

Creating Circles of Hope:

The vital importance of alcohol awareness during pregnancy.

AH, SPRING. We made it through another memorable Vermont winter. First, we hear a solitary bird song then see flocks of robins pecking at bare ground and finally, watch birds competing for spots in the birdhouse.

What really makes spring official is the first crocus, usually alone, sometimes surrounded by snow and debris. How awesome is the genetic design of the crocus, which returns annually despite being deeply buried in the dark and despite the cold, cold winters? Unless somehow interrupted, this flower is designed to re-bloom year after year.

Yet to come, is the joy of observing newborns that arrive each spring. These newborns bird, animal or human are innately designed to be perfect replicas of their species, unless somehow altered or interrupted. AH, APRIL.

In an effort to address the statement “human(s) are innately designed to be perfect replicas of their species, unless somehow altered or interrupted”, April has become Alcohol Awareness Month with a special campaign to address women’s health during pregnancy; The Vital Importance of Alcohol Awareness in Pregnancy.

The perennial message each April is very, very simple: ***If you are pregnant, or think you might be pregnant, do not drink alcohol at all. There is no safe amount, or time, or type of alcohol to drink during pregnancy.***

Sadly, drinking at any time during pregnancy exposes the growing fetus to alterations or interruptions to its growth. This exposure places the fetus at risk for developing a wide range of physical, intellectual, developmental, and behavioral problems known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).

One in one hundred babies have a FASD, nearly the same rate as Autism, according to the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. FASD is more prevalent than Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, SIDS, Cystic Fibrosis, and Spina Bifida. Alcohol use during pregnancy is the leading preventable cause of birth defects, developmental disabilities, and learning disabilities.

FASD lasts a lifetime and ripples from the family into daycares, schools, colleges, agencies, medical and mental health services. It is estimated that raising a child with FASD is up to nine times greater than raising a child with an alcohol related disorder. **And yet, FASD is one hundred percent preventable.**

In the spirit of prevention, Early Education Services and Rocking Horse Circle of Support are partnering to host Kathleen Tavenner Mitchell, Vice President and International Spokesperson for the National Organization of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (NOFAS), as the keynote speaker for two educational events, appropriated titled, *Creating Circles of Hope*.

The first workshop, will be presented on Thursday evening, April 24th 5:00-8:00 p.m. at Marlboro College Graduate Conference Center in Brattleboro, Vermont. This event focuses on the role of the medical provider in identifying, intervening, and preventing Fetal Alcohol Syndrome; registration and dinner will begin at 5:00 p.m.

The second workshop will be presented, Friday, April 25th, 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Brattleboro VFW. This event is focused on identifying and preventing learning and behavior disorders associated with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Registration and light breakfast begins at 8:30 a.m., lunch will be provided and all are welcome; young mothers, their providers and the medical community are encouraged to attend. The intention of *Creating Circles of Hope* is to address the number-one cause of learning and behavioral disorders and provide an understanding of how FASD effects individuals, families, and communities. For more information, and to R.S.V.P please contact Early Education Services 802-254-3742.

There are many disabilities, disorders and challenges occurring in youth; many of which a clear a path to prevention is not defined. Each year in the United States, an estimated 40,000 babies are born with an FASD (credit CDC 2010 report). Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder are absolutely preventable. Please share this information with others and spread the word.

For more information and resources on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder visit www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov; check out *Ask the Expert* for a FASD for a screening tool; State *Spotlight* on one state's awareness and prevention efforts; *FASD Research Review* for recent findings related to women's health and drinking and *Risks to a Healthy Pregnancy*.

M.J. Woodburn, a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor co-facilitates, with Collette Gangloff, the Rocking Horse group at EES twice a year and maintains a private practice helping men and women recovery from the tsunami of a variety of addictions and can be reached at 802-380-3994 or thefirstmj@gmail.com. M.J. has contributed the content for this column as a guest writer for the Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition (BAPC); a local nonprofit that organizes community efforts to be involved in the ongoing prevention and reduction of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse in the Windham Southeast area. The coalition meets in Brattleboro on the second Friday of each month at 12pm; lunch is provided and all are welcome. Visit www.BrattleboroAreaPreventionCoalition.org or call 802.257.2175 to learn more about their prevention efforts and to get involved.

