

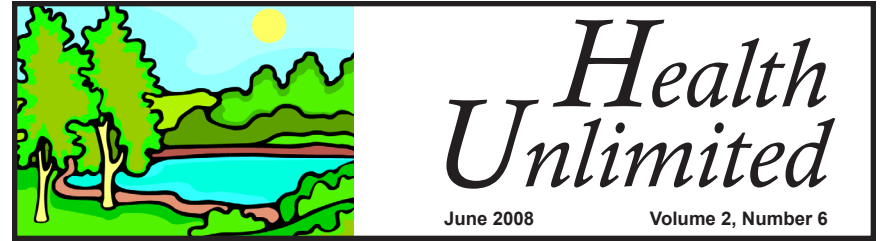
understand time or money. He might buy a single donut with a \$10 bill and say “keep the change.” As a child Bobby had been hyperactive, disruptive and aggressive leading to problems in school and he eventually dropped out. Bobby had worked at various jobs, washing dishes in a fast food restaurant, clearing tables in another, but he couldn’t remember which table was which, or which waitress he was to assist. Then his naivety and poor judgment led him to follow suggestions of someone he met on the street and to criminal behavior and ultimately to jail.

Recently researchers looked at the more subtle effects of even light drinking during pregnancy. Six and seven year old children whose mothers drank as little as once per week during pregnancy were more likely to have behavior problems such as aggressive and delinquent behaviors. These same researchers found that children whose mothers drank *any* alcohol during pregnancy were three times more likely to have delinquent behavior as children whose mothers did not drink at all. The greater the alcohol intake: the greater the problems seen in the children.

The U.S. Surgeon General has warned, “There is no known safe level of alcohol

consumption during pregnancy.” In 1979, Dr David Smith published a book entitled, *Mothering Your Unborn Baby*. In it he said, “When the mother takes an alcoholic drink, the unborn baby takes an alcoholic drink.” The current 2008 web site of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) echoes that statement: “When a pregnant woman drinks alcohol so does her unborn baby.”

What the angel told Samson’s mother, what John Eberle wrote, what Ellen White said in *Ministry of Healing*, is now clear: No amount of alcohol can be considered safe during pregnancy.



Alcohol – Then and Now

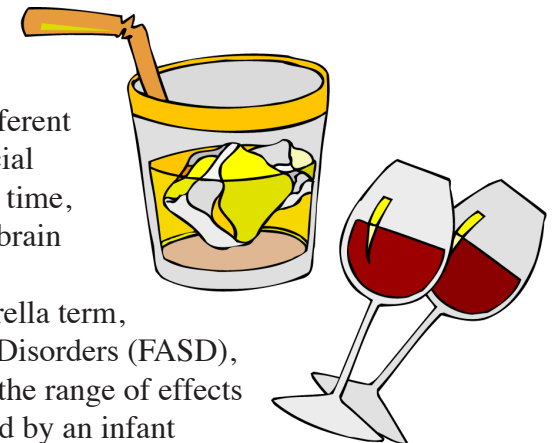
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He had already been in jail a number of times, she said. She was a graduate student of mine. He was her teenage son. She had not known, when she adopted him, that his birth mother had exposed him to alcohol during his gestation. He seemed not to know that what he did was wrong, though he was sorry because it made her sad. His problems were similar to far too many others like him, because their mothers drank alcohol during their pregnancies.

Most of us have heard that if a woman drinks too much alcohol during her pregnancy, her baby can have very serious effects. We may not be as aware that even a small amount of alcohol during pregnancy can cause effects that at first are not so obvious. Effects like those experienced by the adopted son of my grad student.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), the most severe outcome, includes certain abnormal facial features, growth retardation both before and after birth, and irreversible brain damage. Although each affected child will be different and the characteristic facial features may lessen with time, the consequences of the brain damage are permanent.

Recently a new umbrella term, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), was introduced to cover the range of effects that might be experienced by an infant



whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. The term Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE) has been used to describe behavioral and cognitive problems in a child prenatally exposed to alcohol but without the full clinical features of FAS. FAE has been replaced by alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND) and alcohol-related birth defects (ARBD).

Children with ARBD can have problems with internal organs, vision or hearing; abnormal tooth and jaw development and reduced immune function. Children with ARND are at risk for behavioral and/or cognitive problems and not finishing school. Although there is no cure for FASD, an early diagnosis and referral to appropriate resources can lessen the risk of problems.

It is estimated that 40,000 babies are born in the U.S. each year

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with some degree of alcohol related damage, costing the nation more than \$4 billion annually. It is the leading cause of mental retardation in the U.S. and it is 100% preventable.

Interestingly, problems associated with drinking alcohol in pregnancy have been known for a long, long time. The book of Judges in the Bible recounts the story of Samson’s mother being told by the angel that she would become pregnant. The angel then said, “beware that you do not drink any wine or strong drink.” It is notable that this advice was given before she was pregnant. Both the ancient cities of Sparta and Carthage seemed to recognize the dangers of conception during intoxication. Some 450 years before Christ they had strict laws that prohibited alcohol use by newly married couples. Ancient philosophers commented on the problems of children born to drunken women. Plutarch is quoted as saying, “one drunkard begets another.”

In England in 1833, John Eberle published his *Treatise on the Disease and Physical Education of Children*. In it he said, “The majority of children born of decidedly intemperate mothers are weak and sickly and but few of them arrive at the age of

adolescence. It is the far better policy to abstain wholly from spirituous liquors.” Some 75 years later Ellen White said, “Any drop of drink taken by (the pregnant mother) . . . endangers the physical, mental and moral health of her child.”

It is now known that the physical characteristics seen in full-blown FAS are just the tip of an iceberg. The facial features of FAS may diminish as the child grows; however, cognitive deficits and behavioral problems often become more apparent in school-aged children and continue into adolescence and adulthood.

Adam, the adopted son of author Michael Dorris, was such a boy. His life struggles are described in *The Broken Cord*. He was still in diapers at 5. He was very easily distracted. At 7, he couldn’t tie his shoes; he lagged far behind in language skills; his hearing was poor; he required hundreds of repeated instructions for even the most simple of things; he continued to experience convulsions. A puzzle designed for three-year-olds was too much for him. His IQ scores were consistently low, but within the range where he should have been able to learn; yet his progress in school was much less than his increase in years. The grades he received were far greater than any understanding he acquired. Ultimately he was given a certificate of attendance from a vocational education program.

Children with FASD may have poor communication and social skills and behavior problems. On the other hand, some are very outgoing and engaging, to the extent that someone meeting them for the first time would not expect that there was any underlying problem.

Bobby was 18 years old. He used very expressive language, but there was a problem. He didn’t know what it meant and his emotional maturity was that of a six year old; he didn’t understand cues in social interactions. He didn’t

