

Pointers For Parents

The First Five Years: What Parents Should Know

(NAPSA)—The first five years of life are the most crucial in a young child's development. Learning developmental milestones could help your child get help if it's needed.

At least 1.45 million children under the age of 5 who are at risk for developmental delays or other disabilities are not identified at an age when intervention could do the most good. These are children who enter school with learning and health issues that have a lasting, negative effect on their ability to learn and succeed. One notable example is children with autism, who are often not diagnosed until school, and lose four years of early optimal treatment. The reason? Parents often don't know where to turn for answers when they suspect something isn't quite right with their young child and too many communities do not provide the early detection, direct services and interventions critical for vulnerable young children to become ready for school.

Here are five things parents should know:

1 Each child is unique and develops at his or her own pace, but there are certain warning signs that might indicate developmental disabilities.

2 Understanding developmental basics and learning about milestones can make you more aware of the skills a child should achieve.

3 Trust your instincts. If your child misses a milestone or you feel that something is not right, talk to your health care provider.

4 Early identification and treatment are key to a better future for your child.



Programs that offer intervention for children with disabilities have discovered that early treatment is better and less expensive.

5 Families can come to organizations such as Easter Seals for therapies to strengthen a child's physical, intellectual, social and emotional abilities.

To fund such programs, the organization gets donations from individual and corporate sponsors. For example, the grocery company Safeway conducts an annual store fundraising campaign that raises more than \$10 million for Easter Seals and other organizations that support children with disabilities.

However, federal and state funding is also needed. Shrinking budgets are forcing many states to limit the number of young children who can receive early intervention services, even as research shows long-term benefits to the child and cost savings to the nation. You can share your concern about this and other issues with your congressional and state representatives.

Join Easter Seals and speak out about the importance of early intervention at www.MaketheFirstFiveCount.org.