



## Special Needs / Identifying Children with Special Needs

### Most Common Special Needs



Dear Elizabeth,

I'm concerned about the development of one of the children in my care. How can his family and I find out if he has special needs and how can we respond to them?

– **Connie Reid**

#### Elizabeth's Tips



**Elizabeth Sanchez**

Host

#### High-Incidence Special Needs

- Speech and/ or language delays
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Cognitive delays
- Social & emotional disorders
- Learning differences/disabilities

#### Supporting Special Needs

- Be aware of typical developmental milestones
- Document behavior & share observations
- Request a developmental evaluation
- Respond to individual needs as soon as possible

#### Expert Advice



**Lucia Ortiz, M.Ed.**

Special needs  
information specialist

#### Common Types of Special Needs

When a child is young, he or she may have a developmental delay. This is a term that means an infant or child is developing slower than normal in one or more areas. For example, he or she may not be speaking when most children of that age are. Some of the most common special needs that young children are diagnosed with are:

- Speech and/or language delays
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Cognitive delays
- Social & emotional disorders
- Learning differences/disabilities

#### Warning Signs

Parents and providers should be aware of some of the early signs that a child may have a delay.

### Speech and Language Delays

Kids may have trouble producing speech sounds, using spoken language to communicate, or understanding what other people say. So for example, by the age of 2, kids have an average of about 50 words; by 2 ½ they have about 500 words and begin putting words together, like "mom water." By 3 there should be phrases, etc. Even though all children develop at a different pace, if a child is very behind in meeting these milestones, there could be reason for concern. Speech and language delays can also occur with other kinds of developmental delays.

### Autism

Autism affects three different developmental areas as early as 18 months:

- Language -- There are communication delays, not just language delays. For example, some children with autism may have a lot of language or words, but they don't use them to communicate. They may have memorized and be able to recite a whole book, but can't communicate that they would like a glass of water.
- Social Skills -- Lack of interaction with others. Kids with autism don't have the same kind of socialization skills you would expect to see in other typical kids. Many times they won't make eye contact and may appear not to hear you.
- -Behavior -- There is often a display of repetitive behaviors, such as turning in circles or flapping their hands. They develop specific routines and rituals and may become disturbed when these are changed or altered in any way.

Severe regression – for example, the loss of previously acquired language – can also be a warning sign of autism.

### ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

There's 3 different types of ADHD:

- Inattention -- A child can't focus and is easily distracted. Hyperactivity/Impulsivity -- Excessive energy to the point where a child can't sit still or is fidgety. Combined Type -- A child displays signs of both Inattention and Hyperactivity/Impulsivity, and the symptoms have persisted for at least 6 months. Cognitive Delays

Refers to delays in all areas, more of a global delay. For example, if your child is 2-years-old, but her motor skills, such as walking or stacking blocks, and are that of a 6-month-old and she has no language, this could be reason for concern.

### Social/Emotional Disorders

A child may show issues with trust-building and attachment, difficulty forming and maintaining friendships, inappropriate play skills for his age. This is sometimes very apparent in children whose parents immigrate and bring the kids to join them a little later. The changes that the child goes through can many times lead to these social/emotional disorders.

### Learning Disabilities

Delays in learning and learning disabilities are many times diagnosed later in age.

### **Milestones**

Parents, caregivers, and others that impact the lives of young children must be familiar with the broad aspects of development. It is important to have an idea of the milestones a child should be meeting at different ages. This will help to determine if a child is developing like other children his/her age. Because you spend so much time with your child, you know him better than anyone, so sometimes it's a gut feeling that something is not right.

### **First Step**

When there is a concern of a potential special need, the adult should make observations and make note of it. To get a clearer picture of the child's skills, observations should be made over a period of time and in different environments. All caretakers should have input about the skills they have observed the child perform while in their care.

If there is a concern, the child should be evaluated by a professional. Some children develop more slowly than others or develop in ways that seem different from other children. This can cause parents to worry. If a parent thinks that his/her child is not developing at the same pace or in the same way as most children his or her age, it is often a good idea to talk first to the child's pediatrician or health provider. Parents should explain their concerns and tell the doctor what they have observed with their child.

### **Developmental Evaluations**

Families can seek out developmental evaluations by speaking with the child's pediatrician. The pediatrician can refer the child for an evaluation to private providers using the child's insurance or to the state's Child Find program. If you're concerned that your pediatrician isn't addressing your concerns, each state has programs in place that evaluate children for free when there is a concern with their development. For children birth up to their third birthday, the program is called Early Intervention. For children three and up, the services are known as special education and are provided through your local school district.

After the developmental evaluation is conducted, the family will be given information about their child's skills in the different areas of development. Those skills are compared to what an average child of that age should be doing. If the comparison shows a delay, then the child may need to receive some level of service depending on his or her needs (i.e. physical therapy, speech therapy, etc).

### **Work Together**

All of the people involved with the child's care should work together as a team to help the child succeed. The team members need to communicate their concerns as well as share strategies that they use with the child. They need to collaborate with each other to make sure that the child's individual needs are met. The team should work toward goals that will help the child progress, they should build on the child's strengths, and they should keep track of what works or doesn't work.

### **Early Intervention**

Early intervention is crucial. If there is a delay, it's important to identify it as soon as possible so that families can begin to implement strategies that will help benefit their

kids and help build on their strengths. The sooner a potential delay is addressed, the better chance a child has to receive the kind of care and support he deserves.

### Child Care Provider Comments



**Paola Cervantes**

Son has autism

My suggestion to other parents who might be fearful of what a developmental evaluation may reveal is to really question themselves as to why they have this fear. What they may find is that the fear is not about your child, it's about you. Once you come to an understanding about that, then you can put that aside and really focus on what's best for your child. If you're afraid of the label that may result from an evaluation, remember that label might not always be there. As your child starts to grow and you focus on the quality of care and services for your child, that label may disappear. If you can set aside whatever negativity and fear you might experience at first then you can immediately be there for your child.



**Janis Sanders**

Grandmother of four

My grandson has a speech/language delay as a result of his hearing loss. We noticed that from an early age he seemed to not respond to us. Trying to get his attention was very hard. He was always frustrated and irritated. Now, he has a hearing aid and has been working with a speech and language therapist. He's also in a classroom with other typical kids, and I think that's helped him a lot. I feel that being around other kids has helped to encourage him to do his best and to feel independent.



**Marianella Hickery**

Child care provider for 20 years

If you suspect a child in your care might have special needs, the first step is to observe and document everything – all the behavior you see and any warning signs you think are present. This way you have a record of all the behaviors to show the parents so that it becomes more concrete than just saying, "Your son was doing something odd the other day." As child care providers, we aren't experts. All we can do is give parents the tools they need to then seek out an evaluation. It's important that parents know that we're all on the same side and will be there to support them and their child.

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