

# FACTSHEET

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## Developmental delay

### What is developmental delay?

Children develop many skills in their early years of life. These skills include the development of;

- speech and language,
- motor skills,
- self-help,
- play,
- social skills, and
- problem solving.

Developmental delay describes when a child is developing skills more slowly than other children in the same age group.

When more than one area of development is affected, the term Global Development Delay may be used.

All children with developmental delay still have the potential to learn and develop. There are many services that can assess and support children with developmental delay.

By the time a child starts school, the specific areas of development that are still different to other same-aged children are often clearer. By this time more specific descriptions can be given. The delays may be described as motor, speech and language, social, sensory or cognitive (learning) disability.

### What are the causes of developmental delay?

There are many things that can affect how your child develops. Some happen during pregnancy and around the time of birth, others happen after your child is born.

Medical conditions that may be linked with development delay include prematurity (born too early), inherited disorders, chronic illness, infections, problems with hearing and vision. Environmental, dietary and social factors may also contribute. Most of the time, no cause is found.

### What should you do?

The earlier your child's developmental delay is identified and supports put in place, the better the outcome for your child and family.

To help your child with developmental delay it is important to make a diagnosis as early as possible. There is no known 'cure'. What we do know is that early intervention (speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education and behavioural support) makes a difference. Early intervention can help develop a child's skills, reduce behaviour problems and help each child develop as much independence as possible. Being involved as a parent in the early intervention therapy can help you understand and support your child's development and skills.

You know your child better than anyone else. If you have any concerns about your child's development, it is a good

idea to get them seen early by your family doctor or paediatrician..

Your child's personal health record (the Blue Book) has some useful checklists for development at different ages. Use this as a guide and if you have any concerns you can talk to your early childhood nurse or your family doctor (GP).

They may recommend testing your child's vision and hearing, or referral to a specialist for developmental assessment and advice. They may also recommend your child starts therapy or intervention, for example:

- speech therapy
- physiotherapy
- occupational therapy
- psychology

### Who do I go to for support?

- Your local Early Childhood Health Centre [www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au) or Parent Support Team, which is run by early childhood nurses and can offer advice and support to families with children under the age of 5 years.
- Your family doctor (GP) or paediatrician.
- Child Care Centre and pre-school staff.
- Early Childhood Intervention Line (phone 1300 656 865).
- Carer's NSW - phone: 1800 242 636 [www.carersnsw.asn.au](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au)
- NSW Family Support Services inc. A peak body that represents over 250 family support services in NSW. They will help you find a suitable service in your local area for vulnerable families. Phone number: 02 9692 9999. [www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au](http://www.nswfamilyservices.asn.au).
- Parent line – phone: 13 20 55, a 24 hour phone service run by qualified counselors for parents of children between 0-18 years. Provides advice or information about appropriate referral services.

### Other services that may be useful include:

- Family Care services provide parenting support and education for families with children from newborn to 5 years of age:  
**Karitane** Careline: 1300 227 464 or (02) 9794 2350, [www.karitane.com.au](http://www.karitane.com.au).  
**Tresillian**, Parents Help Line: (02) 9787 0855  
[www.tresillian.net](http://www.tresillian.net)

### Remember:

- You know your child better than anyone else. If you have concerns about your child's development take them to see your GP or early childhood nurse.
- There are support services for you and your child.
- The earlier developmental delay is recognised and supports put in place, the better it will be for your child.