

Trust your INSTINCTS!

By Terrence Matteo, Ph.D.

PARENTS MUST trust their instincts when it comes to the health and wellbeing of their young children. I repeatedly hear from parents that they suspected early on that “something was different” about their child’s development but were told by family, friends and even their health care providers not to worry. The fact is that in the first five years of life, important brain structures are developing and time is critical in identifying delays before they become bigger problems.

Here are a few common questions and answers about early childhood development:

What is typical development?

Young children progress rapidly in the first three to five years of life, gaining new skills each month. If your child cannot perform these skills within the following age groups, talk to your pediatrician:

By age 1:

- Responds to his/her name
- Plays simple games such as peek-a-boo
- Crawls on hands and knees
- Responds to music with physical movement

By age 2:

- Points to objects with an index finger
- Imitates behaviors of adults
- Turns pages in a book
- Shows curiosity and explores his/her environment

By age 3:

- Listens and understands simple stories
- Can identify feelings (happy, sad, mad)
- Walks down steps
- Recognizes and tolerates common sounds in his/her environment

What should I do if I have concerns about my child’s development?

Research shows that the earlier the intervention for developmental delays, the better the outcome. If you have concerns about your child’s development, discuss



Cover mom Brooke Gammie of Phoenix is grateful for early intervention to address her daughter’s hearing loss.

them early on with your pediatrician.

If you feel that your pediatrician is not taking you seriously, contact the Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP) and ask for a developmental screening. Screenings are done at no cost to parents and are critical in identifying developmental delays in children up to 3 years of age. School districts are responsible for providing developmental interventions for children older than 3.

If screening shows a developmental delay, further assessment is often necessary to understand the extent and gravity of the delay or to provide a diagnosis, if appropriate.

What do I do if I am concerned that my child may have autism?

Autism is reported to be present in one out of 110 children. Often, there is a two- to three-year gap between a parent’s first concern and subsequent referral

for screening and diagnosis, resulting in delayed intervention. In Arizona, the average age of diagnosis is 4 to 5 years of age. If your child does not meet *any* of the following milestones, you should seek a developmental screening:

- Babbling by 12 months
- Gestures (pointing to faraway objects or waving bye) by 12 months
- Use of single words by 16 months
- Use of two-word spontaneous phrases by 24 months
- Loss of language or social skills at any age

Terrence Matteo, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist and director of the Children’s Developmental Center at Phoenix-based Easter Seals Southwest Human Development (swhd.org), which provides programs and support for more than 135,000 children from birth to age 5 and their families. He contributes to a weekly blog, “Babies to Big Kids” at raisingarizonakids.com.