

# DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES



**A**re you the mom of a young child? If so, you have one of the most important jobs in the world – but it came with no training manual! When my own son was under 3 years of age, I thought it was the hardest job I had ever had! Now, 12 years later, as a speech-language pathologist, the co-owner of Communication Matters, and the President of the Center for the Whole Child (a non profit organization), I STILL think being a mom is the hardest job of all! In one of my professional roles, I am privileged to provide support to families whose young children experience developmental delays. Developmental delays take many forms. Some children are born prematurely, some are born with conditions like Down Syndrome or other congenital disorders. Still others demonstrate delays in reaching milestones - walking late, talking late.



In some cases, the delays may be red flags of more serious conditions.... like autism, for example.

Some of the important developmental milestones of early childhood include:

#### By 6-8 months of age, a baby should:

- Respond to own name
- Babble using a variety of sounds, express pleasure and displeasure vocally
- Sit upright alone
- Use both hands and reach for items
- Enjoy social play and seek out interaction with others by making eye contact and smiling

#### By 12-15 months of age, a child should:

- Walk unassisted
- Use a few words
- Use simple gestures - wave bye-bye, shake head "no", point
- Play simple games, like "peekaboo"
- Eat a variety of foods, drink from a cup, and self-feed finger foods

#### By 24 months of age, a child should:

- Look for hidden objects
- Start to become independent, even defiant!
- Speak at least 50 words
- Follow simple directions
- Kick a ball
- Climb up and down furniture
- Build towers of 4 blocks or more

#### By 36 months of age, a child should:

- Start to 'take turns' and understand the concept of "mine"
- Engage in 'pretend play' with other children
- Express a wide range of emotions
- Sort objects by shape and color
- Follow two and three part directions

- Be understood by most strangers when using short sentences
- Pedal a tricycle
- Run easily
- Turn book pages one at a time

So, what should you do if you have concerns about your child's development? Start with your pediatrician and address any medical factors. For many years, families have relied on state funded "Early Start" when they had concerns about their toddler's development. This federally mandated program, adminis-





that brings together a team of highly educated and qualified professionals (Speech Language Pathologists and Occupational Therapists, and Child Development Experts). Young children with all abilities attend with their caregiver(s), and participate in developmentally appropriate activities in a fun environment that allows everyone to learn! We monitor the child's progress regularly and determine any needed changes, including referrals for other services. This type of best practice program allows us to offer comprehensive professional intervention in a group setting (which is more affordable than individual therapy).

tered by the Tri Counties Regional Center in Ventura County, provides free services for children under 3 years of age demonstrating delays. Unfortunately, like many services being affected by California's budget crisis, the Early Start system will soon be implementing drastic cuts. It is expected that only those toddlers demonstrating severe delays will be eligible to receive free services. Statistics suggest that as many as 75% of the children currently served by Early Start benefit so much that they don't need additional services once they reach 3 years of age. The illogical outcome of the planned

cuts is that those children who may most benefit from "early intervention" will no longer be eligible for the free services. Many are concerned that these children will go without important services that have proven so vital and beneficial, despite the continued need for such services. Anticipating the budget crisis and knowing our community's need for a cost effective service delivery model, I took the responsibility of developing a research based program to offer an option for families who will need to pay out of pocket for the help their child needs. Participants of our pilot program over the past year give us rave reviews! Our program utilizes a collaborative model

Of course, the child's individual needs are paramount, and some children require more intensive direct therapy, which may even be covered by medical insurance. Individual therapy by our staff is also available, and we welcome collaboration with other professionals on the child's team.

So, if you have any concerns about your child's development, contacting your pediatrician should be your first step. Until we know what the changes are, the Tri Counties Regional Center is still a free resource. You might also contact

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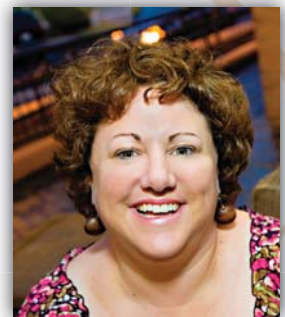
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a qualified child development specialist in the area(s) of your concern. Who is qualified? In California, in order to provide services in speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, or physical therapy, the specialist must hold a professional license in their respective field. Graduate level education and training includes extensive course work in neurology, anatomy, child development, and psychology.

Other licensed child development experts include clinical psychologists and developmental pediatricians. Who does what? Pediatric speech-language pathologists deal with speech and language (talking and understanding), chewing and swallowing, and communicating with others. Pediatric occupational therapists deal with self help and self care skills, fine motor and sensory integration, and feeding. Pediatric physical therapists deal with gross motor skills like walking. Licensed psychologists and physicians may complete comprehensive assessment for diagnostic purposes. Who should I call? Ask around, get referrals from people you know. I am happy to offer a complimentary, no obligation 15 minute phone consultation!

The most important thing is ... don't wait! Early intervention works, it NEVER hurts, and it can definitely give you skills to apply during that important 24/7 job ... as a mother! ■



Mindy Newhouse has a Masters Degree in Communication Disorders and is licensed by the state of California as a Speech-Language Pathologist. She holds 6 awards for continuing education in support of her Certificate of Clinical Competence. Mindy is the co-owner of Communication Matters, and the President of the Center for the Whole Child. She lectures on a local, state and national level, including representing the field of speech language pathology and early intervention on several committees throughout California. Mindy works out of "The Center" in Newbury Park, located at 810 Lawrence Drive Suite 100. Contact Mindy at 805/273 3870 or [mindy@communicationmatters.us](mailto:mindy@communicationmatters.us)