

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA FOG, FASD, & REGULATION:

A Guide for Caregivers

WHAT IS TRAUMA FOG?

“Trauma fog” describes confusion, slowed thinking, and emotional disconnection caused by trauma combined with the brain differences in FASD. This makes it hard for children to process information & regulate emotions.

SIGNS

- Difficulty with instructions or making mistakes even after reminders.
- Emotional meltdowns after minor stressors.
- Zoning out/nonresponsive.
- Overreacting or seeming untruthful due to memory gaps (confabulation).

HOW DOES TRAUMA & FASD AFFECT CHILDREN?

- Prenatal alcohol exposure affects brain development in areas controlling memory, attention, and executive function.
- Trauma adds layers of hypervigilance, fear, and mistrust.
- When both occur, the child’s brain may frequently enter “survival mode,” leading to shutdown, impulsivity, agitation, or apparent defiance when stress exceeds coping capacity.
- These behaviors are not a choice; they reflect an overwhelmed nervous system & slower processing.
- Neurotypical children may calm within hours after emotional overwhelm.
- Neurodivergent children, including those with FASD, may take **24 hours or longer** to fully recover from emotional overwhelm due to their unique brain & sensory processing differences.

HOW PARENTS CAN SUPPORT

PRIORITIZE SAFETY & CALM.

Slow speech and reduce sensory input.

SLOW DOWN COMMUNICATION.

Use short, concrete phrases and allow extra time for processing.

CREATE STRUCTURE & ROUTINE.

Keep predictability & preview new changes

REFRAME BEHAVIOR.

“Can’t right now” instead of “won’t.”

MEET DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL.

Not chronological age.

MODEL CO-REGULATION.

Use “felt safety” language while modeling your own regulation

Lower your voice, get on their eye level, and say “I can see this is hard” or “Let’s figure this out together.”

TEAM UP WITH OTHERS.

Collaborate with caregivers and professionals for consistent support.

Seek help from a trauma-informed therapist experienced in brain-based disabilities.

