

# FASD: What Police Officers Should Know

FASD is an umbrella term used to describe a life-long range of conditions that impact the brain and body of people prenatally exposed to alcohol. FASD is a developmental disability impacting 1 in 20 Americans.

## Considerations for Law Enforcement

Individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) are often misunderstood as being deliberately defiant due to their seemingly inexplicable behavior. They may also struggle with focusing, providing coherent responses, managing emotions, and appear intoxicated even without substance use. These behaviors are a result of neurodiversity associated with FASD. Neglecting to recognize these deficits can lead to serious consequences, especially when dealing with law enforcement.

## D.E.A.R: Interviewing Approach

Direct Language	For people who struggle with abstract thinking, using clear and direct communication, avoiding suggestions, jargon, analogies, or sarcasm, and using open-ended questions while allowing more time for processing can reduce the chances of suggestibility and confabulation.
Engage Support System	Without adequate support, they may give false statements when stressed, emphasizing the need for support systems to protect them.
Accommodate Needs	Individuals may have sensory processing challenges and function at a developmental level younger than their age; law enforcement should speak calmly, avoiding physical contact and sudden gestures.
Remain Calm	Individuals with FASD may have difficulty managing emotions and stress, potentially leading to erratic behavior or worsening existing impairments, so law enforcement should prioritize staying calm and patient in interactions with them.

## Possible Indicators of FASD in Law Enforcement Settings

Desire to please	Predisposed to chattiness, compliance, and gullibility
Decision-making	Impulsive & inconsistent decisions (e.g., waiving of legal rights)
Memory Problems	Short- & long-term memory deficits, suggestibility, & and false confessions
Social Awkwardness	Social inappropriateness (e.g., laughing/smiling at unseemly topics), poor boundaries, immaturity, both verbal /nonverbal communication deficits
Sensory Challenges	Exacerbated negative behaviors in response to sensory input
Affect	Flat affect, no remorse, or lack of understanding the severity of offense
No perceived gain from crime	Illogical, offensive behavior or conduct

Jerrod Brown, Amy Jozan, and Megan Carter, "Interview Considerations – Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: A Beginner's Guide for Criminal Justice Interviewers," Police Chief Online, July 6, 2022.



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