

RED SHOES ROCK



CONVERSATION
GUIDE

Wear red shoes or socks.
Start a conversation.
Build understanding.



Red Shoes Rock is built on a simple idea: something visible can start a conversation about a disability that is often hidden or misunderstood.

By wearing red shoes or socks, sharing campaign content or taking part in an activity, you can help more people understand FASD, support alcohol-free pregnancies and find reliable information and support.

You do not need to be an expert or have all the answers. This conversation guide gives you simple ways to explain the Red Shoes Rock campaign, share reliable information about FASD and respond to common questions without blame or judgement.



YOUR ROLE IN RED SHOES ROCK

You might be wearing red shoes or socks, hosting an event, sharing a social media post, lighting a landmark red or supporting the campaign through your workplace or community.

Whatever your involvement, you don't have to be an expert in FASD, but you can:

- ♦ start a respectful conversation
- ♦ share one or two clear messages
- ♦ listen to people's experiences
- ♦ challenge stigma without creating conflict
- ♦ help people find reliable information and support
- ♦ encourage people to get involved



HOW TO TURN RED SHOES INTO A CONVERSATION

1 Start with the red shoes or socks

Use the red shoes or socks, campaign activity or social media post as a natural opening.

You could say:

"I'm wearing red shoes for Red Shoes Rock, a campaign that raises awareness of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, or FASD."

Or:

"September is Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Awareness Month. Have you heard of FASD before?"

2 Share one clear message

You do not need to explain everything at once.

For example:

"FASD is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disability caused by prenatal alcohol exposure. It can affect learning, memory, communication, attention and emotional regulation."

Or:

"FASD is often a hidden disability, so a person may need support even when their difficulties are not immediately visible."



3 Invite them to get involved

Invite the person to learn more rather than trying to complete the whole conversation yourself.

You could say:

"You can learn more, hear stories from people with FASD or find ways to get involved at redshoesrock.org.au."

Or:

"NOFASD Australia and the FASD Hub Australia have information about FASD, as well as guidance on getting an assessment and where to find FASD-informed health professionals."

CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR DIFFERENT SETTINGS



If you have ten seconds

"I'm wearing red shoes for Red Shoes Rock, a campaign helping more people understand Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, or FASD."

If you have thirty seconds

"September is FASD Awareness Month. I'm wearing red shoes to help start conversations about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, a lifelong disability caused by prenatal alcohol exposure. It's often hidden and misunderstood, so greater awareness can make a real difference."

If the person wants to know more

"Every person with FASD has their own strengths and support needs. Red Shoes Rock helps elevate the voices of people with FASD, reduce stigma and connect people with reliable information and support."

EXPLAINING RED SHOES ROCK

What is Red Shoes Rock?

Red Shoes Rock is a global campaign that raises awareness of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, or FASD.

The campaign began in 2013 when RJ Formanek, a Canadian man living with FASD, wore red shoes to stand out, be noticed and start conversations about his disability.

Today, people wear red shoes or socks, share information, hold events and light landmarks red during FASD Awareness Month in September.

Why red shoes?

The red shoes are designed to get people's attention and start a conversation about FASD, which is often a hidden and misunderstood disability.

What does the campaign aim to achieve?

Red Shoes Rock aims to:

- ♦ build community understanding of FASD
- ♦ elevate the voices and experiences of people with FASD and their families
- ♦ reduce stigma and judgement
- ♦ share the importance of alcohol-free pregnancies
- ♦ help people find reliable information, assessment and support

How to get involved

During September, you can:

- ♦ wear red shoes or socks
- ♦ start a conversation about FASD
- ♦ share campaign stories and resources
- ♦ encourage your workplace or community to participate
- ♦ attend or host a Red Shoes Rock activity

Visit www.redshoesrock.org.au to find campaign resources and more ways to get involved.

Listen and learn from lived experience

Red Shoes Rock centres the voices and experiences of people with FASD and the families and communities who support them. Where possible, encourage people to hear directly from people with FASD through the stories shared at www.redshoesrock.org.au



IF SOMEONE ASKS WHAT FASD IS

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, or FASD, is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disability caused by prenatal alcohol exposure.

Alcohol consumed at any stage of pregnancy passes directly to the developing baby and can damage their brain, body, and organs.

People with FASD can experience difficulties with areas including:

- ♦ learning and memory
- ♦ attention and processing information
- ♦ communication
- ♦ planning and problem-solving
- ♦ sensory processing
- ♦ emotional and behavioural regulation
- ♦ physical development.

Every person's experience is different.

People with FASD also have individual strengths, challenges, goals and contributions.

FASD is one part of a person's identity, it does not define the whole person.

Is FASD always visible?

No. FASD is often described as a hidden disability because its impacts may not be immediately visible.

A person may communicate confidently but still find it difficult to process information, remember instructions, understand abstract language or respond quickly.

This is why Red Shoes Rock uses the highly visible symbol of red shoes, to spark conversations about a disability that can otherwise go unnoticed or be misunderstood.

Is everyone with FASD affected in the same way?

No. FASD is a spectrum, and every person has their own combination of strengths and difficulties.

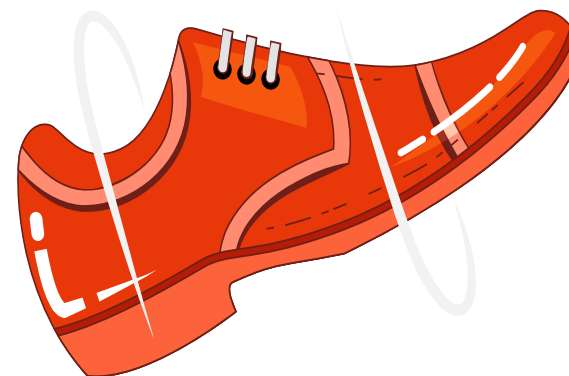
Some people may need significant support in several areas of life. Others may need targeted assistance with particular tasks or environments.

The right support can make a significant difference.

Can FASD be cured?

FASD is lifelong, but with the right understanding, environment and support, people can build on their strengths and live meaningful lives.

Diagnosis can also help a person, their family and the people around them better understand their needs and identify appropriate supports.



IF THE CONVERSATION TURNS TO ALCOHOL AND PREGNANCY

Conversations about alcohol and pregnancy can be personal and sensitive.

Aim to provide information without making assumptions or assigning blame.

Is it ok to drink a little bit of alcohol during a pregnancy?

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines state that to prevent harm from alcohol, women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol.

This is because alcohol consumed at any stage of pregnancy passes directly to the baby and can damage their developing brain, body, and organs, and lead to FASD.

Tip: You can mention that this advice is based on the Australian Government's National Health and Medical Research Council's Alcohol Guidelines.

What if someone drank before knowing they were pregnant?

Many people drink alcohol before they realise they are pregnant. The important thing is to stop drinking once they know and speak with a trusted health professional if they have concerns.

Tip: Avoid trying to assess the person's individual risk or reassure them that everything will definitely be fine. Encourage them to seek advice from a doctor, midwife or other qualified health professional if they have concerns.

Don't people know that alcohol can harm a developing baby?

FASD is caused by prenatal alcohol exposure, but people's circumstances are often much more complex than that question suggests.

Many pregnancies are unplanned, and people may drink before knowing they are pregnant. Some people may also experience alcohol dependence, mental health challenges, violence, social pressure or limited access to accurate health information.

Blame can stop people from seeking information and support. Clear health information and supportive communities are much more helpful.

Tip: Talk about prenatal alcohol exposure, rather than placing the behaviour of the mother at the centre of the discussion.

Is FASD 100 per cent preventable?

FASD can be prevented by avoiding prenatal alcohol exposure. But saying it is '100 per cent preventable' can oversimplify a complex issue.

Many pregnancies are unplanned, while some people experience alcohol dependence or other circumstances that make stopping alcohol use difficult. Prevention requires clear information, supportive health care and communities that make alcohol-free pregnancies easier.

That's one of the reasons I'm supporting Red Shoes Rock, because greater understanding can help reduce judgement and make it easier for people to find support.

Tip: Avoid saying FASD is "100 per cent preventable", as this can unintentionally place blame on individuals. Focus instead on the role of clear information, supportive health care and communities in making alcohol-free pregnancies possible.

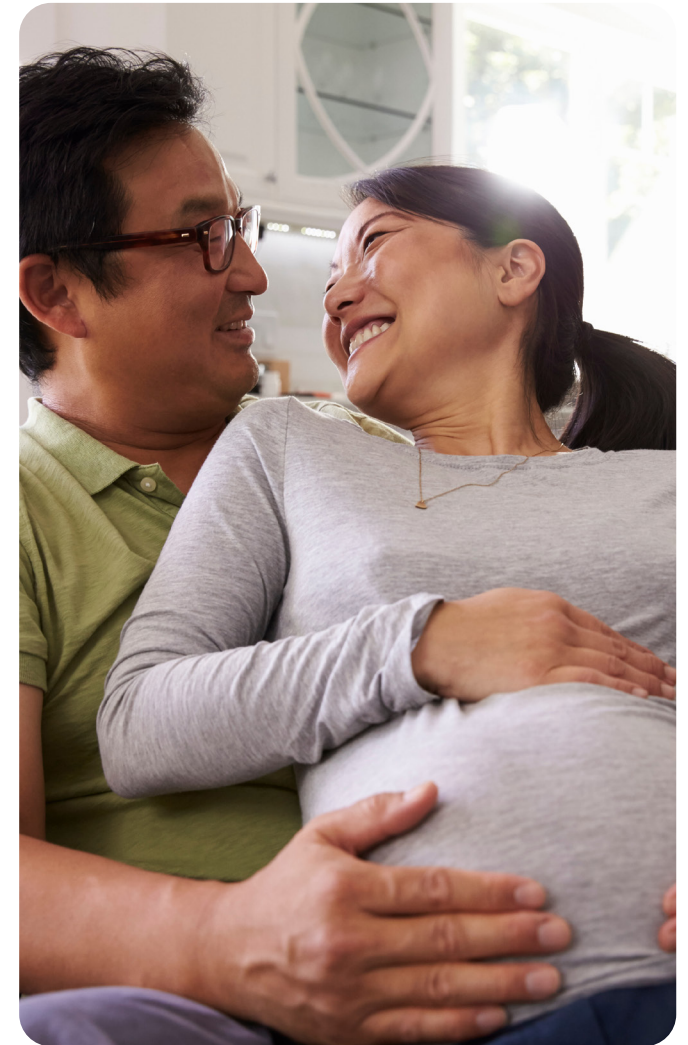
What role do partners, families and friends play?

Alcohol-free pregnancies are easier when the people around someone support them.

Partners, friends and family can help by:

- ♦ not pressuring someone to drink
- ♦ offering appealing alcohol-free options
- ♦ choosing alcohol-free activities when socialising
- ♦ supporting someone to seek help from a health professional if they have concerns
- ♦ avoiding judgement if they are finding it difficult to stop drinking

Tip: If they want more ideas or strategies for supporting a loved one to have an alcohol-free pregnancy, they can visit www.everymomentmatters.org.au



USING RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE IN RED SHOES ROCK CONVERSATIONS

The words we use influence how people with FASD, their families and parents are perceived and treated.

Try saying	Rather than	Why
Person with FASD or person living with FASD	FASD person or FASD kid	The person is more than their disability
Living with FASD	Suffering from FASD	People with FASD can live meaningful lives
Impacted or affected by FASD	Afflicted by FASD	This avoids language based on pity
Prenatal alcohol exposure	Maternal drinking caused FASD	This centres the cause rather than blaming the mother
Reported alcohol use	Admitted to drinking	“Admitted” suggests guilt or wrongdoing
Person who drank alcohol during pregnancy	Irresponsible mother or bad parent	People’s circumstances are complex and judgement can prevent help-seeking
FASD is preventable	FASD is 100 per cent preventable	This avoids oversimplifying complex circumstances
It’s important to go alcohol-free from the moment you start trying for a pregnancy	One drink causes FASD	This is clear and reflects the National Health and Medical Research Council Alcohol Guidelines
Strengths and difficulties	Deficits, damage or problems	This presents a more complete picture of the person
Neurodevelopmental disability	Behavioural problem	FASD affects brain development and functioning
May need support with emotional regulation	Cannot control themselves	This describes the support need without judging the person
Engagement or interactions with the justice system	Offender or criminal	This avoids defining a person by an experience or outcome

Where possible, follow the language and identity preferences of the person you are speaking with or about.

If someone shares their experience of FASD

The conversation may be about FASD, but the person should remain in control of what they share.

Do:

- speak directly to the person
- use clear and concrete language
- give one piece of information at a time
- allow additional time to process and respond
- check understanding without testing or embarrassing the person
- ask what communication or support works best for them
- recognise their expertise in their own life
- respect their privacy

Avoid:

- asking someone to disclose their diagnosis
- asking about their birth mother's alcohol use
- expecting them to educate everyone
- speaking to a support person instead of the person
- using someone's personal story without permission
- assuming that confident speech means they have understood everything
- sharing distressing stories only to create an emotional reaction

When you do not know the answer

It is okay to say:

"I'm not sure, and I don't want to give you the wrong information."

"NOFASD Australia or the FASD Hub Australia's websites would be a good place to check."

"That sounds like a question for a qualified health professional."

"People's experiences of FASD are different, so I wouldn't want to speak for everyone."

Avoid guessing, diagnosing someone or providing individual medical advice.

Responding to stigma or judgement

You do not need to debate every person or respond to every comment. You can gently redirect the conversation:

"We try to talk about this without blame because judgement can make it harder for people to ask for help."

"There may be circumstances we don't know about, so I'd rather focus on what information and support people need."

"People with FASD and their families hear a lot of judgement. This campaign is about building understanding."

"I don't think that description reflects the dignity or complexity of the people involved."

Challenging stigma respectfully is an important part of supporting Red Shoes Rock.

KEY MESSAGES TO REMEMBER

When you only have a moment, choose one or two of these messages:

- ♦ Red Shoes Rock uses red shoes and socks to start conversations about FASD.
- ♦ FASD is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disability caused by prenatal alcohol exposure.
- ♦ FASD is often hidden or misunderstood, and every person has different strengths and support needs.
- ♦ When planning a pregnancy or during pregnancy it's important to not drink any alcohol.
- ♦ Alcohol-free pregnancies need supportive partners, families, health professionals and communities.
- ♦ Listen to lived experience, avoid blame and help people find reliable information and support.

Wear red shoes or socks. Start a conversation. Build understanding.



KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

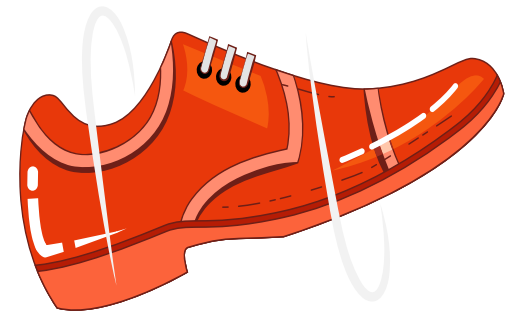
Wearing red shoes or socks is only the beginning. During September, you can:

- ♦ start a conversation about FASD
- ♦ share a story or campaign resource
- ♦ encourage your workplace or community to participate
- ♦ attend or host a Red Shoes Rock activity
- ♦ help challenge stigma when you hear it
- ♦ direct people to reliable information and support

Find campaign information, community stories and ways to participate during FASD Awareness Month at: www.redshoesrock.org.au



FURTHER INFORMATION & RESOURCES



NOFASD Australia

Information, training and support for people with FASD, parents, carers, families and professionals.

www.nofasd.org.au

FASD Hub Australia

Evidence-based information about FASD, assessment and diagnosis, support, services and resources for different professional and community audiences.

www.fasdhub.org.au

Every Moment Matters

Evidence-based information about alcohol, pregnancy and breastfeeding.

www.everymomentmatters.org.au

Strong Born

Culturally informed resources developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and communities.

www.naccho.org.au/fasd

A FASD-informed health professional

People with questions about alcohol and pregnancy, development, assessment or diagnosis should speak with an appropriately qualified and FASD-informed health professional.

www.fasdhub.org.au/services-directory

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This conversation guide supports people participating in Red Shoes Rock to discuss the campaign and FASD with greater confidence.

It draws on the FASD Hub Australia Language Guide and provides general information. This guide does not replace individual medical, diagnostic or support advice.

Learn more at

redshoesrock.org.au



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