

## 9 SEPTEMBER INTERNATIONAL FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER (FASD) DAY

### Background

In the late nineties, a group of biological and adoptive/foster parents situated in Canada and New Zealand collaborated to discuss how best to create awareness and share information regarding the management of children diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) across the globe. They were hugely concerned about the lack of information regarding FASD. An online parental support group was formed, and this eventually led to the establishment of an International FASD day. The first International FASD Day was held on 9 September 1999 (09/09/1999) and was also commemorated for the first time in South Africa on this date.

### Why 9 September?

The symbolism of the number 9 is very important, as a woman is normally pregnant for 9 months. The number 9 is therefore fully utilised (the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month at 09h00).

### What happens on 9 September?

Members of the public who are interested in raising awareness regarding FASD are requested to share the prevention message with small groups of friends/colleagues or other community members in doing the following:

- Meet on 9 September at 09h00
- Hand out FASD knots or button badges, if available (order from FARR at a cost of R25 per packet of 9 knots or R198 per packet of 9 button badges – each packet includes flags containing the FASD prevention message)
- Share a short FASD prevention message (\*See below: “What is the FASD prevention message”);
- 09h08: Observe one minute of silence to think about individuals affected by FASD and their family/caregivers, as well as how one can go about sharing this message with friends and family;
- 09h09: Break the silence by ringing a bell (or bells, e.g. church, school or hand bells) thereby calling people to take action in creating awareness about FASD, especially regarding the importance of alcohol-free pregnancies;
- Encourage participants to wear the FASD knot or button badges for the day and to share the message with at least 9 other people.

### What is the FASD knot?

The knot consists of a white rope tied in a specific way, known as the reef knot or the fisherman's knot. The knot is worn on your chest to raise awareness about FASD.

The knot symbolises the following:

- The rope symbolises the umbilical cord whereby the unborn baby (fetus) is supposed to receive nutritious food and not alcohol;
- The worn ends of the rope is a reminder of the damage that prenatal alcohol use can cause to the central nervous system (brain) and other organs of the unborn baby;

- The knot is so strong that it will not break if traction is put on it, it will only pull tighter. This symbolizes the strong support that we are supposed to give pregnant women to abstain from alcohol use;
- The circle inside the knot symbolises the womb (uterus) of the pregnant women which should provide a safe environment for the unborn baby free of alcohol.



FASD Awareness Knot

### What is the FASD Button Badge?

The FASD Button Badge is a new design and initiative by FARR. The badge is 55mm in diameter and can be temporarily fastened to the surface of a garment using a safety pin attached to the back of the badge. It is durable and delivers a high impact message and imagery. The FASD Button Badge (as seen below) was specifically designed for International FASD Day and contains a digital representation of the FASD Knot (symbolism explained above) and the prevention message: No alcohol is safe during pregnancy.



FASD Awareness Button Badge

### \*What is the FASD prevention message?

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) as the most severe form of these disorders, is the most common cause of permanent mental disability in the world. According to the World Health Association the prevalence of FASD in the world is projected to less than 1%. South Africa has the highest reported FASD prevalence rates in the world, with rates as high as 28 - 31% in some communities. It is estimated that our country's overall rate might be as high as 11%. (WHO report, 2018)

FASD is caused when a pregnant woman uses alcohol during pregnancy. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the most severe form of this condition. It is prevalent in all cultural, religious, and socio-economic groups. The alcohol consumed by the pregnant women is absorbed through her bloodstream and reaches the unborn baby (fetus) through the umbilical cord. The alcohol is poisonous (toxic) for the unborn baby, and it may damage any of the unborn baby's organs. The brain is the most vulnerable organ. For this reason, all children with FASD have some form of permanent brain damage, presenting as developmental delays, learning and behavioural problems. This condition is permanent and cannot be cured by medication.

There are still many myths around FASD. Some people still believe that a woman must be an alcoholic to have a child with FASD. Therefore the prevention message that must be spread is:

***No amount of alcohol is safe any time during pregnancy.***

***FASD causes permanent damage, but it is 100% preventable by not drinking alcohol during pregnancy.***

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