



## Your Advice Matters

You could be a mother or even a sister, a cousin, an aunt, or a grandmother. You could be a close friend or a co-worker. If you're close to a pregnant woman who drinks alcohol, you can help her in ways you might not realize. Alcohol hurts at least 40,000 babies born each year.\* Women of any age, income, or educational level who drink alcohol during pregnancy risk causing problems to their fetus, families, and futures.

If you know someone who is (or may become) pregnant, don't be afraid to talk—and listen—to her. Some pregnant women who are careful not to smoke or use drugs during pregnancy may not know that even small amounts of alcohol can hurt their babies. Any information you can share will mean a lot. You'll show her that you care about her and her baby.

If you are a woman of childbearing age who is pregnant, is planning to get pregnant, or may become pregnant, read this information carefully and consider changes you may need to make. Pregnant women and the people closest to them all want the same thing—strong, healthy babies. Help your family member, friend, and yourself make the safe choice to not drink alcohol during pregnancy.

## Information To Share

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy may cause mild to severe problems, called “fetal alcohol spectrum disorders” (FASD). These problems may include lifelong physical, mental, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities.

Children whose mothers drank during pregnancy may need surgeries to fix physical problems. They may also have brain damage that can make it hard to remember things or solve problems. They may not be able to follow simple instructions or

form friendships. These challenges may make it difficult to focus in school or follow everyday routines.

The following are important facts to remember and share about FASD:

- ❖ FASD is permanent. It cannot be cured.
- ❖ FASD is 100 percent preventable. If a woman doesn't drink when she's pregnant, her baby will not have an FASD.
- ❖ There is no known safe time, safe amount, or safe type of alcohol to drink while pregnant. Beer and wine are just as harmful as hard liquor.
- ❖ If a pregnant woman stops drinking as soon as possible, she can improve her chances of having a healthy baby.

People with an FASD can grow, improve, and succeed in life with the right support, but you can help prevent problems like those mentioned above from even starting.

## The Role Native Women Can Play

Native women can have an important role in preventing FASD. As grandmothers, mothers, aunties, cousins, sisters, daughters, and friends, women understand the challenges and stresses of personal relationships, work, and bringing up children. Some people feel that women who drink alcohol while pregnant are uneducated or uncaring. Others may believe that members of certain groups (e.g., middle or upper class) do not have problems with FASD. The reality is that any woman can have a child with an FASD. It is especially important for women to keep open minds and to avoid harsh opinions or false assumptions. Being open and accepting will make it easier for other women to talk to you about their problems and concerns.

## Start the Conversation

Sometimes it's tough to start “the conversation” with a pregnant friend or family member who is drinking alcohol. Find a quiet place to sit and talk about having a healthy baby. Use a gentle tone of voice, and let her know that you care about her and her child. Remember that your opinion means a lot. Here are some things you might want to talk about:

- ❖ Ask her how she is feeling, and remind her that pregnancy is a sacred time.
- ❖ Share some of the facts about the problems alcohol can cause and how to prevent FASD.
- ❖ Tell her that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can hurt the baby—the baby drinks whatever she drinks. Alcohol goes into the bloodstream and passes to the baby through the umbilical cord.
- ❖ Explain that a baby's body cannot get rid of alcohol the same way that adult bodies can.
- ❖ Ask her to talk about problems that may be causing her to drink alcohol.
- ❖ Remind her that she can talk to you whenever she wants, and be sure to check in on her occasionally.
- ❖ Help her connect with a counselor or support group for additional information.

