

COMMUNICATING ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

Discussing developmental concerns with parents or sharing screening results that indicate that a child may be at risk for a development delay can be a sensitive conversation. It is normal to feel anxious about having these conversations. With preparation and practice, you can develop the skills to have productive conversations with parents, even when the topic might be difficult.

Lay the Foundation

The foundation for productive conversations with parents about their child's development should be established long before you might need to share a concern. To avoid having your first conversation be about development concerns, make sure you have conversations about healthy child development and developmental milestones from the beginning of your relationship with the family and their child.

Introduce the concept of healthy development by integrating conversations about development into your regular communication with parents. Try conversation starters such as:

- "I'm noticing that she's trying to _____ (e.g., pull herself to stand). Have you noticed her trying this at home?"
- "You must spend lots of time reading to him at home. I've noticed that he really likes books. What else does he really like to do?"

Discuss developmental screening in positive terms and frame the process as an opportunity to gather information that will help you and the caregiver plan together how best to support the child. Explain screening in a way that clearly communicates the purpose as well as limitations. Emphasize that screening is used to track the development of all children in your program or practice, and that their child is not being singled out. With a solid understanding of the screening parents may be better prepared for possible results.

Nurture Relationships

Build trust. Establish respect. Develop a positive relationship with the parent. Demonstrate that you are the parent's partner in their child's development.

Build Your Knowledge

Pursue professional development opportunities on topics related to early childhood development, early identification, screening, and referral. Attend training on administering the screening instrument to improve your ability to accurately score and interpret the results. Develop your understanding of the referral process and availability of resources in your community. Become familiar with area resources so you can help support families as they navigate the process.

Contact programs such as Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO) or Child Care Aware® of Kansas for training opportunities.

Adapted from National Infant & Toddler Child Care Initiative: A Project of the Child Care Bureau at ZERO TO THREE. (2010, April). Infant/Toddler Development, Screening, and Assessment. Retrieved from https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/infant-toddler_development_screening_and_assessment.pdf