



CONVERSATIONS IN CARE

Quick Guides for CHWs and Care Teams

Practical Tools Rooted in Trust and Respect

Child Development

Why It Matters:

Parents and caregivers are a child’s first and most important teachers. Families, no matter their backgrounds, share the same hope that their children grow up safe, healthy, and strong.

In the U.S., we often describe child development as the way children grow and learn over time. How they move, talk, think, play, and build relationships. Every child is unique and develops at their own pace, but there are common stages and skills we usually see at different ages.

It is important to honor all cultures, traditions, and values. There is no one ‘right’ way to raise a child. By learning from one another, we can give children the best start in life.

This conversation guide aims to support providers in delivering information with compassion, creating a safe and respectful environment, and connecting families to the resources and support they need as they begin navigating their journeys.

Before the conversation:

- Create a safe, respectful environment.
- Ask what the family already knows or believes.
- Acknowledge that different words, beliefs, or traditions may be different and that it is okay.
- Listen more than you speak at first.

Questions Parents May Have About Child Development

What is child development?

Child development is the way your child grows and learns over time. We look at how they move, talk, think, feel, and get along with others. It starts from the day they are born and continues as they grow into children.



What are the areas of child development that I should know about?

There are five main areas of child development:

1. **Physical development:** Learning to roll, sit, crawl, walk, use hands and fingers.
2. **Cognitive development:** How your child thinks, solves problems, and learns.
3. **Language and communication:** How they listen, understand, and speak.
4. **Social and emotional development:** How they play, share, make friends, and express feelings.
5. **Self-help skills:** Things like feeding themselves, dressing, and using the bathroom.



All children grow and develop in their own time. Some learn things quickly, and others take a little longer ... and that's completely normal. It's important to watch for any signs that a child may be having more difficulty than expected, so they can get help early, if needed.

Is it okay if my child takes longer than others to do something?

Yes. Children grow at different speeds. Some talk early, some talk later. That doesn't mean something is wrong, but, if your child is much slower than other children their age or if you feel like something is 'off,' it's good to talk to someone who can help.



You know your child best. If something doesn't feel right, we'll figure it out together.

What helps my child develop well?

Your time and love are the most important things. You can help your child grow by:

- Talking, singing, and reading to them (in your home language is great!).
- Giving them time to play and explore.
- Making sure they eat healthy food and get enough sleep.
- Praising their effort, not just results.
- Being patient and kind even when parenting feels hard.



What could slow down a child's development?

Many things can affect how a child grows, including:

- Not enough food or sleep.
- Stress at home or in the environment.
- Health problems, like ear infections or low vision.
- Not having chances to play or talk with others.
- Exposure to violence, trauma, or frequent moves.



These situations don't mean a child will never catch up, but they do make support more important.

How is child development monitored?

There are three levels of developmental monitoring and screening we like to use (see table on page 3).



Developmental Monitoring	Developmental Screening	Developmental Evaluation
<p>WHO: You! Parents, grandparents, other caregivers</p>	<p>WHO: Health care provider, early childhood teacher, or other trained providers</p>	<p>WHO: Developmental pediatrician, child psychologist, or other trained providers, such as speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, or other specialists</p>
<p>WHAT: Look for developmental milestones. Developmental monitoring observes how your child grows and changes over time and whether your child meets the typical developmental milestones in playing, learning, speaking, behaving, and moving. Parents, grandparents, early childhood providers, and other caregivers can participate in developmental monitoring</p>	<p>WHAT: Developmental screening takes a closer look at how your child is developing. Your child will get a brief test, or you will complete a questionnaire about your child. The tools used for developmental and behavioral screening are formal questionnaires or checklists based on research that ask questions about a child's development, including language, movement, thinking, behavior, and emotions.</p>	<p>WHAT: Identify and diagnose developmental delays and conditions. If the screening tool identifies an area of concern, a formal developmental evaluation may be needed. This formal evaluation is an in-depth look at a child's development that's usually done by a trained specialist, such as a developmental pediatrician, child psychologist, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, or other specialist</p>
<p>WHEN: From birth to 5 years</p>	<p>WHEN: Developmental screening at 9, 18, 30 months of age; and autism screening at 18 and 24 months of age</p>	<p>WHEN: Whenever there is a concern</p>
<p>WHY: To help you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate your child's development • Talk about your child's progress with doctors and childcare providers • Learn what to expect next • Identify any concerns early 	<p>WHY: To find out if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your child needs more help with development as it is not always obvious to doctors, childcare providers, or parents • More developmental evaluation are recommended 	<p>WHY: To find out if your child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs specific treatment • Qualifies for early intervention
<p>HOW: Learn the Signs, Act Early: Milestones (free, easy checklists at: cdc.gov/milestones)</p>	<p>HOW: ASQ, ASQ-SE, ASD with a formal, validated screening tool</p>	<p>HOW: If the screening tool identifies an area of concern, a formal developmental evaluation may be needed. This formal evaluation is an in-depth look at a child's development, usually done by a trained specialist</p>

What happens if my child needs help or does not pass the test? Will something bad happen?

No. If your child needs help, they may get special services, like speech therapy or extra support in preschool or kindergarten. These services help your child succeed, and do not take anything away from your family.

Asking for help shows strength. You are doing what every good parent does looking out for your child.



Is there one 'right' way to raise a child in the U.S.?

No. Every family has different ways of raising children. What matters most is love, safety, and giving your child the chance to learn and grow. You don't need to stop using your cultural traditions, and, in fact, your language, music, food, and parenting wisdom are gifts to your child.



I didn't go to school much. Can I still help my child learn?

Yes! You are your child's first teacher. Even if you never went to school, you teach your child every day when you talk, cook, and walk with them or tell them stories. Those small moments matter a lot.

You are already doing more than you think.



What if I don't speak English well? Will my child fall behind?

No. Speaking your home language is good for your child. Children can learn more than one language, and it helps their brains grow. Speak to them in the language that feels most natural to you; they will learn English in school and from others.



Note: These questions and responses were gathered from community members and developed with their voices and cultural insight.

