

# Handout II: Talking with Parents About a Concerning Developmental Screen

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- Explain in advance that all children of a certain age are screened for developmental concerns.
- Be sure parents understand that screening is not a diagnosis; it gives the pediatric provider information about parental concerns and is a starting point for discussion.
- Discuss screening results in person, not on the phone. If only one parent is present, offer to meet again with both parents or another support person identified by the parent.
- Referral to Early Intervention may be the first step. Be able to explain what Early Intervention is, and make parents aware that Early Intervention provides developmental services based on established eligibility criteria such as language delay, not based on a diagnosis. Early Intervention providers do not typically provide diagnoses, though they may or suggest that a child be evaluated by a specialist in order to determine a diagnosis.
- If a referral to a specialist is indicated, be sure that the parents understand your concerns in addition to their own.
- Use language that leaves room for parents to anticipate possible results of a more detailed evaluation: e.g., The child “may be behind other children her age in this area,” or “seems to be having more difficulty than we would expect in a couple of areas,” or “The specialist has a lot of experience helping children, and will make recommendations for us to follow over time.”
- Provide information about accessing Early Intervention as soon as concerns are raised. If possible, identify someone in the office (social worker, nurse, etc.) to help parents make appointments. This is especially important for non-English speaking parents.
- Try to get a sense of whether the parents are likely to follow through with your recommendations. Arrange a follow-up visit in several weeks if you are concerned.
- Be available to parents as questions arise, and let them know you will remain the primary care doctor for their child.
- Ask if they want information about support groups in your area.

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