

Early Childhood Intervention: Developmental Red Flags

Child development is a concern of parents of young children, but many parents aren't sure what to expect. We understand that each child develops a little differently but:

- What if a child is more than a little behind in a developmental skill?
- When should a parent be concerned; and
- What can anyone do to help?

Here are some common indicators, or red flags, that a baby or toddler may have a developmental delay:

- **Socializing** – The human brain is hard-wired to connect with other people. For infants, this means their parents and other caregivers. For toddlers, this includes not just adults, but also other children. If a baby doesn't smile when you smile, doesn't look at you when you talk to him, or doesn't like to be held, this could indicate a developmental concern. If a toddler doesn't seem interested in other children, doesn't come to an adult for help, or doesn't notice if there is a new caregiver, this is a developmental red flag.
- **Exploring** – Exploring the environment with hands, mouth, and for older infants and toddlers, through mobility, is important for learning. To explore, babies and toddlers must have both the ability and motivation. If a baby is stiff and can't bend his arms and legs, he may need special therapy services to help him use his body effectively. An infant who is too weak or "floppy" may also have trouble learning to use her body to explore. If an older infant or toddler doesn't seem interested in reaching for toys, or easily gives up trying to get a toy, he may need some help in learning to explore. By five months old, children should be moving from place to place first by rolling, then by scooting, crawling, and finally, walking and running.
- **Communicating** – Even newborns begin learning the rules of communication. They learn that if they cry, someone will feed them, change them, or comfort them. If a baby doesn't make noises when distressed, or if a toddler is not able to point and use at least a few words to indicate what she wants, these are developmental concerns.
- **Managing emotions** – Babies and toddlers don't usually manage their emotions well, but some extreme emotional responses may be red flags. If a child seems unhappy most of the time, has tantrums that last more than 20 minutes, or doesn't calm down within a few minutes when you try to soothe him, there may be some developmental problems.

If a child shows any of these red flags, a child and family may qualify for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services. ECI will help parents find ways to help their child learn new skills. Anyone can refer to ECI for an evaluation to see if services are needed. To make a referral and locate an ECI program in your area, visit <https://citysearch.hhsc.state.tx.us/>

From Parent 2 Parent Newsletter 6/15



The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education, H328M150022 (PATH), H328M150023 (PEN), & H328M150024 (TEAM). However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



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