



- ◆ **Stress the importance of checking things out right away.** It is very common for parents to need a few days to think about and understand what you have shared. They often feel doubtful, confused, and scared. If they seem unable to take action, reassure them of your support. Remind parents that if there is a problem, getting help early can keep things from getting worse. Early help can make a big difference for a child's later development.
- ◆ **Be ready to offer information and resources.** Be prepared to guide the parents through the next steps to get an evaluation or help for the child. Have contact information and website information on hand. If parents do not have access to the internet, print off information and have it ready to share.
- ◆ **Continue your support.** When parents find out that their child has a disability, they may be in shock. Many parents go through a period of grieving. They may become depressed or angry. The range of emotions they experience may make it hard for them to complete everyday tasks. It is possible they may even consider removing the child from your care because they don't want to face the issue. Sometimes this happens. Continue to be understanding and to listen and offer help.
- ◆ **Trust yourself.** As someone who cares for children every day, you are in a unique position to notice when a child may be experiencing problems. Sharing your concerns respectfully with parents shows that you really care about their child. Even in a parent seems to resist your efforts at first, they will most likely be grateful later for your concern.

Tips for Child Care Providers!

How to Communicate with Parents Their Concerns about a Child's Development

Child care providers are in a unique position to notice if a child is not developing through typical stages or milestones. If there is a possibility that a child has a developmental delay, child care providers have the responsibility to discuss their concerns with the child's family right away.

Children develop very quickly. If a child has a special need that affects her development, it is best *not* to take a "wait and see" approach. Getting professional help early for children can make a tremendous difference in their quality of life, their learning, and their later development. Sharing a concern about a child's development with a parent is never easy, but it can be an important way for child care providers to ensure that children receive the early intervention they need.

Parents can sometimes rely on child care providers for professional advice. If a parent comes to you with a concern about a child's development, listen respectfully. Take a few days to watch the child, and see if you observe the same issues. Share what you observe with the parent, and discuss what to do next.

If you are the one who has concerns about a child's development and need to bring up a concern with a parent, show them the same respect. Explain your concerns gently. Encourage them to observe the child, and allow them some time to see if they notice the things you are sharing with them.

The following are some suggestions for talking to parents about your concerns for a child's development:

- ◆ **Choose a time and place where you can talk alone.** Share your thoughts in person; this is not a conversation to have on the phone. If you are still responsible for children during this time, ask another adult to supervise them.
- ◆ **Make sure both you and the parents have enough time to talk.** This should not be done in a hurry as a parent is rushing out of the door to work. You may want to schedule this conversation ahead of time. You might say, *“Mary, I often have regular chats throughout the year with parents to get to know them better, talk about how their children are adjusting to child care, or just general things we need to touch base on. It’s time to schedule a chat with you. I wonder if you would have time this week to drop by in the afternoon?”*
- ◆ **Be prepared for strong emotions.** Parents often sense there may be a problem but have been afraid to talk about it. Often they may not know how to put their concerns into words. Sometimes they are not familiar with typical ages and stages and do not realise that some of their child’s behaviour is not typical. This is especially true for young parents who may not have other children. Parents also may be worried that if their child does have a special need, you will no longer want to provide child care for their child.
- ◆ **Be caring, supportive and respectful.** Some parents may be relieved to visit with you, but others may be defensive or scared. Showing warmth and respect will help parents trust and listen to what you have to share.
- ◆ **Begin by saying something positive about the child.** You might point out several things you really like about the child – his smile, curiosity, love of puzzles. Or you might mention something positive the child did recently such as helping a friend or learning a song. Say something positive about the child’s relationship with the parent. When things go wrong, parents sometimes tend to blame themselves. Pointing out the positives helps reassure them that they are good parents. You might say, *“Mary, Sara seems to have a real interest in puzzles. She is so skilled at them. Tell me, have you worked with her on this? I can tell you seem to have real interest in helping Sara grow and develop.”*
- ◆ **Ask if parents have concerns or questions about how the child seems to be developing.** Quietly and respectfully, ask the parents to share what they have noticed. Who, what, when, where, how questions will help you gather more information and help parents focus on the issue. You might say, *“I wonder if you have had any concerns about Jason being able to understand what you say?”* Or, *“Have you noticed if Sara seems to be having a hard time hearing loud noises or people talking? Tell me what you have noticed.”* You might also say, *“How long has this been happening? When does this seem to happen? What happens next? Has anyone else noticed this? Where does this seem to happen most?”*
- ◆ **Share your own observations and concerns.** Do this only after the parents have had a chance to talk. Share information on typical developmental milestones or other developmental checklists so parents will have something to look at. If it makes you feel more comfortable, practice what you will say beforehand.
- ◆ **Choose your words carefully.** Rather than say, *“I think Sara might be deaf,”* give specific examples and describe what you have seen. You might say, *“I have noticed the other day a gust of wind blew the door shut. It made a loud bang and scared all of us, but Sara didn’t even flinch. And last week, I kept calling her to come to the lunch table and she didn’t seem to hear me.”*
- ◆ **Avoid using labels to technical terms.** Remember you are not trying to present yourself as an expert. It is not your job to identify the specific disability. It is a very scary thing for parents to hear that someone may think their child has a disability. Keep it simple. Use words that describe only what you have seen. You might say, *“I’ve noticed that Sara doesn’t seem to hear loud sounds,”* or, *“Jason seems to bump into things a lot as if he has trouble seeing.”* Or, *“I miss hearing Megan babble and smile like she did when she was a baby.”*
- ◆ **Keep your eyes on the goal.** Your goal is to encourage the parents to get a professional evaluation for their child so that any concerns can be checked out. You might say, *“It never hurts to check things out. Think about how relieved you will be to find out for sure. And if it does turn out that there is a problem, getting help now will make a big difference.”*