

Parenting Your Child With Developmental Delays and Disabilities



What's Happening

Children develop at different rates. But there are some skills that children are expected to develop by certain ages. When children do not reach these milestones within the expected timeframe (or at all), parents and caregivers may worry.

What You Might Be Seeing

Parents and primary caregivers are in the best position to see any problems with their child's development that may require action. Some differences between children are normal, but others may be signs of developmental delays or disabilities. These can occur in any of the following areas:

- Using large groups of muscles to roll over, sit up, stand, walk, run, etc.
- Using hands to eat, draw, dress, play, or write
- Speaking, using gestures, and understanding what others say
- Thinking skills such as learning, understanding, problem-solving, and remembering
- Relating to family, friends, and teachers; cooperating; and responding to the feelings of others

What You Can Do

First Steps

- If you are worried about your child, tell someone who can help you get answers. Don't accept others dismissing your concerns. You know your child and are his or her best advocate.
- If your child starts to not be able to do things he or she could do in the past, have him or her seen by a doctor right away. Ask for a "developmental screening."

- At your child's screening, if you don't understand the words used to describe your child, be sure to ask "What does that mean?"

Next Steps

- If your child is diagnosed with a developmental delay or disability, remember that you are not alone. Seek out other families of children with special needs, including those with your child's disability. Find or start a support group in your area. For more information, visit <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/parentgroups/>.
- Learn about your child's special needs and options for treatment. Begin treatment as early as possible so your child can make the best possible progress.
- Ask your doctor for referrals to professionals and agencies that will help your child. Some services for your child may also benefit your entire family.

Ongoing Strategies

- Take a break when you need it. Give yourself time to connect with supportive family members and friends. You will be a better champion for your child when you take the time to care of yourself.
- Don't let your child's challenges become your family's entire focus. Seeing your child grow and develop as 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/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/resources/tip-sheets/>, you can download this tip sheet and get more parenting tips, or call 800.394.3366.