




Sharing Concerns with Parents

As an Early Care and Education Professional, you are often the first person to notice a developmental or behavioral concern in a child. If your careful observation and efforts to work with a particular child do not seem to be meeting the child's needs, it is time to look for help to foster belonging and appropriately support the child. This help can come from the family, or more specialized assistance may be needed, such as from the child's primary care provider, a therapist or other specialist. When you recommend to the family that they seek help in this way you are "making a referral."



It can be difficult to think about approaching a parent with a concern about their child. Parents may react in different ways. Some may be relieved and grateful for the opportunity to share and problem solve. A few parents might be insulted or angry. Talking with parent about their child is an opportunity to ease a parent's anxiety, provide support and advocate for the parent and child.

Preparing for the Meeting

- Carefully observe the child for specific areas of concern. Record your observations over time, noting times and places as well as possible contributing factors.
- Focus on strength and positive behaviors as well as concerns.
- Keep mind that you may have an emotional response to the possibility of a child in your care having a developmental and/or social emotional concern. Your own emotional response will impact the way you share the information. Caregivers often need to take the time to uncover their own emotional responses before meeting with a family.
- Review what you know about this child through the application and conversations. Has the parent expressed concerns before? Is the child receiving outside services? Has the child received a developmental screening?
- Plan what you want to say and how you want to approach the issue. Identify your goal for the conversation. What do you want the outcome to be?
- When you schedule a time to talk to the parent(s), let them know the concern you would like to discuss. Depending on your site, discuss your concerns with the Director as well.
- To see some examples for practice:
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/pfce_simulation

Using the following techniques can alleviate some of the stress of addressing a sensitive issue with a parent:

During the Meeting:

Goal: Share your concerns in a way that the parents can hear and understand. Put yourself in the parent's place. Consider if you were the parent, what information would you need to know and how would you want to hear it? How would this make you feel? Remember, this is a two-way conversation. But don't forget this is important information that needs to be shared and understood

- In the meeting itself, try to make the parents feel comfortable and at ease. Choose a seating arrangement that brings you together. Provide privacy. Choose a meeting time that is most convenient for the parents.
- Start the conversation with what is going well. Sharing positive qualities helps parent(s) know that you are partners in meeting the needs of their child.
- Gather information from the parent(s) about how they see their child's development and behavior.
- Actively listen to their viewpoint. Pause often to give the parent(s) time to think and respond. Ask open-ended questions. Allow the parent(s) to speak without interruption. Pay attention to tone of voice and body language in order to determine how to proceed.
- Expect that if the child is the oldest or only child, the parent(s) may not have experience to know the milestones the child should be reaching.
- When it is your turn to share, take care to communicate clearly. Use concrete examples and avoid judgmental language
- Give the parents another opportunity to share any further observations/concerns they may have not previously mentioned.
- Let the parents know that you are there to support their child's development by sharing your observations and by getting their ideas on how to best meet their child's needs
- Remember that it is only appropriate for you to discuss your specific observations with the parents. Avoid the urge to label or diagnose a child

What if:

Parents agree



- If the parents agree with your observations, you can move to a discussion of next steps. Support the parents in getting help.
- Let the parent(s) know that they can contact the child's health care provider, Early Intervention and/or Child Find for more information and/or evaluation.

Parents want to wait



- Some parents may be open to your concerns but may choose not to access resources immediately. Processing and integrating new information will take a varying amount of time. Let the parent(s) know that there are resources available to support them and that you will continue to support their child's needs.
- Keep in mind that some parent(s) may be hearing these concerns for the first time and may need to think about the conversation.
- Let the parent(s) know that they can contact the child's health care provider, Early Intervention and/or Child Find for more information and/or evaluation.
- Schedule a time frame for follow up regarding parent decisions.

Parents disagree



- If the parent(s) do not share your concerns, accept their perspective. Do not take it personally. Share with the parent(s) that you see further assessment as a positive move and that both of you have the child's best interest at heart.
- Let the parent(s) know that they can contact the child's health care provider, Early Intervention and/or Child Find for more information and/or evaluation.
- Schedule a time frame for follow up regarding parent decisions.

What's next?

When a referral is considered

Before making a referral, ask if the child is currently receiving services from Early Intervention (Foothills Gateway), School District Preschool/Child Find or Private Therapy.

"Yes"



Ask: What services, how often and where the services are provided (home, childcare, office)?

- Ask if there are other issues that still need to be addressed, or resources parents need.
- Ask for permission to connect with the service provider.
- Have the parent sign a Release of Information form with Child Find, Early Intervention, or private provider and with child care.
- Follow up with the provider for strategies that would be helpful at your site. Follow up with parents.

"I don't know"



- Discuss with the parents the possibilities of who could be involved with the child.
- Determine whether or not services are occurring and move forward with the process on your determination.
- Schedule a time frame for follow up regarding parent decisions, activities and results.

"No"



Ask: "Have you or anyone else every indicated concerns about your child development or behavior?"

Discuss the benefits of early intervention. If you and the parent(s) decided to move forward:

- Make referral if necessary, using the EI/CF Referral Form.
- Develop a plan (who will do what).
- Schedule a time frame for follow up regarding parent decisions, activities and results.

Whether or not a parent decides to proceed with the referral, develop plans for implementation at home and early learning site. Revisit the plans with the parent in 6 weeks to assess developmental progress.

*See "Observing Child Development" Document for more information and guidance.

Make a referral:

Developmental/Educational Referral for Children Birth-5 Years

Children 0-3rd Birthday: Referral is made to a local program of **Early Intervention Colorado** based on the **county** in which the family lives. Fax the referral form with any screening tool or other medical records that would be helpful for the evaluation. Early Intervention staff will contact the family to schedule an evaluation.

- Children referred will receive a multidisciplinary, global evaluation
- If a 25% delay is found in one or more domains the child will qualify for services
- Services are provided in the family's home
- Services are at no cost to families regardless of their insurance status
- Services are provided with the evidence based "Family Service" model

Larimer County
Foothills Gateway
Phone: (970) 226-2345
Fax: (970) 226-2613

Weld County
Envision
Phone: (970) 313-2629
Fax: (970) 330-2261

Boulder County
Imagine!
Phone: (303) 926-6487
Fax: (303) 665-2648

All services are provided at no cost to family. A service coordinator will be provided in addition to needed therapies. Therapy is provided in the family's home.

Children 3-5: Referral is made to the **Child Find** office in the **school district** in which the family lives. Families should call the Child Find Coordinator in their school district and tell them you recommended an evaluation. If the child has a documented developmental delay that is determined to be educationally relevant by the district's evaluation team, the child will be enrolled in preschool through the school district as well as receive any special education services he or she may need (speech/language services, physical therapy, etc.). Any records you can send with a referral will be helpful.

Poudre School District
(Fort Collins & Northern Larimer County)
Phone: (970) 490-3204 (application)
Phone: (970) 490-3040 (information)
Fax: (970) 490-3134

Thompson School District
(Loveland/Berthoud area)
Phone: (970) 613-5762
Fax: (970) 613-5766

Estes Park School District
Phone: (970) 586-4439 Ext. 3608
Fax: (970) 586-7407

Windsor School District
Phone: (970) 686-8008
Fax: (970) 686-8001

Johnstown-Milliken School District
Phone: (970) 587-6250
Summer: (970) 373-8417
Fax: (970) 587-2855

Special Education services are provided within a school district preschool classroom at no cost to the family.

Additional referrals to private therapy may be appropriate if:

- **the child does not qualify for Early Intervention or Special Education services**
- **families choose not to participate**
- **families want additional services**

We thank you for taking the time to support our youngest children!