

Discussing Developmental Concerns with Parents

Educators and child care providers have a responsibility to monitor a child's development. As soon as a developmental delay or special need is suspected, it is important to report this to a parent in an in-person meeting. This will help ensure that the child will have access to early and appropriate interventions, if needed.

Bringing up your concerns about a child's development can be daunting. Some parents may be relieved to know that you have noticed something too while others may not be open to hearing this information. Here are some tips to help you prepare for the conversation.

Prior to the Meeting

- Schedule the meeting ahead of time. Don't try to fit it into a hectic pick-up or drop-off time.
- Tell the parents what the topic of the meeting will be.
- Hold the meeting in an area that is private and comfortable.
- Document concerns and collect data over a period of time. Document any modifications you've made to meet the child's needs and the results. Monitor development by comparing [age-appropriate milestones](#) with the development of the child.
- Prepare what you are going to say. Think about the words you will use and what those words will mean to the parents.

During the Meeting

- Start by talking about the child's strengths. Lead into the discussion of concerns by encouraging the parent to share their own observations, questions or concerns about their child. Ask questions that will allow a parent to share his/her own observations, then share your own. This encourages a back-and-forth conversation that may validate a parent's hidden concerns and fears.
- When communicating your concerns, use a developmental checklist. This provides a visual and gives parents something to think about without putting a label on it. It helps get the conversation started and the information is objective.
- Be supportive and respectful.
- Practice active listening techniques.
- Be calm, but show your concern.
- Focus on developmental milestones, specific behaviors and the need to "rule out" possible concerns.
- Be honest but kind. Give parents accurate information in a nonjudgmental way, such as, "Based on the developmental checklist we completed, your child is not meeting his/her developmental milestones" or "Your child seems to be learning in a different way."

- Be open to trying a parent's suggestions.
- Reassure parents that you will support them and their child.
- Explain the role and importance of early identification and intervention for developmental concerns.
- Refer to other resources, such as the child's health care provider or [refer a child](#) through Help Me Grow.
- End the meeting in a positive way and with a plan that may include follow-up with other resources.

Watch these videos for more tips on discussing concerns with parents

[Conversation Strategies and Preparation Video](#)

[Conversation with Parents Video](#)

What Happens After Referral?

The family will be contacted by the local school district to arrange for a screening or evaluation to determine if a child is eligible for Infant and Toddler Intervention or Preschool Special Education services.

Tips for Successful Conversations

- Be careful not to use jargon, acronyms and labels.
- Do not diagnose. This should only be done through a comprehensive developmental or medical evaluation.
- Acknowledge a parent's concerns if they are not the same as yours.
- Remember that parents may tell you that you are wrong. Find out what the parents see their child doing in other situations. Agree to revisit the issue and check in again.



If you have concerns about a child's development and think a child might need extra help to learn and grow, don't hesitate to refer a child.

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[Refer a Child](#)