

Ages at Which Children Usually Develop Specific Skills

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 Individualized 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.

Several resources provided information upon which the checklist is based. They include PACER Center; the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning; the Minnesota Department of Health; Hennepin County Community Health; and others.