

Acting Early: Navigating Concerns about Children's Development

● A roadmap for early childhood professionals



Children are rapidly developing in early childhood, especially the first three years. Early care providers and teachers have a unique opportunity to partner with families in keeping children on a healthy path to development—especially when a child may be experiencing developmental delays.

1 OBSERVE & TRACK

Use developmental milestone checklists to track children's progress across important early skills.

Teachers can track a child's development by watching how he or she plays, learns, speaks, interacts, and moves. Knowing what to look for is key to knowing how a child is developing. Use milestones checklists to become aware of which developmental skills are expected at what ages.

Each child's growth and development varies, so it is important to remember that a milestone checklist is only a guide. Some children may achieve skills a little earlier and others a little bit later; however, certain skills tend to develop within predictable age ranges.

When completing a milestones checklist, talk to the child's family to find out if there are additional skills that the child demonstrates at home in order to gain a more complete picture of the child's skills.

In addition to completing the checklist, document your specific concerns very clearly in writing. For example, "Marco is 15 months old, but I haven't heard him try to say any words."

2 COMMUNICATE CONCERNS EARLY

When a child's development appears delayed or unusual, it's best not to "wait and see." Talk to parents as soon as you have concerns based on your observations. If intervention is needed, it's better to start early.

3 COMMUNICATE CONCERNS CAREFULLY

When sharing concerns with families, choose a time when you and the family can have a private and relaxed conversation. Arrange for someone to translate if the family speaks a language other than yours. Have the milestone checklists handy during the meeting so families can view them, and share any observations and notes about the child in a respectful, thoughtful, and non-judgmental way. Remember to present positive observations about their child's development as well as your concerns. Give families a chance to talk and ask questions. Understand that it may be hard for parents to hear developmental concerns about their child. Let them know that you care about their child and want to support his or her development.

4 CONNECT FAMILIES TO RESOURCES

Recommend that the family make an appointment to share concerns with a **specialist** (child psychologist or developmental pediatrician). Write down specific concerns to discuss at the appointment, and encourage families to bring any completed milestone checklists to share with the doctor.

A family member, doctor, childcare provider, teacher, or other concerned person in a child's life can contact **Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)** to request an evaluation for children ages birth to 3-years-old, at no cost to families. Offer to call ECI with families, as this might make it more comfortable for them. Early Childhood Intervention professionals assess infants and toddlers for any developmental concerns and determine whether the child needs intervention services and supports.

To find ECI programs in Texas:

Go to <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services> to search for local programs, or call 1-877-787-8999, select language, and then press 3.

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.