

FASD Video Series Transcript: Annette

Narrator: Lived Experiences with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.
Annette.

Annette: My name is Annette Kuntzman, and I'd like people to first and foremost know me as a mom. I have two young adults that are 31 and 27, and both are on the FASD spectrum.

I wanted to come here today to increase awareness and bring acceptance to the condition called FASD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, because the vast majority of people don't know anything about it. They've never heard of it.

My husband and I adopted our two sons. The first one was an infant, and the second one, four years later, what we were concerned about in adopting children was obviously number one, not having much family history.

We were concerned about drugs, drug exposure, and the one thing we didn't think about at all was the one legal drug, and that's available everywhere, and that's alcohol. Both as infants, we took them to the pediatricians and they said healthy, you know, but you know, later on things and their development weren't as typical.

They didn't get a diagnosis until they were 14 and 18. So, we had a lot of trials and errors trying to figure out what was going on with them. And then of course, issues, particularly with my oldest son happened when, when they start school, our oldest son was very active, just very, very active. His play wasn't like some children, for example, with blocks, putting blocks together, you know, he would just scatter them all over. There was nothing methodical about stacking them. Now I can look back and see there were sensory issues to tags on the neck or the toes, the seams on the toes. When I went to put sunscreen on him, it was like I was putting on, you know, acid on his arms.

Then in school I was trying to get some answers from the teachers and they said, "Oh, don't worry about it." Fourth grade I got the school to do an, you know, a whole assessment of our oldest son. You know, they wanted to just say it's IQ. And that just didn't sit right with me because he was so bright in so many other ways. And so, I do remember making an appointment with the school psychologist to try to go get some help, you know, wondering, you know, what, what I might do to help him. And her first question was, "So, how are things at home? How are things between you and your husband?" You know, so from the school's perspective, we were doing things wrong as parents. And of course, I was questioning myself because I was a working mom. I wasn't there all the time. And so, we were sent to many parenting classes, and we failed them all. Of course, over time, you learn that traditional parenting doesn't work when children have been exposed to alcohol.

Going to the medical community, they didn't have much information, they didn't have much guidance. It was really all looking at physical. And that's when I, I quit my

career. I gave up my career because I was trying, I needed to focus on what was going on.

I suspected that there was alcohol exposure. I denied it. I was in denial, but the seed was planted, and I pulled it out. I finally found a doctor who really gets the medication because it's tricky with people who have been prenatally exposed to alcohol. They don't process medicine the same way. So, it's lots of trial and error. I think my oldest son must have tried 15 different medicines.

So, we're now in Colorado, and what we did is we found a property where the basement was unfinished, and we built two apartments. They each had their own apartment. They were both involved with how it was set up. My oldest has a gaming room that's off his sitting room where he has a big screen tv. And the younger one, he, we set up a workshop for him. So, he is got a 3D printer now, and he's gonna be painting these little figures, making these figures, and painting them. He's also very accomplished pastry chef. So, that's how we situated it. We said, it's, this is, for now, you don't, you know, you don't have to live here forever, but for now, this is time being. And so, then I just have to pay one bill. They don't have to worry about their rent, they don't have to worry about utilities. I think it's not that they can't do it, it's just where to start, how to, you know, that they just get so overwhelmed by the idea of it, they just shut down.

But the one great strength of our, our kids that have been affected is that they, they get up every day. I can't imagine how strong and brave they are. I mean, they are. One condition that my oldest son in particular has is, is we called it perseveration. He would just get an idea and he can't let it go. He is a dog with a bone. He just perseverate on an idea. But the flip of that is it's perseverance. They persevere, and I think that's one of their greatest strengths.

Narrator: For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/fasd.