

The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

ISSUE NO. 52

DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS?: Looking at Development

Having a baby is a wondrous event. Babies are born every day, yet the birth of a baby is still a unique and special time for every parent. A new child brings joy, excitement, and a sense of hope. All parents have great hopes and expectations for their newborn. They wonder what kind of person their child will be, what types of activities he will enjoy. They ask: will she be a lawyer, a painter or a teacher? So many thoughts about how your child will develop will come up over time.



It's natural to wonder what kind of person your child will turn out to be and hope for the best. What is not so expected is to have to consider what you will do if your child doesn't grow or develop typically. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), one out of every six children is diagnosed with a developmental or behavior problem.

Do you know what to do if your child has a delay or disability? It can be both scary and confusing to discover your child may have special needs. However, if your child does have special needs, know that you are not alone. There are many resources and people to help you determine what is best for your child and your family.

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Is Baby Developing on Target?

As a parent, you naturally monitor your baby's physical growth and development. You keep track of the age at which your baby rolls over, sits up on his own, holds a bottle or cup on his own, and takes her first step. When you take your baby in for regular check-ups, especially for the first few years of life, the doctor will always ask you questions to tell if your baby is reaching "developmental milestones".

These kinds of checks are usually done at 9, 18, and 30 months during the well-child checkups. But they can be done at anytime if you have any concerns about your child's development.

The term "developmental milestones" is used by doctors to talk about all types of skills that children should reach within certain age ranges. These milestones cover children's growth in these areas:

- **Physical** (gross and fine motor) skills (sitting up, walking, holding an object);
- **Language and communication** skills (understanding what is said, pointing at objects he wants, learning and using words);
- **Self-help** skills (able to feed self, dress self, use the toilet); and
- **Social skills** (making eye contact, playing with others, wanting to be around others).

Does Your Child Need Help?

You know your child better than anyone. As you feed her, hold her, talk to him, you get to know your child's personality and how she responds to what is going

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POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

on around her. Some children do not like a lot of noise or chatter and some children like certain types of foods more than others. All children are different, just as all adults are different. As you get to know your baby, if there's an issue, you will sense when something is not quite "right".

Children develop at different rates, but there are general guidelines or age markers on when you should get help if your child does not reach some of the typical milestones. If you feel that your child isn't developing typically, seems a bit behind other children his age or hasn't reached any milestones within the typical age ranges, talk to your child's doctor.

Before speaking with your doctor, keep a log or record of your observations and your concerns. Keep a written list or a chart, noting

- Your baby's **age**
- What your **concern** is (language, walking, eating, etc.)
- Specific **times** you are noticing your concern, times of day (to see if there is a pattern or connection with times, other people)
- Behaviors or concerns **when around other people** (note if your concerns only occurs in certain situations, around other people, social settings)

Getting the Help You Need

When you speak with your doctor, bring your written records. If you are prepared ahead of time, you will

be sure not to leave out something important and to make sure all your concerns are heard. Bring copies for your child's doctor to keep.



After talking, the doctor will most likely request medical tests and a full evaluation. You can ask your child's doctor to refer you so that a full developmental evaluation can be done on your child. If your doctor suggests you may want to wait or not to worry, it may be necessary to insist on it. Potential developmental delays or issues should be addressed as soon as possible. Your child's doctor will direct you to your state's Child Find programs to start a formal early intervention identification

and evaluation process.

Know Your Rights

Know that there are federal and state laws to help you as you get help for your child. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees that children (preschool age and above) with disabilities will receive a "free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment". One part of the IDEA law is Part C. Part C is an early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities.

This law applies to any sort of delay or disability – physical, speech and language, hearing, cognitive, learning – that affects a child's ability to learn and progress along with his peers. The law is aimed at getting children and their families services and assistance they need. These services are usually run at the state level through states' departments of social services and education. All states have to participate.

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EVERY STATE HAS A PARENT TRAINING AND INFORMATION OFFICE TO HELP PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.

All intervention services are free and available to eligible families whose children are identified and evaluated as needing special services.

Once your child has been evaluated and if a diagnosis has been made, you can then participate in a team effort to determine if your child is eligible. The team will decide what kinds of services your child will receive.

The process of having evaluations and meeting to determine eligibility for services can sometimes take several weeks or several months. Remember you are an important person on this team and you are your child's best advocate or spokesperson.

Get Support

There are many support services and support groups to help you. Every state has a parent training and information office or agency that serves to help parents of children with disabilities or special needs. If you call your state's office (locate your nearest office by calling toll-free at 1-888-248-0822), they can let you know of the office nearest you. There are many parent support groups to help you as well. These groups are established to help parents go through the often frightening and confusing process of getting their child evaluated and getting the services they need. Other parents may be your biggest support.

Remember, you are your child's first support and champion. You know your child better than anyone. The more you know about what resources and serv-

ices are available to you and your child, the better choices you can make. There are laws, procedures and structures in place to help you find services that will help your child develop and grow and learn to her highest potential.



For More Information

- **Learn the Signs. Act Early,** www.cdc.gov/actearly, 1-800-CDC-INFO. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in partnership with other organizations, heads this campaign for the community of adults who come into contact with young children to learn about "signs" of possible developmental growth issues in

young children. The campaign helps people consider other areas, besides physical growth and development, that are important and should be addressed. The sooner any delays are addressed, the better chance of treating and good progress for the child. The "Learn the Signs" website has an interactive milestone tool for parents to check on their child's development, along with many resources and fact sheets about different developmental conditions.

- **American Academy of Pediatrics,** www.aap.org/healthtopics/early.cfm, has a section called "Parenting Corner" with all kinds of information on children's health topics and specific web page on Early Identification/Developmental Screening that provides information for parents and child care providers, including brochures and publications.

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- **State Parent Training and Information Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers,** www.taalliance.org/centers/index.htm, 1-888-248-0822 (toll-free), funded by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services under the U.S. Department of Education. These parent centers are established by law under IDEA to serve families of children and young adults from birth to age 22 with all disabilities: physical, cognitive, emotional, and learning. They help families obtain appropriate education and services for their children with disabilities; work to improve education results for all children; train and inform parents and professionals on a variety of topics; resolve problems between families and schools or other agencies; and connect children with disabilities to community resources that address their needs.
- **National Child Care Information Center,** <http://nccic.org/poptopics/specialneeds.html>. More information on the Americans with Disabilities Act, and how to access the websites of organizations that help parents advocate their children's education and medical care.



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KNOW THE SIGNS

Here are some “general” signs to look for in developmental areas that may signal that your child should be checked and seen by your doctor or a specialist. These are not the only signs of a possible delay, nor are they absolute proof that your child is delayed. They are “signals” that should be brought to your doctor’s attention. Your child’s doctor can give you more details and guidance in every developmental area.



SOCIAL SKILLS

Age (range)	Seek Help If Your Child
By 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not wave bye-bye or use simple gestures Does not watch or look at other people when they are speaking or when they are trying to engage child Does not like being held or any attempts from family to engage or be affectionate
By 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not seem interested in other children, doesn’t approach other children Does not like being held or touched; pulls away from parents being affectionate
By 3-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not engage in make-believe play with toys or imitate other children and adults Does not play with other children or try to play with other children

PHYSICAL

Age (range)	Seek Help If Your Child
Birth to 2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not hold his head up when being picked up Feels too floppy or too stiff when held Seems uncomfortable when being held, doesn’t like being held or touched
3 to 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot support head well or sit up with help Does not reach or hold onto objects Still startles and stiffens arms, neck and legs
7 to 9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not sit up on own Does not put objects in mouth Does not put any weight on legs – when pulling up, when being held up by arms and feet on floor
9 to 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is not crawling Not able to stand with support Crawls, but drags leg(s) or uses only one hand
1 to 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is not walking by 18 months Walks on toes most of the time
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is not able to handle small objects Unsteady walk or frequently falls Unable to use stairs Drools a lot

KNOW THE SIGNS

(CONTINUED)

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Age (range)	Seek Help If Your Child
By 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not imitate sounds • Does not laugh or squeal
8 to 10 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not babble or use sounds to get your attention • Does not respond to own name
12 to 15 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not use gestures – shake head, reach • Does not, make a few of these letter sounds – p, b, g, m or d • Does not say at least two or three words by 15 months
18 months to 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not know at least speak six to 10 words by 18 months • Does not point out objects • Does not respond to one-word directions
2.5 years to 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is not understood by anyone in family when speaking • Does not ask questions or use simple sentences



SELF-HELP

(These skills are ones in which children need opportunities to develop. They are not necessarily inborn skills, but ones that are taught.)

Age	Seek Help If Your Child
By 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is not able to self-feed eating small, cut-up finger foods
By 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is not able to hold and use a spoon • Is not able to hold and drink with a cup • Is not able to use a straw • Is not learning to put on shoes with help • Not learning to push pants down and help take off shirts, pants, socks
By 3-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is not moving forward with dressing independently (learning to tie shoes, snap buttons, use zippers) • Is not able to hold and use child-size scissors • Is not progressing in grooming skills such as brushing teeth, washing hands (still needs help to do it properly, but can do it alone)

