

Parenting Your Child With Developmental Delays and Disabilities



What's Happening

Children develop in many ways and at different rates. While each child is unique, there are developmental milestones or skills that children are expected to develop by certain ages. As parents, we expect these age-specific tasks to occur naturally. Children don't necessarily learn skills at the same pace, but when milestones don't develop within the expected broad timeframe or don't appear at all, parents and caregivers may become concerned.

What You Might Be Seeing

Parents and primary caregivers are in the best position to note any ongoing concerns about their child's development that may require action. Although children develop at their own rate, some differences may be signs of developmental delays or disabilities. You may want to observe your child in the following areas to decide if your child is on a typical developmental path:

- **Gross motor skills:** Using large groups of muscles to sit, stand, walk, run, etc.; keeping balance; and changing positions
- **Fine motor skills:** Using hands to eat, draw, dress, play, write, and do many other things
- **Language:** Speaking, using body language and gestures, communicating, and understanding what others say
- **Cognitive:** Thinking skills including learning, understanding, problem-solving, reasoning, and remembering
- **Social:** Interacting with others; having relationships with family, friends, and teachers; cooperating; and responding to the feelings of others

What You Can Do

First Steps

- If your child's development worries you, share your concerns with someone who can and will help you get clear answers about your child's development. Don't accept others dismissing your concerns by saying "You worry too much," or "That will go away in a few months." You know your child and are his or her best advocate.
- If your child seems to be losing ground—in other words, starts to not be able to do things they *could* do in the past—you should request an evaluation right away. Get professional input for your concerns.
- If you think your child may be delayed or have a disability, take him or her to a primary health-care provider or pediatrician and request a developmental screening. If you don't understand the words used to assess or describe your child, be sure to ask questions such as, "What does that mean?"

Next Steps

- If your child is diagnosed with a developmental delay or disability, remember that you are not alone. Meet and interact with other families of children with special needs, including those with your child's identified disability. You may have many questions about how your child's diagnosis affects your whole family.
- Seek information. Learn the specifics about your child's special needs. When your child is diagnosed with a delay or a disability, you should begin interventions as early as possible so your child can make the best possible progress.
- Find resources for your child. Seek referrals from your physician or other advisors to find professionals and agencies that will help your child. Keep in mind that some services that assist your child may also provide programs to benefit your entire family.

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Ongoing Strategies

- Locate or start a support group. You may appreciate the opportunity to give and receive assistance or encouragement from others who can truly identify with your experience.
- Take a break and give yourself the gift of time to regroup, reestablish your relationships with family members, or reconnect with friends. You will be a better champion for your child when you take the time to care of yourself as well.
- Don't let your child's delay or disability label become the entire focus. Your child has special challenges but is also a member of your family. Seeing your child grow and develop as an individual and part of the family is one of the great pleasures of being a parent.

Remember:

You are your child's best advocate. Trust your feelings, be confident, and take action!

This tip sheet was created with information from experts in national organizations that work to prevent child maltreatment and promote well-being. At <https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/parenting/> you can download this tip sheet and get more parenting tips, or call 800.394.3366.