

A Toolkit on Child Development: Learn the Signs. Act Early.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has launched an awareness campaign to educate parents about childhood development, including early warning signs of autism and other developmental disorders. The earlier children with developmental delays receive appropriate assessment and intervention, the more that can be done to help them reach their full potential.

To help prepare the health care community for an anticipated increase in questions and requests for information from parents, CDC has developed a **Health Care Professional Resource Kit**. This kit contains materials designed to help you communicate with parents about childhood development, what parents should be concerned about, and other developmental problems.

The success of the "Learn the Signs. Act Early." campaign depends on health care professionals, like yourself, using these materials to talk to parents about their child's overall development and sharing these materials with your colleagues.

In this kit, you will find:

- Informational cards to share with parents that provide a few milestones by age and a series of questions about childhood development they can discuss with you and your staff.
- A series of fact sheets on childhood development and developmental screening, developmental disorders (including autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, ADHD, vision loss and hearing loss), and age-specific milestones.

The informational card and age-related milestone fact sheets are designed to share with all parents; the cards can be displayed in high-traffic areas such as a waiting room or lobby, and the fact sheets can be distributed at well-child visits. The fact sheets on developmental screening and developmental disorders can be distributed when there is a concern, or you need additional information to give a parent.

If you would like additional cards or fact sheets, please visit www.cdc.gov/actearly. All of the materials are printed with English on one side and Spanish on the other, and are available free of charge.

The campaign is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Autism Coalition, Autism Society of America (ASA), Cure Autism Now (CAN), First Signs, Organization for Autism Research (OAR), and the National Alliance for Autism Research (NAAR).

Have you ever said these?

- "Parents worry too much."
- "Every child is different."
- "Boys are slower. He'll catch up."
- "We'll watch and check again in 6 months."

Instead, try these!

- "I understand you're worried. Tell me more."
- "Children are different, but let's check to be sure."
- "Boys can be slower. But let's see if therapy will help."
- "The nurse will give you the information for a referral today."

To download PDFs or request free copies of these materials, please visit www.cdc.gov/actearly.

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Learn the Signs. Act Early.

Developmental Screening

FACT SHEET

What is child development?

A child's growth is more than just physical. Children grow, develop, and learn throughout their lives, starting at birth. A child's development can be followed by how they play, learn, speak, and behave.

What is a developmental delay? Will my child just grow out of it?

Skills such as taking a first step, smiling for the first time, and waving "bye bye" are called developmental milestones. Children reach milestones in playing, learning, speaking, behaving, and moving (crawling, walking, etc.). A developmental delay is when your child does not reach these milestones at the same time as other children the same age. If your child is not developing properly, there are things you can do that may help. Most of the time, a developmental problem is not something your child will "grow out of" on his or her own. But with help, your child could reach his or her full potential!

What is developmental screening?

Doctors and nurses use developmental screening to tell if children are learning basic skills when they should, or if they might have problems. Your child's doctor may ask you questions or talk and play with your child during an exam to see how he or she learns, speaks, behaves, and moves. Since there is no lab or blood test to tell if your child may have a delay, the developmental screening will help tell if your child needs to see a specialist.

Why is developmental screening important?

When a developmental delay is not recognized early, children must wait to get the help they need. This can make it hard for them to learn when they start school. In the United States, 17 percent of children have a developmental or behavioral disability such as autism, mental retardation, or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In addition, many children have delays

in language or other areas. But, less than half of children with problems are identified before starting school. During this time, the child could have received help for these problems and may even have entered school more ready to learn.

I have concerns that my child could have a developmental delay. Whom can I contact in my state to get a developmental assessment for my child?

Talk to your child's doctor or nurse if you have concerns about how your child is developing. If you or your doctor think there could be a problem, you can take your child to see a developmental pediatrician or other specialist, and you can contact your local early intervention agency (for children under 3) or public school (for children 3 and older) for help. To find out who to speak to in your area, you can contact the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities by logging on to www.nichcy.org/states.htm. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has links to information for families at (www.cdc.gov/actearly). If there is a problem, it is very important to get your child help as soon as possible.

How can I help my child's development?

Proper nutrition, exercise, and rest are very important for children's health and development. Providing a safe and loving home and spending time with your child – playing, singing, reading, and even just talking – can also make a big difference in his or her development.

For other ideas of activities to do with your child, and for child safety information, go to www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/child/ and look in the "developmental milestones" section.

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Autism Spectrum Disorders

FACT SHEET

What are autism spectrum disorders?

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities caused by a problem with the brain. Scientists do not know yet exactly what causes this problem. ASDs can impact a person's functioning at different levels, from very mildly to severely. There is usually nothing about how a person with an ASD looks that sets them apart from other people, but they may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most people. The thinking and learning abilities of people with ASDs can vary – from gifted to severely challenged. Autistic disorder is the most commonly known type of ASD, but there are others, including "pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified" (PDD-NOS) and Asperger Syndrome.

What are some of the signs of ASDs?

People with ASDs may have problems with social, emotional, and communication skills. They might repeat certain behaviors and might not want change in their daily activities. Many people with ASDs also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things. ASDs begin during early childhood and last throughout a person's life.

A child or adult with an ASD might:

- not play "pretend" games (pretend to "feed" a doll)
- not point at objects to show interest (point at an airplane flying over)
- not look at objects when another person points at them
- have trouble relating to others or not have an interest in other people at all
- avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings
- prefer not to be held or cuddled or might cuddle only when they want to
- appear to be unaware when other people talk to them but respond to other sounds

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- be very interested in people, but not know how to talk, play, or relate to them
- repeat or echo words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language (echolalia)
- have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions
- repeat actions over and over again (hand flapping, finger movements, rocking, etc.)
- have trouble adapting when a routine changes
- have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound
- lose skills they once had (for instance, stop saying words they were using)

* Note: Contact your child's doctor or nurse if your child experiences a dramatic loss of skills at any age.

What can I do if I think my child has an ASD?

You are doing the right thing now – talking with your child's doctor or nurse. If you or your doctor think there could be a problem, ask for a referral to see a developmental pediatrician or other specialist, and you can contact your local early intervention agency (for children under 3) or public school (for children 3 and older). To find out who to speak to in your area, you can contact the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) by logging onto www.nichcy.org/states.htm. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has links to additional information for families at www.cdc.gov/autism.

Right now, the main research-based treatment for ASDs is intensive structured teaching of skills, often called behavioral intervention. It is **very** important to begin this intervention as early as possible in order to help your child reach his or her full potential. Acting early can make a real difference!



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