CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

Tip Sheets
Developmental Delay

Every child goes through a process of growth and change. This process of **child development** involves learning and mastering skills—known as **developmental milestones**—such as sitting, pulling to stand, walking, talking, and learning to write his own name.

Children generally attain these milestones during a specific time frame or window of development. For example, most infants learn to sit up independently sometime between the ages of 4–7 months. Milestones develop in sequence, and each new milestone attained builds on the previous one.

Developmental Milestones

The six primary areas in which children develop are:

1. Cognitive—The ability to learn and solve problems
2. Social and Emotional—The ability to interact with others and control one's emotions and impulses
3. Speech and Language—The ability to understand and use language
4. Fine Motor Skills—Ability to use small muscles specifically in the hands and fingers
5. Gross Motor Skills—The ability to use large muscles for movement and other activities
6. Adaptive Skills—Self-care and daily living skills

Developmental milestones enable us to predict when most children will attain certain skills. It is important to keep in mind that although children tend to follow a fairly predictable course of development, each child is a unique individual and may reach a developmental milestone a little sooner or later than peers of the same age.

If a child is not learning a skill that other children of the same age are learning, this might be a red flag or signal of developmental delay.

Developmental Delay

IDEA (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), an entitlement law that makes early intervention and special education services available to children with developmental delays and/or disabilities, defines developmental delay as a child who:

- Is experiencing developmental delays as defined by the state and as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures in one or more of the following areas of development: physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional, or adaptive development; and
- By reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

The state of Minnesota's defines developmental delay as a child up to age seven is experiencing a measurable delay in development according to diagnostic instruments and procedure and fits the Developmental Delay disability category.

Identification of Developmental Delay

There are two types of play-based assessments used to identify developmental delay:

1. Developmental Screening

- Quick and general measurement of skills to identify children in need of further evaluation
- A questionnaire related to developmental milestones given to parents and caregivers
- A test given to the child by a health or education professional

2. Developmental Evaluation

- In-depth assessment administered by a professional trained in the use of the assessment instrument being utilized
- A profile of areas of strength and areas of need in each developmental domain
- Determines need for early intervention services and/or development of a treatment plan

When Concerns Arise

Parents and caregivers may become concerned if a child has not reached a developmental milestone or a skill has not begun to emerge during the expected range of time. For early care and education professionals who have concerns it is important to do the following:

- Observe and document your concerns.
- Share your concerns with the child's parents/family members,
- Encourage parents/family members to talk with their pediatrician.
- Refer parents/family members to Help Me Grow www.helpmegrowmn.org.
- Offer to assist with the referral process if needed.