



Forensic Assessment of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

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Interviewing the Birth Mom (and Informants)

Establishing the history of alcohol consumption is one of the most difficult diagnostic issues in FASD. The pregnant woman who consumes alcohol (perhaps along with drugs) is not always easily identified. Patients usually are not forthright about their drinking habits nor are they necessarily able to recall the precise quantities and timing of their drinks. However, in the absence of a specific biomarker to detect alcohol exposure, the prenatal alcohol exposure history remains pivotal in the diagnosis.

High risk: 4-6 drinks per occasion / 45 or more drinks per month (1 drink = 5 oz. alcohol)

Preparation: Explain to the birth mother that you want to determine everything she (and her unborn infant/your client) were exposed to during her pregnancy. Explain that sometimes, toxic chemicals/substances can cause birth defects that affect development in subtle ways. (Minimize the significance of what you'll be asking.) Say, "For example, even doctors didn't know until relatively recently that drinking alcohol was toxic to an unborn fetus, so many of them advised their patients to drink a glass or wine or beer to relax during their pregnancies." Explain that you are going to ask her questions about all of the toxins, not just alcohol, she might have come into contact with during her pregnancy.

Birth mother questions are divided into 3 categories: 1) before pregnancy (i.e., before the birth mother KNEW she was pregnant), 2) after she learned she was pregnant, and 3) after the birth of her child (your client) until the present time.

At the conclusion of the birth mother questions, a final section contains questions for informants.

BIRTH MOMS

BEFORE PREGNANCY

Determine:

- 1) Average number of drinks per drinking occasion?

- 2) Type of alcohol?
- 3) Size of container/glass (try to estimate # of ounces of alcohol per drink)?
- 4) Maximum number of drinks per typical drinking occasion?
- 5) Average number of drinking days per week?
- 6) Did you ever drink 4 or more drinks at a time on any single occasion in the year leading up to the pregnancy?
- 7) If so, how often?
- 8) Were you on prescription meds at the time? Which ones?
- 9) Were you using drugs at the time? Which ones?
- 10) How often did you use drugs, and was alcohol used in conjunction with drug use?
- 11) Were you smoking cigarettes as well?
- 12) Were you exposed to fumes, gases, or toxic chemicals in the months leading up to your pregnancy?
- 13) How was your nutrition in the months leading to your pregnancy?
- 14) Were you under stress in the months leading to your pregnancy?

DURING PREGNANCY

Determine:

- 1) How far into the pregnancy were you when you learned you were pregnant?
- 2) How did you know you were pregnant?
- 3) Did you drink even once after you started "showing"?
- 4) Did you drink during the last trimester? (If she's acknowledging she drank, ask her directly if she drank through all 3 trimesters.)
- 5) Average number of drinks per drinking occasion?
- 6) Type of alcohol?
- 7) Size of container/glass (try to estimate # of ounces of alcohol per drink)?
- 8) Maximum number of drinks per typical drinking occasion?
- 9) Average number of drinking days per week?
- 10) Did you ever drink 4 or more drinks on any single occasion?
- 11) If so, how often?
- 12) Were you on prescription meds at the time? Which ones?
- 13) Were you using drugs at the time? Which ones?
- 14) How often did you use drugs, and was alcohol used in conjunction with drug use?
- 15) Were you smoking cigarettes as well?
- 16) How much weight did you gain during your pregnancy?
- 17) How was your nutrition in the months leading up to your pregnancy?
- 18) Were you exposed to fumes, gases, or toxic chemicals in the months leading up to your pregnancy?
- 19) Did you fall or become injured at any time in pregnancy? (Get details.)

AT ANY TIME IN LIFE

Determine:

- 1) Was there ever a time in your life when you partied a lot and drank frequently?
- 2) Have you ever had a problem at any point in your life with alcohol or drugs? (If she responds "yes," get her to describe the problem in some detail.)
- 3) Have you ever been diagnosed with a substance abuse problem?

- 4) Have you ever had substance abuse treatment?
- 5) Have you ever been arrested (including DWI/DUI) for an alcohol or drug related incident/offense?
- 6) Has there ever been a time in your life when you worried about your alcohol or drug use? (Get details)

INFORMANT QUESTIONS

- 1) Did you ever observe birth mother's drinking or drug use before pregnancy? (If so, have informant describe amount, type of alcohol, frequency.)
- 2) Did you ever observe her drinking or drug use DURING the pregnancy? (If so, have informant describe amount, type of alcohol, frequency.)
- 3) Did you ever observe her drinking 4 or more drinks AROUND THE TIME of her pregnancy? (Get details.)
- 4) Could she have consumed alcohol/drugs prior to learning she was pregnant? (Get details.)
- 5) How far along was she when she learned she was pregnant?
- 6) Was birth mother ever known to have a problem with alcohol and/or drugs?
- 7) Was she ever diagnosed with alcoholism/drug addiction?
- 8) Was she ever arrested or charged with an alcohol/drug-related violation (DUI, public intoxication) during her pregnancy?
- 9) Did she ever receive treatment for substance abuse?
- 10) (If birth mother is deceased), did she die of an alcohol or drug related cause? (Get details.)