FASD DIAGNOSIS FOR THEIR CHILD**

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

When FASD was first coined as a diagnosis it was intended as a diagnosis for two people, the child and the mother. By diagnosing the children we find the birth mothers and are able to offer them support and reassurance in obtaining supports to prevent future children from being born with FASD.

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

- ▶ Determine why you suspect this child to have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).
- ▶ Remind yourself that you are not in a position to place blame on this mother, that you will remain open minded.
- ▶ Remember that schools are very intimidating for parents and is this the best location to have this discussion. Perhaps a neutral place or the family home may be less threatening to the parents.
- ▶ Are you the best person to have this conversation? In a school, who has the best rapport with the parents?
- ▶ Is there a school policy on who speaks to the parents about referrals?

### **Entering the Discussion:**

- ▶ Advise the parents of some of the behaviour or concerns you have about the child.
- ▶ You may choose to review the results of any testing that has been completed with the child
- ▶ Suggest to the parents that you would like to work together to figure out these difficulties.
  - Are you experiencing any of these concerns at home?
  - Were these difficulties present last year? Year before?
  - Were there any problems as a toddler? As an infant?
  - How was your pregnancy?
  - What was happening at the time of your pregnancy, what was life like?
  - When did you find out you were pregnant?
  - Any chance that you drank before you found out you were pregnant? Were you taking any medication?
  - Were there any complications at birth?

- ▶ Any of these questions may bring about the admission you are looking for with gentle probing.
- ▶ Do NOT ask: “Did you drink when you were pregnant?” This statement is loaded with judgement and will likely bring about defensive and angry responses.
- ▶ Praise women for their bravery in speaking up to help their child. Explain that a diagnosis helps to put appropriate programming and services in place for the child.
- ▶ Do not become frustrated if you have to have this discussion more than once with the parent.
- ▶ Remember, that some parents may still 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 Children Services Authority.
- ▶ 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 child’s parent 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 Authority

Public Health

Mental Health

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