



Welcome to the **Positive Choices Webinar Series**

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Australian Government

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY
—
Matilda Centre



Acknowledgement of country

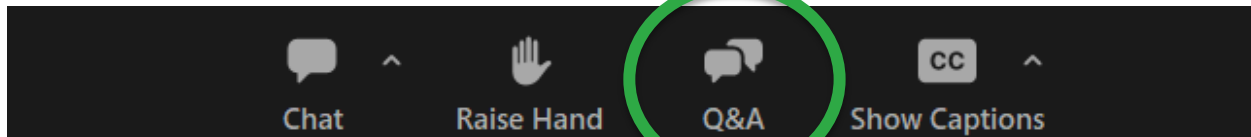
I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, water and community. I am currently on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to Elders, past and present. I further acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which you are and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

I would also like to acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us for the webinar today.



Housekeeping

- 1 Listen only mode.
- 2 This webinar is being recorded and will be made available on the Positive Choices website.
- 3 We will have a Q&A session at the end of the webinar. Please add questions to the Q&A box available.





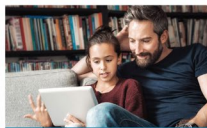
What is Positive Choices?

positivechoices.org.au



Teachers & Schools

Evidence-based teaching programs and activities, webinars for teachers, and resources for your students



Parents & Families

Parenting advice and information to help you talk to your children about drugs and alcohol



Students

Facts, advice and interactive tools to help you find out information about drugs and alcohol and make positive choices



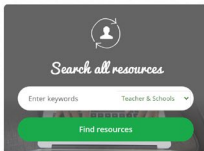
Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Peoples

Evidence based drug education resources for individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse communities



Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples

A collection of culturally appropriate resources based on research and consultation with people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities



- Central access point for trustworthy, up-to-date drug and alcohol information and educational resources.
- Developed by the Matilda Centre in consultation with teachers, parents and students. Funded by Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.
- Learning resources, factsheets, videos, webinars and games to engage young people with drug education.
- Access to classroom-based drug prevention programs that are proven to reduced drug-related harms.



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Supporting secondary students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Learning with FASD

Associate Professor Louise Mewton

Julia Riches

Georgette Borel

The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, the University of Sydney

11th June 2025



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Learning with FASD: New evidence-based resources for secondary school educators.



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Learning
with



1. What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)?
2. New resources for secondary school teaching and support staff
3. Strategies for teaching and support staff

What is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder?

Associate Professor Louise Mewton

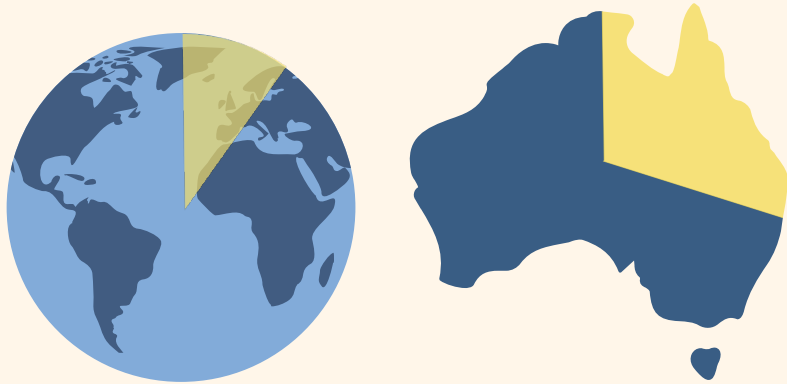
Program Lead in Lifespan and Brain Health Research

What do you know about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder?



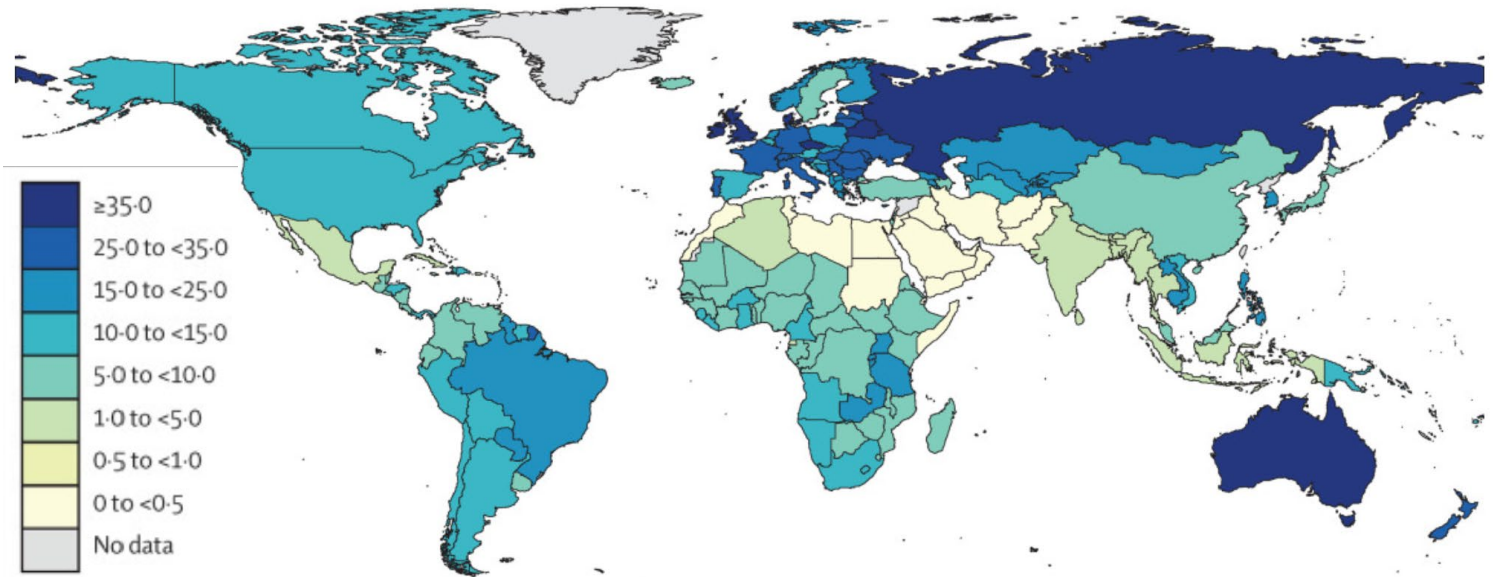
Alcohol use in pregnancy

- ~10% of women globally drink alcohol when pregnant
- ~36% of women in Australia drink alcohol when pregnant



Estimation of national, regional, and global prevalence of alcohol use during pregnancy and fetal alcohol syndrome: a systematic review and meta-analysis

Svetlana Popova, Shannon Lange, Charlotte Probst, Gerrit Gmel, Jürgen Rehm



Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder

Australian Guidelines for Assessment and Diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

FULL GUIDELINES

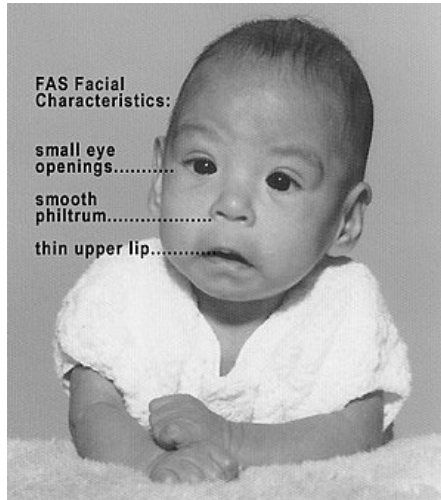
APRIL 2025

FAS Facial Characteristics:

small eye openings.....

smooth philtrum.....

thin upper lip.....



A

Evidence of Prenatal Alcohol Exposure (PAE)

+

Confirmed PAE above low risk levels at any time during gestation

or

Presence of 3 sentinel facial features

B

Presence of pervasive and clinically significant neurodevelopmental impairments in 3 or more domains*

+

Direct evidence

+

Reports from informants in different settings

C

Neurodevelopmental impairments result in functional impacts that require significant supports

+

D

Onset of impairments is during the developmental period

+

E

Presentation not better explained by other factors

+

Specifiers

Any sentinel facial features, head circumference and/or physical size restriction



Prevalence of FASD



- Globally, estimated that **1 in 13** prenatally-exposed infants will have FASD
- Prevalence in Australia is **6.7 per 1000**
- But data are not population-based, rely on ad hoc reporting, or incomplete data collections and are **likely to underestimate the true prevalence**
- Recent studies using active case ascertainment in the US suggest conservative prevalence rates of **1.1-5.0%** of 6-7 year olds
- In Canada, active case ascertainment indicates that the prevalence of FASD is **2-3%**

Global prevalence of alcohol use and binge drinking during pregnancy, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder

Authors: [Svetlana Popova](#) ✉, [Shannon Lange](#), [Charlotte Probst](#), [Gerrit Gmel](#), and [Jürgen Rehm](#) | [AUTHORS INFO & AFFILIATIONS](#)

Publication: Biochemistry and Cell Biology • 23 August 2017 • <https://doi.org/10.1139/bcb-2017-0077>

Profile of those diagnosed with FASD



- Median age of diagnosis is 8.8 years (n=1074 confirmed cases of FASD)
- 17% had 3 facial features; 18% had microcephaly
- Severe neurodevelopmental impairment in attention (80.5%), executive function (76.6%), adaptive behaviour/social skills/social communication (72.8%), language (65.2%)
- Comorbidities included ADHD (67.6%) communication disorders (53.8%), attachment disorders (39.8%), trauma (38.5%), sleep disorders (27.6%), anxiety (26.9%), motor disorders (27.0%), and intellectual disabilities (25.7%) (FASDAR, Jun 2023)



FASD in adolescence

Learning
with **F** **A** **S** **D**



New evidence-based resources for secondary school teaching and support staff

Julia Riches

Research Officer, Learning with FASD

Research team & key stakeholders

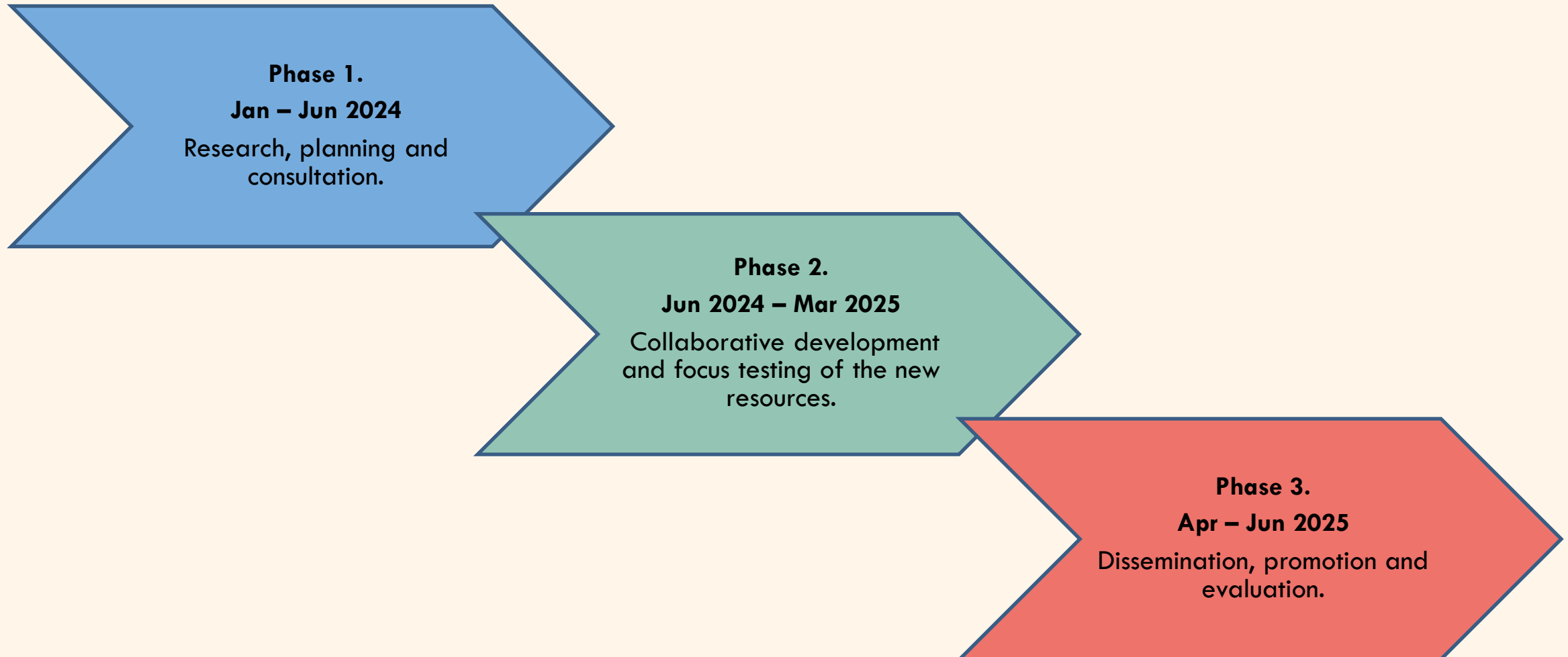


The original primary focused website

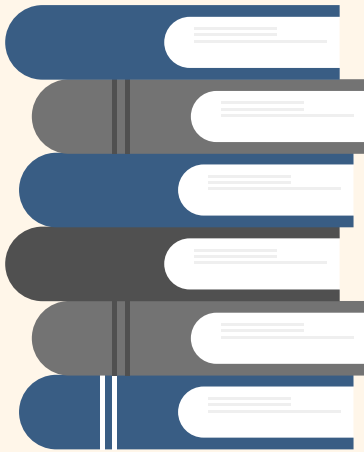
Learning with **F A S D**



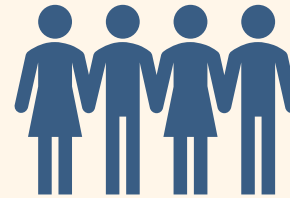
The secondary school expansion



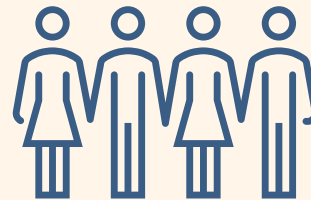
Phase one: Research & consultation



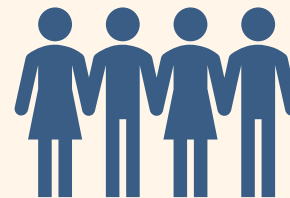
**138 relevant resources
identified in scoping
review**



Secondary school staff (N = 34)



FASD or education experts (N = 6)



Parents and/or caregivers (N = 16)

Phase one: Research & consultation

- Gaps identified by the **scoping review**.
- Two **cross cutting themes** emerged from consultations.
- Priority areas identified by **educators, experts, and parents and caregivers**.



Phase two: Development

- The resources and expanded website were developed using a multi-stage review process.
- At each stage, refinements were made by the research team based on consultation feedback.



The updated website



Secondary school resources

Substance use

- Individuals with FASD are at increased risk of harmful substance use.
- Provides educators with strategies to guide students against drug and alcohol related harms.

Mental health

- Over 90% of people with FASD experience mental health challenges
- Adolescence is a key period for the emergence of mental health challenges.
- Identified as a key topic by experts.

Social and emotional development

- Provides a framework for educators to explicitly teach social and emotional skills.
- Identified as a key topic by secondary school staff.

Transitions during adolescence

- Transitions include primary to secondary school, moving between classrooms, transitioning out of secondary school.
- Identified as a key topic by experts.

Secondary school resources

FASD in adolescence

- FASD presents differently in secondary school aged children compared to primary school age.
- An introductory resource for secondary school educators.

Managing challenging behaviours

- Challenging behaviours such as violence, bullying, or inappropriate behaviour may arise for adolescents with FASD.
- Identified as a key topic by parents and caregivers, and experts.

Trauma

- Trauma is extremely common among young people with FASD.
- The challenges associated with trauma may overlap with and intensify the difficulties associated with FASD.

Strategies for teaching and support staff

Georgette Borel

Research Assistant, Learning with FASD

Key points & underpinning principles



There is no typical pattern of impairment in FASD. Each individual with FASD will have a unique combination of strengths and challenges and thus require different supports.

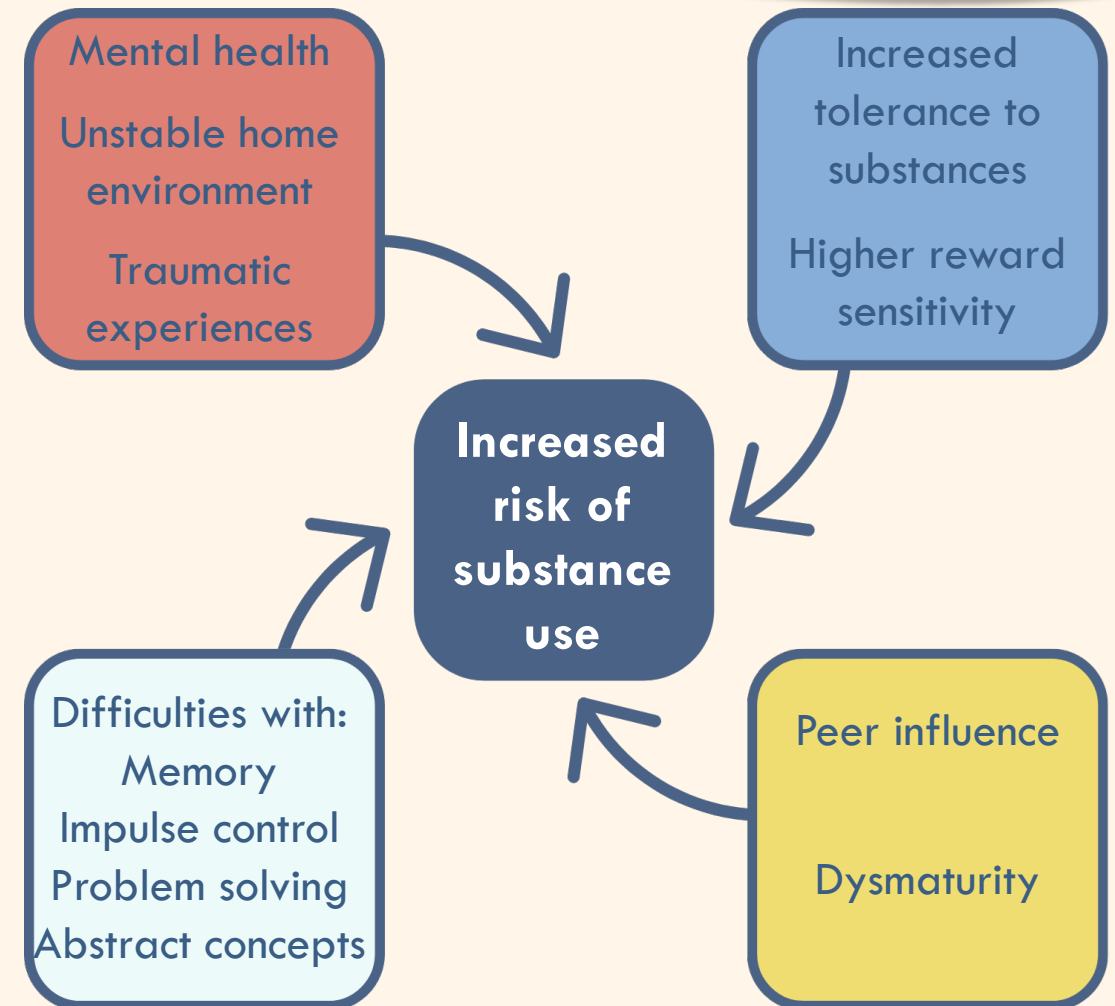
Young people with FASD will typically show a pattern of **dysmaturity**. This means they will display varying levels of maturity in different areas of development. Expectations should be shifted to match developmental maturity rather than chronological age.

Don't remove supports or scaffolding from students once improvements have occurred.



Substance use and FASD

- PAE is associated with greater alcohol, cannabis and tobacco use, even when other factors such as age, sex, education and prenatal exposure to other substances are accounted for.
- Young people with FASD may be more likely to initiate substance use earlier, and engage in risky drinking by age 14.
- Adults with FASD are up to 20x more likely to develop substance use disorders than the general population and approximately 46% engage in risky substance use.



Substance use strategies

Adapt educational materials



Use hands-on or visual examples



Model communication & social skills



Address motivations for substance use



Implement class discussion strategies



Facilitate access to resources



Collaborate with caregivers & community



Consider duty of care



Build trust



Prepare for individual discussions



Learning
with



Thank you!



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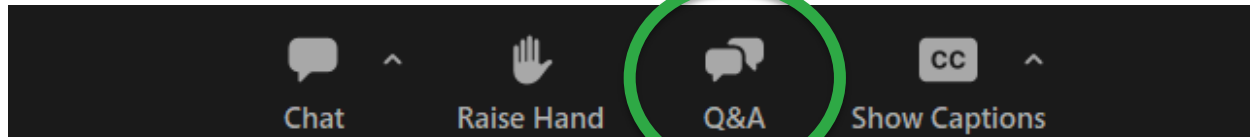


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Questions?





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