

THINGS I WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW

My name is David and I am 15 1/2 years old and in Grade 8. I have FAS. I have a brother and a sister who also have FAS. I am the oldest. We live together in our family. I was diagnosed with FAS when I was 9 years old. I understand a lot about it.

When I was little, I lived with my birth mother. She had a problem with alcohol and drugs. She did all her life. She did not do this on purpose. I think she had FAS too.

I went to my first foster home when I was a baby. I was in lots of foster homes because my birth mother could not handle us and did not know how to take care of us. Lots of things happened to us. My brother had 3 broken arms in one year and I got a big scar on my forehead. All of us were in different foster homes until the last one. Then we got adopted when I was 9, and my sister was 8 and my brother was 6.

I used to see my birth mother once a month after I got adopted when we would take her out for brunch. She died last December from AIDS and Hepatitis C.

HOW FAS HAS AFFECTED ME

I am very small for my age. I have always been the smallest kid in my class even though I am the oldest kid in the class. I had to have braces on my teeth because my jaw is too small for my adult teeth to come in properly. I don't feel pain. You can stomp on my toes and it does not hurt at all. It never hurts if I injure myself. People always ask me what it feels like, but I don't know what to tell them.

My fingers are not straight and they go skinny at the tip. My fingernails don't grow hardly at all. My face doesn't look FAS anymore because when you get older and you have FAS, your face changes and you mostly look just like other people.

But this does not mean I can grow out of it. I can't. I have it for the rest of my life.

My brain is smaller than a regular one, so I have a smaller head. I have really big problems with learning all kinds of things. My IQ is 76. I know that means I don't learn like other people do, or as fast.

Things that are hard for me to do are things like math!!!! It feels like it is impossible for me to do. I have just finally figured out what a loonie and a toonie are – you had to say one dollar or two dollars or else I wouldn't get it. I don't understand how much things cost and get mixed up. I can only sort of tell time on a round clock. I use a digital clock and watch. I cannot figure out “how long time” and needs LOTS of help. It is very frustrating for me.

I have a terrible memory!! I forget things all the time. I forget things pretty soon after I learn them. This is very frustrating because I have to learn it again. I forget all kinds of things, like what I just said and where I put something, or what happened a little while ago. **I HATE IT!!!!**

I am a horrible speller!!

I have a really hard time paying attention and I get **VERY hyper when there is too much going on. It is very hard for me to stay in a classroom. The resource room works better for me because the teacher will sit by me and go step-by-step and explain it my way, simply. It is quieter and has less distractions.**

When people talk to me with big words, I don't understand them. You have to use small words and slow down and it takes longer for me to figure out what you mean. Sometimes, I never do. I have to think over what I say too, because sometimes what I said doesn't make sense to me either.

It is hard for me to get friends and keep them. Kids used to pick on me, and be mean to me a lot in grade school. This year in high school I only went half days until February. Then I went all day for 2 months but now I go half days again because things were not working out. I only took 4 classes – drama, art, Gym and resource room – when I went all day and now I just take Art and Resource Room. School is very hard and not fun.

THINGS I AM GOOD AT

I am good at gym. I am an excellent swimmer and I am good at diving. We have a pool so I can do this a lot and use up my energy. I am good at outdoor activities and I like to be able to run around.

I am good at making posters for school. I was a good reading tutor to the Grade One student I helped last year. I was also a buddy to a Grade One and Two class. That means I help them with art, stuff on the computer, and I write out the rough copy for them of their journals. I have to set a good example for them of proper behaviour.

I am good at helping with most things as long as I know what I have to do, and I like helping.

I have done excellent science fair reports on FAS. I know a lot about it and I can teach people about it. I help to teach second year medical students every year and have my own groups of them that I talk to by myself, six at a time. I do it two afternoons a week for two months every year. I also do home interviews with third year medical students so they really get to learn about FASD. I am very good at this and I think it is very important to do this. It is an important job.

What I really want people to understand about me is that I need reminding about most things. I DO NOT forget on purpose!! I would never remember to take medicine unless someone told me to no matter even if I was really sick. Actually, I probably wouldn't know I was sick. I need someone (my mom) to go to appointments and meetings and things like that with me. I do not understand what people tell me, especially when they use big words and talk too fast for me. I never understand what the principal is saying to me, and then I can't remember it.

I don't feel pain the same way as other people – I am not too sure what it is supposed to be like. That means I can get sick or hurt and not really know it.

I think I will always need help with how money works. I know I need a trust account so I don't spend all my money and have no food. If I have no food, I will get sick. But I also want to have some money for my own to spend on stuff.

I don't know the difference from 10 minutes to an hour so I need other people to help me so I am not late, too early or forget. I do not get places on time if no one helps me. I would always be late for appointments without someone to tell me when we have to go. That does not mean I am not responsible, just I forget a lot and I can never figure out how much time things take.

Whenever I get frustrated, I explode. It's not because I am a bad person. I am a good person. I have a hard time judging things. Lots of times I make mistakes because I don't understand, no matter how hard I try.

I also won't ask questions, because I don't want to look like an idiot, not because I am not listening to what people say. I

need people to be patient with me and to always explain things to someone like my mom so I can have help.

IF I COULD HAVE THREE WISHES:

I wish that everyone understood FAS.

I wish I could get more chances to do the things I am good at, instead of all the things I have so much trouble with, in a school for kids like me with FASD.

I wish that there were jobs for people with FASD that paid money, and more programs to teach you how to get a job.

If I could have another wish, I would wish for a million dollars so I could build a school for people with FASD and for adults with FASD who quit school because it was too hard.