

When you think something might be wrong

FROM THE MOMENT A BABY IS BORN, PARENTS SEARCH her beautiful face and count little fingers and toes. As a parent, you are always concerned that your child's development is on target. Most of the time your concerns melt away as your child passes the developmental milestones you eagerly await, but what should you do if you continue to be uneasy about your child's development? Here are some suggestions.

Learn about typical child development.

Because you are enrolled in Parents as Teachers, you receive information from your parent educator about typical child development. Read the handouts you receive, and keep them for future reference. Ask your parent educator for additional materials or suggestions for things to read if you want more information. Seek out sources of information that are reliable and research-based.

Keep a log.

Be organized and systematic about observing your child. Create a log to record observations about the things that concern you. For example, if you are worried about your child's language development, you might want to record the date, time, sounds you hear him make, and the environment or context for his language (for example, "Screeched when frustrated by shape sorter.") You will be able to have an objective record of what your child is doing, and you may be able to see patterns in your child's behavior. This will enable you to check out your concerns with developmental information or expert opinion.

Observe other children your child's age.

Get together with other families who have children your child's age. Watch children when you're out. What do you observe the other children doing? Does it change your concern for your child's development? Be confident in your opinion of your child's development and the goals and values you hold. Well-meaning friends and relatives may be anxious to share their opinions and advice. Listen to everyone, but select the information that fits you and your child.



Ask for expert help.

Discuss your concerns with your parent educator. Request a screening if one is not planned in the near future. Your parent educator can refer you to other professionals with expertise in the developmental area you are concerned about. Ask your child's health care provider for an opinion and referral to other appropriate professionals. If necessary, be persistent and bring your observation log to back up your concerns.

You know your child best and it is your role to be her advocate. If you have a concern, seek out information until you are satisfied. Get the support you need, and the early help your child needs to meet her full potential. ❖