

# Living With Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Annette Bowen

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What does *fetal* mean? What do you think Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is?

## My Birth Mom Drank a Lot

To properly tell my story, let me take you back to the beginning. I was born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). My biological mom drank in excess while pregnant. Please allow me to give you a tutorial on FAS, the different spectrums of FAS, and what life is like living with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

FAS is a condition that develops in a fetus when a pregnant woman drinks alcohol during pregnancy. It is a lifelong condition that can't be cured. Honestly, if there were a cure for FAS, I'd be first in line.

FAS is called a syndrome because a person with FAS can have a range of symptoms. Not everyone has the same symptoms or the same severity of symptoms.

## My Symptoms Are Severe

I got diagnosed with a particular type of FAS. It is called Neurobehavioral Disorder Associated with Prenatal Alcohol Exposure (ND-PAE). This means I was exposed to more than a small amount of alcohol as a fetus.

As a toddler, I experienced shaking, excessive crying, trouble in school, and severe stuttering. I've had my ankles reset due to my feet turning outwards (slew foot). Thank goodness for my patient and loving parents who cared for me through all my challenges

My adopted mother explained it to me as best she could when I was a little child. She told me my biological parents were abusive towards each other, which drove my birth mother deep into her bottles of alcohol. Since birth, I've had over 10 surgeries, mental health challenges, and learning disabilities.

## Harmful Effects of Short-Term Alcohol Use



Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/drink-less-be-your-best/about/index.html>. Visit the site to learn more.

And yet, here I am writing this article. How? Words make sense. It's as if a switch flips on when I'm writing; the words flow from my mind to the page.

## FAS Is Preventable

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov>),

- 1 in 9 pregnant women consume alcohol and out of them, one-third report binge alcohol use.
- Tens of millions of children and adults have lifelong impairment from FAS.
- The cost of health care, disabilities services, special education, and related programs amount to \$4 billion a year.

An article published in Movendi International, reports that "the USA is facing a crisis of fetal

alcohol syndrome (FAS) with the rising level of addiction in the country.”

Despite this alarming data, you don’t see too many politicians making it a priority to educate the public about alcohol use during pregnancy. Instead of being named a public health emergency, alcohol is a multi-billion dollar industry in the United States.

## Educate and Advocate!

There is a bill that passed the House in June 2025. It is called the FASD Respect Act. FASD stands for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. According to the advocacy organization FASD United, this bill would provide funding for FAS prevention, research, and treatment. You can make a difference by contacting your Senator. Tell them how you feel about the bill. It makes a difference when our elected officials hear from us!

## Not a Victim

In spite of all the adversity I face, I will not be a victim. Writing keeps my mind focused on the present. It gives me an escape from my challenges and gives me a safe haven. In this case, I hope my writing will help others stay safe as well.

Keep your child safe! Don’t drink while pregnant. And do your part to keep everyone safe! Advocate for safer alcohol use!

### AFTER YOU READ:

1. Look up the FASD Respect Act and follow Annette’s advice: contact your congressperson to tell them what you think.
2. Read about alcohol advertising in the box on the right. Collect some alcohol ads into a slideshow presentation and discuss how they might influence us.

Annette Bowen is a former student at Literacy Action, Inc., in Atlanta, Georgia. She’s a mother, grandmother and bona fide “Marvel movie nerd!!” Annette believes there’s a writer inside everyone. All you have to do is tap into yourself and allow the words to flow!!

Sources: <https://movendi.ngo/policy-updates/2020/02/21/usa-the-crisis-of-fetal-alcohol-syndrome/>; <https://spiritsofamerica.org/notable-facts-figures/>; <https://fasdunited.org/fasd-respect-act-of-2025-introduced-by-senators-murkowski-klobuchar/>

## Pressure to Drink

Alcohol has many short- and long-term risks. Yet the alcohol industry spends millions of dollars every year try to get us to buy more. The ads try to convince us that alcohol makes us more fun, more sexy, more successful – when, in fact, alcohol can cause so much harm. This site (<https://alcohol.org/advocacy-groups/>) lists some orgs that advocate for safer alcohol use, and here is a nonprofit dedicated to raising awareness about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: <https://nofaspolicycenter.org/>

Take some time to visit both sites. Share what you learn by writing it up or preparing a slideshow presentation. What action can you take to respond to what you learned?



Image of alcohol ad taken from: <https://www.cancer.org.au/blog/lets-keep-the-alcohol-industry-honest>