

Navigating Concerns about Your Child's Development ● A roadmap for families



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Children are rapidly developing in early childhood, especially during the first three years. Parents, early care providers, and teachers have a unique opportunity to work together to keep children on a healthy path of development, especially when there is a concern that a child may be experiencing a developmental delay.

1 OBSERVE & TRACK

Many parents enjoy documenting their child's first milestones, such as their first smile, word, or tooth. Watching your baby closely and celebrating each new skill is an exciting part of parenthood! It's also natural to compare your baby to his siblings or friends, even though every baby is different. One baby may walk earlier and start talking later, while another may start talking earlier but be slower to walk. Nonetheless, there are predictable sequences and typical time frames in which most children develop particular skills. A developmental checklist that lists milestones in different areas of development can help you see whether your child appears to be "on track." You may want to document your child's progress periodically by reviewing such a checklist and noting the skills your child has shown (see cliengage.org/public/tools/assessment/infant-toddler-checklists/ to download a free version). Looking at a developmental checklist can also alert you to areas in which your child may be showing a delay. This is important because you know your child best, and you may be the first to notice concerns about your child. To gain a more complete picture of your child's growth, talk with your child's teacher or childcare provider for additional input. For instance, social skills may be more evident when your child is in a group setting with other children. Most providers will use a developmental checklist as part of their observation and assessment process for each child. Parents should always have access to this information.

2 COMMUNICATE CONCERNS EARLY

If you have a concern or question about your child's development, it is always a good idea to bring it to the attention of your child's teacher, and your child's health care provider. They can refer you to a specialist to take a closer look at your child's development. If your child's skills or unusual behaviors are concerning you or your child's teacher, do not 'wait and see' for too long. Early identification and intervention is the best way to help your child.

3 COMMUNICATE CONCERNS CLEARLY

Sharing concerns about your child's development can feel emotionally difficult. No one wants to hear that there might be something "not quite right" with their child. However, your child cannot speak up for herself. If there is a concern, you must be the one to gather information and advocate for her needs. When approaching your child's teacher, ask for a good time to have a private conversation. Have the milestones checklist handy during the conference to view together. You may want to bring written notes and questions as well. Take time to talk and ask questions. Be clear and specific about your concerns. Ask for the caregiver's observations and input. Finish the conversation with a plan on how to work together to come up with a next step that is agreeable to all. It's often a good idea to set up a time for a follow-up conversation.

In talking with your pediatrician about your child's development, share observations about your specific concerns as well as any reports or notes from your child's teacher. Be assertive about requesting a referral to a specialist if you feel you still have questions and need more answers and information.

4 CONNECT WITH RESOURCES

Parents may also connect directly to Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) to request an evaluation of their child. These services are available to any child up to age three years, and initial evaluations are provided free of charge. Intervention services may have a copay that is calculated based on income. ECI professionals assess infants and toddlers for any developmental concerns and determine whether the child is in need of intervention services, such as speech, physical, occupational, or feeding therapies, developmental teaching, and other supports.

To find ECI programs in Texas: Go to <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services> or call 1-877-787-8999.

For developmental concerns about children 3-years-old and older, families can request a free evaluation from the **local public school district** by calling their local zoned elementary school to request a formal evaluation for their child.