Parent Blocks
NEWSLETTER

Recovering learning gaps after COVID

The introduction of Coronavirus, followed by a multi-year pandemic, has been challenging for adults and children alike. Family routines have become interrupted and early childhood educators are seeing learning and developmental gaps that may have occurred becuase of the diruption within relationships.

Throughout the last few years, many have received services via remote learning. Routine well-visits and non-emergency medical visits were cancelled or delayed. Everything from home visits to therapy was delivered via technology. While this does have some advantages, the socialization piece was missing for the youngest of children, and even adults providing care to children.

Many within the early childhood classroom are placing a renewed focus on social emotional development, allowing children the space to understand, explore, and express emotions. Families are also being encouraged to support the individual strengths of the child. By doing so, families can help the child develop self-confidence, as well as learn to use these skills for other areas that may be frustrating.

If you have questions or concerns about your child's development, you can contact your child's pediatrician, child care teacher, Help Me Grow (1-800-642-8522), or West Virginia Birth to Three (1-800-642-8522).

How to support
L A N G U A G E
in young children

Why is this important to know?

The first few years of life are so important for young children and set the foundation for a lifetime of learning. Learning to speak and communicate is very powerful! Children learn how to interact and share ideas and feelings. They also learn how to solve problems, be curious about the world around them, and learn who they are as people. This helps children make sense of all their experiences as they prepare for school and adulthood.

COVID-19 has changed life for families. With child care centers closed, changes in parents' employment and juggling other responsibilities, changes in family routines, and increases in passive screen time, important opportunities for children to talk and learn with peers and adults has been limited. While the long-term impact of COVID-19 on language development remains unclear, a recent study in Rhode Island found that "Children born during the pandemic have significantly reduced verbal, motor, and overall cognitive performance compared to children born pre-pandemic." However, this does not mean that it is too late! Taking the time each day to read together, talk together during everyday routines, and engage in play with your child, will go a long way in getting development back on track.

(Sparks, S.D. April, 07, 2022. Babies are saying less since the pandemic: Why it's concerning. https://www.edweek.org/teachering-learning/babies-are-saying-less-since-the-pandemic-why-thats-concerning/2022/04)

Download the **Learn the Signs. Act Early.** app to track and celebrate your child's milestones

Here are some everyday ideas to help your child grow and learn:

Newborns and babies:

- Talk during your daily routines like diaper changing or bath time ("Let's change your diaper. First, we need to get a clean diaper. After we change your diaper, we'll take a nap.")

- Read books together (Check out Dolly Parton's Imagination Library)

- Notice your baby babbling or smiling at you and respond ("I see you smiling at me. You must be happy.")

- Sing and play nursery rhyme games (Peek-a-Boo, Pattycake, This Little Pig)

Young children:

- Talk together during your routines such as during grocery shopping, bath time, driving in the car, or on walks. You can talk about something you see or something you are doing. ("Look at those red peppers. What is something else that is red that we can eat?")

- Put screens down during mealtimes. Use the time to talk about daily routines or family plans.

- Read and make books together. Ask your child what is happening in a picture.

- Cook together (check out this great, short video on making banana pudding together)

- Make up stories together about your child's favorite toys or people

- Sing and play simple children's games such as Ring Around the Rosey or Head Shoulders Knees and Toes

- Play together, adding to the words your child uses. "You're right, that is a car. It's red just like Papaw's car".

If you have concerns about your child's language development, talk to your child's:

- *primary care physician*
- *child care teacher*
- *home visitor or the West Virginia Home Visitation program*
- *West Virginia Birth to Three or 1-800-642-8522)*
- *Help Me Grow or 1-800-642-8522*
- *West Virginia Early Head Start*

West Virginia Infant/Toddler Mental Health Association
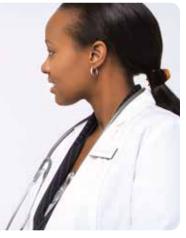*Supporting the social and emotional well-being of children*

www.nurturingwvbabies.org

Concerned about Development?

How to Get Help for Your Child

Talking to the doctor is the first step toward getting help for your child if you are concerned about his or her development (how your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, or moves). **Don't wait.** Acting early can make a real difference!

1 Make an appointment with your child's doctor

- When you schedule the appointment, tell the doctor's staff you have concerns about your child's development that you would like to discuss with the doctor.

2 Complete a milestone checklist

- Before the appointment, complete a milestone checklist by downloading CDC's free *Milestone Tracker* **mobile app** from the App Store or Google Play or printing a paper checklist from **www.cdc.gov/Milestones**.
- Write down your questions and concerns; take these with you to the doctor's appointment.

3 During the doctor's appointment

- **Show the completed milestone checklist to the doctor**
  - > If your child **is** missing milestones, point them out, and share any other concerns that you have.
  - > If your child **is not** missing milestones but you still have concerns, tell the doctor about them.
- **Ask the doctor for developmental screening for your child**
  - > Developmental screening is recommended whenever there is a concern. It gives the doctor more information to figure out how best to help your child.
  - > For more information about developmental screening, go to **www.cdc.gov/DevScreening**.
- **Ask the doctor if your child needs further developmental evaluation**
  - > If your child does, ask for a referral and call right away. If you have difficulty getting an appointment, let the doctor know.

4 Make sure you understand what the doctor tells you, and what to do next

- Before you leave the appointment, check the notes you have written and make sure all of your questions have been answered.
- If you do not understand something, ask the doctor to explain it again or in a different way.
- When you get home, review your notes and follow the steps the doctor has given you. Remember, you can always contact the doctor's office if you have any questions.

You Know Your Child Best

If your child's doctor has told you to "wait and see," but you feel uneasy about that advice:

Talk with others (doctor, teacher, another provider) to get a second opinion

AND

Call for a free evaluation to find out if your child can get free or low-cost services that can help.

- **If your child is under age 3:** Call your state's early intervention program. Find the phone number at **www.cdc.gov/FindEI**.

- **If your child is age 3 or older:** Call the local public elementary school.

You do not need a doctor's referral to have your child evaluated for services.

Find more information, including what to say when you make these important calls, visit **www.cdc.gov/Concerned**.

Don't wait. Acting early can make a real difference!

www.cdc.gov/ActEarly
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)

Download CDC's free *Milestone Tracker app*
App Store | Google Play

Learn the Signs. Act Early.