

Is your young child developing skills at a normal rate?

By Patricia Bill

Sam's parents are worried. He's 18 months old and doesn't have many of the skills his older sister had at that age. Grandma, too, is concerned. "Shouldn't he be...," has cropped up in several conversations.

"He's healthy and seems fine otherwise," said the doctor at the last appointment. "Let's see how he's doing at his two-year check." What should parents do?

1. They should determine as early as possible, with help from professionals and second opinions if necessary, if their child does have special needs.

2. If so, they should seek services without delay.

Early intervention programs established by federal and state law are located across Minnesota and the nation. Through screening and assessment, the programs can help families identify special needs in young children and guide them to services confidentially and at no cost. If the parents disagree with results of their child's screening, they can request a closer look or an assessment. If still dissatisfied, there is an appeal process.

Most experts advise parents to begin services as soon as possible if their child has special needs. Experience shows that early intervention is a major factor in helping children with disabilities reach their potentials.

This is how the system works:

The names of the early intervention programs and numbers to call vary from community to community in Minnesota. Parents can locate their local program by calling the child's physician, local public health department, school district or special education director, county human services agency, or parent training and information center (PACER Center).*

Shortly after parents contact the local program, a service facilitator will talk to them by telephone or in person to gather preliminary information about the child and offer free screening.

If the screening indicates delays in a child's development, the facilitator and an "interagency review team," composed of local health, human services, and education professionals, may do an assessment of the child's development. The assessment determines whether the child qualifies for services. If the child is eligible, the team and family work together to design an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) with services and support. If the child is not eligible, the family may be referred to other resources for information, services, and support. The team may also suggest follow-up to determine if the child qualifies for services later.

Following is a brief list of skills compiled from several sources. It indicates skills the majority of children accomplish at certain ages. Parents should not panic if a child is not doing all of the items in their age group. If the child can perform none or only a few of the skills, however, the family may want to take a closer look at their child's development.

Ages at which children usually develop specific skills

By 3 months a child usually can

- look toward bright colors and lights
- move eyes in the same direction together
- react to bottle or breast
- react to loud noises or voices
- make a fist with either hand
- grasp hair or toy
- wiggle and kicks
- lift head and chest when on stomach
- smile in social interaction
- vocalize and coo

By 6 months, a child usually can

- turn over from stomach to back
- follow moving objects with eyes
- distinguish mother from others
- turn toward source of normal sound
- pick up toy with one hand
- transfer objects from one hand to the other
- play with toes
- help hold bottle during feeding
- recognize familiar persons
- babble

By 9 months, a child usually can

- sit without support
- feed self cracker or cookie
- push away things not wanted
- reach for familiar persons
- roll from back to stomach
- make wide range of vocalizations
- react when called by name

By 12 months, a child usually can

- crawl on hands and knees
- pull to standing position
- walk around furniture or crib while holding on
- drink from a cup
- wave bye-bye and play peek-a-boo and pattycake
- pick up small objects with thumb and index finger
- hold out arms and legs while being dressed
- put objects into container
- stack two blocks
- use 5-6 words
- understand "no"

By 18 months, a child usually can

- walk without support
- enjoy pulling, pushing, and dumping things
- follow simple directions
- pull off shoes, socks, mittens
- enjoy looking at pictures
- keep balance when stepping off low objects
- hold cup by self to drink
- give kisses and hugs
- feed self with spoon
- pick up two small toys in one hand
- talk in single words
- scribble with crayon

By 2 years, a child usually can

- use 2-3 word sentences
- recognize familiar pictures
- carry an object while walking
- play independently
- enjoy imitating parents
- identify hair, eyes, ears, and nose by pointing
- build a tower of four blocks
- show affection
- sometimes say "no" when interfered with
- kick a ball forward
- show sympathy to other children
- run well
- respond to correction
- take off open coat or shirt without help
- walk up and down stairs alone
- turn pages of picture book one at a time
- follow two-part instructions

At 3 years, a child usually can

- ride a tricycle
- repeat common rhymes
- name at least one color correctly
- use toilet
- help with simple household tasks
- open door by turning knob
- climb on play equipment, ladders, slide
- scribble with circular motion
- play with other children
- stand on one foot without support
- draw or copy vertical lines
- speak and be understood most of the time
- play a role in pretend games
- dress self with help
- walk up and down stairs alternating feet

Early Childhood Connection is published three times a year by PACER Center. PACER Co-directors: Marge Goldberg and Paula Goldberg; Early Childhood Coordinator: Maria Anderson; Connection Editor: Patricia Bill.

*The Early Intervention System in Kentucky is called First Steps (ages 0-3) and you can reach them by calling 1-800-442-0087 or for more information on other services, material, etc. contact Kentucky's parent training and information center, KY-SPIN, Inc., at 800-525-7746.

Distributed by: KY-SPIN, Inc.
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