Early Child Development and Identification of Developmental Milestones

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The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, nor the U.S. government.
Presentation Outline

- What is early childhood development and why does it matter?
- What is the importance of brain development and nurturing relationships in early childhood?
- What is a developmental milestone?
- What is CDC doing to support early childhood development?
- What are the benefits of using *Learn the Signs. Act Early.* resources within WIC?
- How do I identify a developmental milestone?
Early Childhood Matters

- Early experiences build a foundation for future health and life success

- Nurturing care builds healthy brain architecture, and provides a buffer from the effects of negative experiences such as poverty

- Caregivers are frontline public health workers in the trenches of child health and development


Brain Growth in Childhood


What Are These Connections Like Over Time?
What is Development?

- Development is the pattern of changes that occur throughout the lifespan. These are the changes that children experience as they grow older, bigger, stronger, and more mature.
  - Developmental Milestones are things most children can do by a certain age.
Developmental Milestones

- Social and Emotional
- Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)
- Communication/Language
- Motor/physical development
- Hearing and vision (infants only)
How is CDC supporting early childhood development?
Protecting & Promoting Early Childhood Development

- Early Intervention for Medical & Biological Issues
- Positive Parenting & Caregiving
- Nutrition & Activity

Accounting for and addressing Social Determinants and Contexts

 Preventing

- Hazardous Exposures
- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Infections
- Injuries
Why *Learn the Signs. Act Early.*?

- 1 in 6 U.S. children has a developmental disability
- Delays to diagnosis often occur
- Children from families with low incomes, like those served by WIC, are at even greater risk for delays
- Parent concerns about a child’s development are reliable predictors of children’s delays

Learn the Signs. Act Early.

Studies on *Learn the Signs. Act Early* have shown using the materials:

- Increases parents’ knowledge of developmental milestones
- Improves parents’ observation skills
- Helps parents identify developmental concerns
- Increases the likelihood of a parent taking action or following up on a concern
- Prepares parents to respond more accurately to developmental screening
- Increases parent engagement in conversations with healthcare providers about children's development


Learn the Signs. Act Early. Materials

Materials are free, customizable, and available in English and Spanish, as well as other languages.
Learn the Signs. Act Early. & WIC

- Promoting parent awareness
  - Provide parents a checklist
  - Review the completed checklist with parents
  - Provide parents with a milestones brochure

- Making a referral
  - Refer to the child’s healthcare provider and/or early intervention program
  - Support parents in following up on concerns
Learn the Signs. Act Early. & WIC

- Acceptable to staff and families
- Associated with high referral rates
  - 96% of WIC staff referred one or more children
- Quick implementation
  - 84% of WIC staff report that implementation takes less than 5 minutes

“The Learn the Signs. Act Early. program fits perfectly with the work our WIC program does. The materials give our families a simple overview of key milestones to watch for in their children. And our staff is glad to have this additional support in talking with families about child development in a consistent, effective way.”

—WIC manager, St. Louis, Missouri

What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?
What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?

2 Months:

- Smiles at people
- Follows objects with eyes
- Holds up head
- Coos, makes gurgling sounds
- **Turns head toward sounds**
What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?

4 Months:

- Copies some movements and facial expressions
- Reaches with one hand
- Brings hands to mouth
- Watches faces closely
- **Babbles with expression**
What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?

6 Months:

- Looks at self in mirror
- Responds to own name
- Rolls over in both directions
- Makes sounds to show joy or displeasure
- Responds to other people’s emotions
What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?

9 Months:

- Uses fingers to point
- Puts things in mouth
- Plays peek-a-boo
- Begins to sit without support
- Has favorite toys
- Pulls to stand
What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?

1 Year:

- Shy or nervous with strangers
- Simple gestures, shakes head “no”
- Looks at objects when named
- Gets to a sitting position without help
- **Tries to say words you say**
What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?

18 Months:

- Shakes head and says “no”
- Can follow 1-step commands
- Walks alone
- May be afraid of strangers
- **Points to show others something interesting**
What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?

2 Years:
- Shows independence and defiance
- Uses 2-4 word “sentences”
- Begins to sort shapes and colors
- Walks up and down stairs with support
- Copies others
What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?

3 Years:

- Takes turns playing games
- Upset with major changes in routine
- Plays make-believe
- Runs easily
- **Speech is understandable**
What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?

4 Years:

- Cooperates with other children
- Sings a song or says a poem
- Catches a bounced ball
- Can’t tell what’s real and what’s make-believe
- Remembers parts of a story
What Do Developmental Milestones Look Like?

5 Years:

- Wants to please friends
- Swings and climbs
- Can count ten or more things
- Shows more independence
- **Uses future tense**
Let’s practice identifying some developmental milestones together.
Commercial Game

Round 1: *Darth Vader kid*
Commercial Game

Round 1: *Darth Vader kid*

- Creative make-believe play
- Often can’t tell the difference between reality and make-believe
- Shows more independence
- Others?
Commercial Game

Round 2: A *baby wants milk*
Commercial Game

Round 2: *A baby wants milk*

- Points to show what they want
- Simple gestures (shaking head “no”)
- Says single words (“no”)
- Shows independence and defiance
- Shows full range of emotions
- Stands, holding on
- Others?
Round 3: *Car remote chew toy*
Round 3: *Car remote chew toy*

- Puts things in mouth
- Reacts to loud sounds
- Has favorite toys
- Begins to sit without support
- Begins to move things from hand to hand
- Laughs
- Others?
Commercial Game

Round 4: *Little Tikes*
Commercial Game

Round 4: *Little Tikes*

- Runs easily
- Swings, climbs, and jumps
- Cooperates with other children
- Plays make-believe
- Others?
Where Do I Find More CDC Resources on Development?

- Learn the Signs. Act Early. resources for WIC
  [https://www.cdc.gov/ActEarly/WIC](https://www.cdc.gov/ActEarly/WIC)

- Parenting tips

- Parent resources if there are developmental concerns
  [https://www.cdc.gov/concerned](https://www.cdc.gov/concerned)
Thank you!

Questions?

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