

The importance of early intervention

Intervention is most effective in the early years because this is a critical period of childhood development. If neurodevelopmental disorders can be diagnosed early, tailored interventions can be undertaken at that time to support your child. If early intervention is needed, you can access many types of support, including health and community systems, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), education services and playgroups.

If you have any concerns

- 1) Discuss them with your child's educators.
- 2) Document your observations and concerns.
- 3) Meet with your doctor or maternal and child health service. Each state and territory has a helpline or intake service to help you.
- 4) Follow up with your child's educators about any information provided by your health professionals.
- 5) Have a meeting with your child's educators to set goals between home and the service that support consistency. Follow this up with regular meetings to evaluate these goals and set new ones.

Remember: your child's educators are here to work with you and support your child and family through this process.

Worried about your child's development?

You know your child. Our early childhood professional educators are here to discuss any questions or concerns confidentially and without judgement. The rights and best interests of your child are paramount.

Let's have a chat

Make a time to have a chat about your concerns; your child's early childhood educators are here to help.

Acknowledgement of Country

Early Childhood Australia and NOFASD Australia acknowledge the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to the land and community. We pay our respect to the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of our First Nations people and to the Elders both past and present.

This work is supported by the Australian Government Department of Health.



www.nofasd.org.au www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

THROUGH Different Eyes



Understanding young children living with
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

What is a neurodevelopmental disorder?

Neurodevelopmental disorders, also known as spectrum-based disorders, are a group of conditions first seen in early development. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder.

FASD is caused when a developing fetus is exposed to alcohol. Alcohol can impact an unborn child at any time during pregnancy; this will affect each child differently depending on the amount, frequency and timing of alcohol use.

Other spectrum disorders include, but are not limited to, Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Cerebral Palsy.

Neurodevelopmental disorders impact children's cognitive, social and emotional development, executive functioning and speech. Approximately one in ten children will receive a diagnosis for a neurodevelopmental disorder.

Neurodevelopmental disorders and development

Early childhood experiences are crucial for shaping lifelong health, and healthy development. Sensory pathways, such as hearing and vision, develop first, followed by language skills and higher cognitive functions. The first eight years of life lay the foundation for future learning and success.

FASD, like other neurodevelopmental disorders, is a complex condition that can affect children in a wide range of ways. This might look different for every child, as each child and their development is unique.

While early diagnosis can be a slow process, it is the key to helping children access intervention, support and understanding, which, in turn, offers them the best possible start to life.

Executive functioning

Executive functioning is the ability to execute complex tasks.

Children with neurodevelopmental disorders experience reduced executive functioning skills. Children with spectrum-based disorders are likely to need support with:

- impulses
- regulating feelings
- processing information
- problem solving
- motor skills
- language and speech
- memory.

These skills can be developed through practice, modelling, play and warm and consistent responses from adults.

Transitions

For some children, transitions can be stressful. There are many different types of transitions that children will experience throughout their day, for example:

- moving between home and an early learning service
- between play and meal times
- from one activity to another
- from one room and educator to another.

Your child might start to become stressed if they are too rushed, if they are not ready to stop what they are doing or if transitions are inconsistent or unpredictable. If you are finding this is the case, make some time to speak with your child's educator to make a plan together about how to best support your child.

What should I do if I am feeling worried?

Remember: you know your child best. If you have any concerns about your child's development, make time to talk with the educators at your service. Early childhood professionals are there to help you. They can discuss any questions or concerns you may have about your child's development confidentially and without judgment.

Educators cannot offer a diagnosis but they can provide referral pathways to those who can.

Successful early identification and intervention provide access to a coordinated treatment approach from health services, advocates, families and early childhood professionals.

Every child is different, with different needs and interests. It is essential to work in partnership with your child's service to foster open, two-way communication with educators about your child. A genuine partnership with your child's service and meaningful discussions with educators provide crucial support for you and your child.

