

# Tips for Talking with Parents about Child Development



The following talking points are examples that can be used to support your conversation. Modify them as needed to best fit the situation.

## TIPS

## EXAMPLES

### ALWAYS:

#### Talk about development regularly

- Talk with parents regularly about their child's development – not only when they have concerns.
- Provide them with resources they can use to track milestones at home.

#### EXAMPLE:

"I am so excited to be working with \_\_\_\_\_. Tracking \_\_\_\_\_'s milestones, how they play, speak, learn, act, and move for their age helps me better understand how to support their development. I hope we can work together to look for and track \_\_\_\_\_'s developmental milestones. I have free milestone checklists and an app to help us share \_\_\_\_\_'s progress."

#### Share resources

- Encourage families to use [milestone checklists](#), like those that are a part of the [Milestone Tracker app](#), or the [Milestone Moments booklet](#) to monitor their child's development at home. Find these free resources here: [www.cdc.gov/ActEarly/Materials](http://www.cdc.gov/ActEarly/Materials).

#### EXAMPLE:

"A great way to monitor \_\_\_\_\_'s developmental milestones is with these checklists. They can help you understand milestones most children reach by certain ages and the ones to look for as they get older. You can put them on the refrigerator as an easy place to see them every day. You can also track your child's development with CDC's *Milestone Tracker* app!"

#### Use good listening skills

- Listen closely, make eye contact, nod when appropriate, and be silent when the parent is speaking.
- Repeat the parent's main points when you respond so he or she will know you heard and understood.
- Consider how the parent feels about what he or she is saying.
- Watch and listen closely, and ask the parent how they are feeling. Acknowledge their feelings when you respond.
- Probe for more information when necessary.

#### EXAMPLE:

"It sounds like you are pretty worried and I hear you saying that at home, you do not hear \_\_\_\_ talk well enough to be understood most of the time. Is that correct?"

"Let's talk about what you have noticed at home. Can you describe specific situations?"

"Is there anything else about \_\_\_\_\_'s development you'd like to talk about?"



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## WHEN YOU HAVE CONCERNS TO SHARE:

**Highlight the child's strengths**

- Let the parent know what the child does well and the milestones he or she is meeting.
- Keep the conversation positive.

**EXAMPLE:**

"We love having \_\_\_\_\_ in our group. They enjoy group activities, and really love to sing and dance. They're quite the entertainer!"

**Make sure you are well prepared**

- Invest time in building meaningful relationships with the parents and discuss developmental progress regularly.
- Complete a [milestone checklist](#) for the child's age to help the parent know that you are basing your comments on facts and not just feelings.

**EXAMPLE:**

"Since our last meeting, I have noticed a few things about \_\_\_\_\_ that I would like to discuss. I've been completing a milestone checklist for \_\_\_\_\_, like I do for all the children, and I see \_\_\_\_\_ is meeting their cognitive milestones very well. However, they are not meeting a few of their language/communication milestones. For one, I have noticed that \_\_\_\_\_ doesn't talk well enough for others to understand, most of the time. As you can see on the checklist, that is a three-year-old language/communication milestone. Can you tell me what you're seeing at home and when with family and friends?"

**Encourage the parent to share any concerns with the child's doctor and offer tips and activities for supporting development**

- Remember it's not your role to make or even suggest a diagnosis.
- Remind parents of the importance of acting early on concerns.
- Share tips and activities from CDC's [milestone checklists](#) or the [Milestone Tracker app](#).

**EXAMPLE:**

"There might not be anything to be concerned about, but I do think it's important to schedule an appointment with \_\_\_\_\_'s doctor to talk about this."

"Take this checklist with you when you go, share it, and ask the doctor for a developmental screening. This will help the doctor and you to know whether \_\_\_\_\_ might need a little extra help. In the meantime, I'd like to go through some tips and activities you could try at home between now and the appointment. Getting help early can make a big difference! Let me know if there is anything else I can do to make it easier for you to talk with their doctor."

**Follow-up with the family in a few weeks****EXAMPLE:**

"Thank you for taking time to meet with me again. I know the last time we talked about \_\_\_\_\_'s development, we were concerned about their language skills. Have you been able to talk with \_\_\_\_\_'s doctor about this?"

## HOW TO RESPOND:

### If a parent disagrees with you about their child's behavior or abilities

#### TRY:

"Sometimes children behave differently at home than they do at school. I'm only able to share with you what I've seen during our time together. How does \_\_\_\_\_ act when they're around other children in the neighborhood?"

### If a parent gets angry or upset

#### TRY:

"I understand that you are upset. Like you, I want what's best for \_\_\_\_\_. That's why it's so important for me to share with you what I am seeing. If \_\_\_\_\_ does need some extra help, I want them to have the opportunity to get it as soon as possible. Do you want to discuss your questions and concerns now, or would you rather think about this a little more and meet again (in a couple of days, next week, etc.)?"

*(If the parent hasn't already been given a milestone checklist, give one and suggest that he or she fill it out and bring it back.)*

### If a parent reports that the doctor said to wait and see

#### TRY:

"While it's true that every child develops at their own pace, there are certain milestones we typically see from most children by \_\_\_\_\_'s age. If you are concerned, you can reach out to early intervention directly to see if \_\_\_\_\_ qualifies for help through free or low-cost services. You don't need a doctor's referral. Acting early may make a real difference for \_\_\_\_\_, so it's better to find out for sure. If their development is delayed enough to qualify for help, you can get those services started right away and then follow-up with the doctor.

Let me know if I can help connect you with the early intervention system if you would like to do this."

## BE MINDFUL OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Not all cultures place the same value on particular developmental milestones. When communicating with families, be aware of your own cultural biases in making decisions about how to communicate with families.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- For a FREE 1-hour online training about developmental monitoring and communicating with parents, including videos of sample conversations (Module 4), visit [www.cdc.gov/WatchMeTraining](http://www.cdc.gov/WatchMeTraining)
- For tips on why and how to use *Learn the Signs. Act Early.* materials in your program and to access free materials visit [www.cdc.gov/ActEarly](http://www.cdc.gov/ActEarly)
- Share the [How to Get Help For Your Child](http://www.cdc.gov/Concerned) tip sheet and other information with parents: [www.cdc.gov/Concerned](http://www.cdc.gov/Concerned)