

Tip Sheets

Developmental Concerns: When to Refer Children



Learning takes place throughout our lives, beginning at birth. Children learn and grow physically, socially, and cognitively. These areas of growth and children's general health are important when monitoring overall development.

While the majority of children develop on a similar path, there are indicators that a child may not be moving along the expected path of development.

Typical Milestones

Birth to 8 Months

- Will show preference for the face, smell, and sound of a familiar person
- Will smile and make eye contact as social interaction
- May observe own hand, grasp own hand
- Reaches for and grabs toys
- Babbles
- Smiles at self in mirror
- Sits with support

12 Months to 18 Months

- Uses a few gestures, one after another, to get needs met (giving, showing, reaching, pointing, waving)

- Feeds self with finger foods
- Knocks two blocks together
- Turns to person speaking when name is called
- Plays social games—Peek-A-Boo; Patty Cake
- Stands alone, takes steps, and/or walks with one hand held

18 Months to 3 Years

- Enjoys being read to
- Follows simple commands without gestures
- Points to simple body parts
- Begins to use pronouns, such as mine
- Speaks in two to three-word sentences
- Shows increased fearfulness (darkness, monsters, etc.)
- Expresses emotions with increasing control

Red Flags

- No big smiles by 6 months
- No back-and-forth sharing by 9 months
- No babbling by 12 months
- No back-and-forth gestures by 12 months
- No words by 16 months
- No two-word, meaningful phrases by 24 months
- Any loss of speech, babbling, or social skills at any age

Concerning Behaviors

- Little or no eye contact
No response to name
- Unusual motor behaviors or motor planning
- Rigidity or getting stuck on certain activities
- Over or under-reactive sensory input
- Over-arousal and regulatory issues

Observation and Documentation

Through careful observation and recording of all children in child care programs, you can identify early developmental concerns about a child and make referrals for screening or assessment recommendations to the parent. When observing and documenting:

- Choose a format that works for you.
- Observe the child involved in a variety of activities.
- Observe the child over an extended period of time.
- Record the time of day, day of week, and the activity the child is engaged in during the observation.

Sharing Information with Parents

Families and staff experience a range of emotions when they first suspect that a child may have a developmental concern. When sharing your observation and documentation with parents:

- Choose a private place to talk.
- Have documentation that is objective.
- Consider cultural differences.
- Be respectful.
- Have referral resources ready to share.
- Do not diagnose.

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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