

Module 1: Early Identification: Newborn Infant Hearing Screening and Evaluation; The Importance of Ensuring Early Access to Language

Section: Communication and Language Milestones



Activity 1.7: Supporting Families in Learning About Considerations and Strategies to Track Their Child’s Language and Communication Progress

- A. Ask the family questions about their child’s language and communication development milestones. Discuss what they are looking for when they think about progress. Ask questions such as, “How do you think we can tell if your child is progressing in language and communication development?” or “How do you think we can tell if the languages and modalities being used with your child are working for your child?” (e.g., signed language, spoken language, ASL and spoken language). Also, remind families that language and communication milestones are only one part of their child’s growth that will be addressed in early intervention.
- B. Discuss such considerations as:
- Does the child have adequate access to spoken language through his or her hearing to learn language?
 - Does the child visually attend to sign language?
 - Is the child receiving ongoing exposure to language in whichever modalities he or she is using? (For example, is everyone signing at all times? Is everyone talking in a way that is accessible?) How does all of this impact a child’s language and communication development?

- C. Include families in assessments related to language and communication:
- Show the family different assessments that can be used to examine their child’s language and communication abilities (e.g., MacArthur Communicative Development Inventories, Rossetti Infant-Toddler Language Scale).
 - Use assessments that have age-equivalent norms. When sign language is being assessed, pick assessment tools that are valid for sign language (e.g., Visual Communication and Sign Language Checklist –VCSL).
- D. Have the parent practice being the “assessor” and have him or her record responses. Collaborate with the parent to explain the items on the assessment tool or to give examples as needed. Show the parent how to find his or her child’s score and age equivalent. For children who are exposed to both sign language and spoken language, complete an assessment twice—once using spoken language only and once using sign language only. If you have previous assessment results available, compare them to the current results. Check to see if there is a difference in scores depending on language/modality used and how the child is progressing in each language and modality. Does the child have equivalent gains in both spoken and signed language or is one progressing faster? If so, why are there noted differences?
- E. Use assessments and associated benchmarks to guide families in understanding what to expect related to their child’s progress in developing milestones. Look at where the child is currently. Look at benchmarks for six months in the future. Discuss what you would expect to see, and use these benchmarks to guide establishment of goals for the following six months. Use the benchmarks to ensure the child is on track.
- F. For children using language and communication strategies other than signed or spoken language:
- Provide assessment using any/all forms of communication the child uses (e.g., home language, Picture Exchange Communication System, alternative/augmentative communication devices, Cued Speech).
 - Look at a child’s receptive and expressive skills with each form of communication used.
 - Discuss differences in the child’s abilities in each form of communication.

G. For children with cognitive delays:

- Explain to the family that using only the child's chronological age to track language development may result in the child's language appearing excessively delayed.
- Encourage the parent to compare the child's language level to his or her cognitive level. For example, if a child's cognitive age equivalent increased by four months in the past six months, and his or her language also increased by four months, then language may be considered to be developing as expected.

H. For children of families speaking a language other than English in the home, provide language assessment in the child's home language.

I. Discuss local resources to support spoken and/or signed language development (e.g., Deaf community events, library story time, playgroups and classes, ASL tutors).

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