

Stages of Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol Crowe, 2010

Many times, after I have spoken at an event or did training with professionals, I have been approached by people who tell of someone they know who was prenatally exposed to alcohol, but are “all right.” Those examples of “all right” seem to, in their mind, justify drinking while pregnant. Also, too often, the acronyms of FAS, FASD, ARND, ARBD are lost on the uneducated or unknowing layperson. After considerable thought, I decided to present a new way of looking at prenatal exposure to alcohol. Most people are aware of stages of cancer. I propose using Stages of Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol. I believe using a common terminology strategy provides an easier way of defining the impact of prenatal exposure to alcohol on our society, a strategy that does not leave any prenatally exposed person out of the picture. In this model, every person fits one of the five stages:

Stages of Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol

| <u>0</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>5</u> |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| <u>No prenatal exposure to alcohol</u> | <u>Prenatal exposure to alcohol with loss of potential not observable with current tools</u> | <u>Prenatal exposure to alcohol resulting in detectable lowered academic, social and emotional intelligence.</u> | <u>Prenatal exposure to alcohol resulting in observable exhibitions of brain damage behaviors, which result in academic failure, psychological diagnoses, criminal behaviors, depression</u> | <u>Prenatal exposure to alcohol resulting in physical manifestation and observable exhibitions of Stage 3 academic and social brain damage behaviors</u> | <u>Prenatal exposure to alcohol resulting in miscarriage, stillborn, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, death due to organ failure damage from prenatal exposure to alcohol.</u> |

Stage O -

No prenatal exposure to alcohol.

Depending on geographical area and demographics, an estimated 40% of children have been prenatally exposed to alcohol at some level at one or more occasion during the fetal development.

Each of the 40% of the prenatally exposed children fit one of the four remaining stages of prenatal exposure to alcohol. Research has established that the ethanol in alcohol is a teratogen. The Surgeon General of the United States declared there is no safe level of alcohol during a pregnancy. The following stages provide a category for every child/person exposed to alcohol in their fetal development. The author understands other drugs are involved in a percentage of pregnancies, but in most drug related cases, there is co-occurring drug and alcohol involvement. With the exception of meth, alcohol is, by far, the most damaging of teratogens. Meth, in some cases, causes strokes in the brain of the fetus, which can cause brain damage above and beyond the damage caused by co-occurring alcohol damage.

Stage 1

The child or person has been exposed to alcohol during the fetal development and there are no observable brain damage behaviors or physical anomalies linked to prenatal exposure to alcohol. Current tools are not finite enough to measure any loss of potential due to brain damage from prenatal exposure to alcohol. Unobservable loss of potential may occur in lower reading and math ability and higher levels of social difficulties, but not enough to cause concern for parents or teachers. Other loss of potential may exhibit in the inability to effectively utilize a high IQ because of white brain cell damage that limits the ability of the brain to send messages quickly and efficiently. Stage 1 prenatal exposure to alcohol may be exhibited by higher levels of anxiety and depression linked to minimal amounts of alcohol during pregnancy.

Stage 2

Stage 2 is prenatal exposure to alcohol resulting in detectible lowered academic, social and emotional intelligence. This loss of potential is realized in the school setting with exhibitions of lower reading and math skills and increased social behavior indicator, including ADHD and ADD, that cause concern in the school setting. Assessments used to identify this loss of potential include statewide testing, standardized testing, norm referenced assessments, reading assessments and math assessments, and a litany of academic assessments by school professionals including school psychologists. Loss of potential in social behaviors is assessed by teacher observations, behavioral assessments, Rtl (Response to Intervention) data, and assessments by school professionals including school psychologists. Prenatal damage that affects hearing and vision can

impact the child's ability to read and write, as well as the inability to maintain focus due to central nervous system damage. Children with Stage 2 prenatal exposure to alcohol are typically placed in Title I programs, Special Education program, and other remedial programs within the school. Many Stage 2 children do not qualify for Special Education because of an IQ over 70 or there is not enough discrepancy between their IQ and achievement,

Stage 3

Stage 3 prenatal exposure to alcohol is evident through observable exhibitions of brain damage, including clearly identified reading and math deficits, abnormal behaviors, and emotional immaturity, which result in academic failure, psychological diagnoses, low regulation of emotions and sexual behaviors, criminal behaviors, and/or depression. Stage 3 prenatal exposure to alcohol may have none to minimal anomalies to the eyes and mid-face, unrecognizable to all but the highly experienced, but may have normal head circumference and normal body size. Stage 3 prenatally exposed children usually are identified as Special Education students. If not identified as Special Education, these students may fall between the cracks in schools because their IQ scores are considered too high for Special Education, even though they can't perform at the level indicated by their IQ.

Stage 4

Stage 4 prenatal exposure to alcohol is evidenced through physical manifestation and observable exhibitions of Stage 3 academic and social brain damage behaviors, with increasingly lower levels of each. The physical manifestations could include facial anomalies, skeletal anomalies, and damage to the eyes, ears, heart, lungs, sternum, arms, fingers, legs, toes, genitals, rectum, and other organs of the body.

Stage 5

Stage 5 prenatal exposure to alcohol can result in miscarriage, death of the fetus, stillborn, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or death due to damage to organs of the body from prenatal exposure to alcohol.