



Secondary Disabilities

Secondary disabilities are those that result from the primary disabilities. For example, due to damage to certain brain regions, a person with FAS/ARND may have poor judgment. This could lead to the secondary disability of getting into trouble with the law. Ann Streissguth, Ph.D. of the University of Washington, a pioneer and recognized authority in the field of FAS, completed a study in 1996 identifying these secondary disabilities. They include:

- **Trouble with the law** – secondary to poor judgment, inability to understand consequences, and boundary issues
- **Mental health problems** – secondary to damage to brain regions and chemical imbalances
- **Disrupted school experience** – secondary to developmental delays, inconsistent performance, hyperactivity, impulsivity, distractibility, attention deficits, disorganization, poor social skills, difficulty with abstractions, memory problems, processing deficits, difficulty with transitions
- **Confinement** – secondary to poor judgment and boundary issues
- **Alcohol and drug problems** – possibly self medicating to compensate for damage to brain regions and chemical imbalances
- **Problems with employment** – secondary to developmental delays, poor social skills, difficulty with abstractions like time, etc.
- **Dependent living** – secondary to difficulty with abstractions like time, money management, poor social skills, developmental delays
- **Inappropriate sexual behavior** – secondary to boundary issues, poor social skills, inability to understand consequences

With early and ongoing support and services, children with FAS/ARND are less likely to develop these secondary disabilities.

Dr. Streissguth, in the same study, identified factors that decreased incidence or reduced the effect of the secondary disabilities. These factors include:

- **Living in a stable and nurturant home for over 72% of life**
- **Being diagnosed before the age of 6**
- **Never having experienced violence against oneself**
- **Staying in each living situation for an average of more than 2.8 years.**
- **Experiencing a good quality home from ages 8-12 years**
- **Applied for and eligible for services for the developmentally disabled**
- **Having a diagnosis of FAS rather than ARND**
- **Having basic needs met for at least 13% of life**

