

# Parent Blocks

## NEWSLETTER



"Providing resources to parents throughout West Virginia"

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## Noah

Submitted by Jhamaia Murphy

When I had my son Noah, I was very excited. I was a first-time mom who wanted nothing more in life than for my child to develop properly both physically and mentally and reach every milestone that babies are supposed to in a timely manner. Noah was doing these things

for the first year of his life, until one day he just stopped. He no longer responded to his name, stopped communicating (laughing, attempting to speak), had minimal to no eye contact with others, stopped being playful and would stare as if he were looking into space. All his accomplishments and

milestones that he had reached suddenly disappeared. He would not hold his own bottles or even attempt to use utensils. He stopped playing with his favorite toys. He had no interest in anyone



or anything. A cheerful little boy turned into one who would cry for no reason, or so I thought. There was a reason that I would eventually discover. I was confused, lost, scared and worried. The only thing I could think of doing was speak to his pediatrician and figure out where to go from there. I began to wonder what all of this meant and what could be going on with my baby boy. I began to question exactly what I needed to do with and for my son.

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Step one, noticing the changes in my son and advocating for some answers began a lifelong journey for us. Several tests, brain scans, questions, and discussions were needed. Although the pediatrician felt Noah was a perfectly physically healthy child, he needed more intervention which led to step two in our process, a psychologist getting involved for the behavioral changes and concerns. I was referred to Birth to Three. Birth to Three provides services to children in their homes who have delays, both diagnosed and undiagnosed. The program offers speech, occupational, developmental, and physical therapy. This program helps tremendously, not only in the development of the child, but also assisting the caregivers with support and direction. After being seen by a few psychologists, Noah was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

Autism affects a person neurologically and psychologically with the way they interact and socialize with others. Hearing that your child has been diagnosed with autism can be devastating. But as I can attest to, with time, learning, therapy, support, your child/family member can flourish and live a normal life just as anyone else. Noah was and continues to be assessed to see what he can do on his own and what interventions can be provided to make him more successful in all aspects of his life, and the start to all of this was the Birth to Three program.

After graduating from the Birth to Three program due to turning three, Noah and I needed more support for his continued progression. Step three began at the Developmental Therapy Center in Huntington, where Noah began receiving services on an outpatient basis. This



center has the most loving and caring staff who want to help your children progress at their own pace. Not only can they get services at the center, but services are also provided in the school systems. Noah is now seven and in first grade. Which leads me to step four.

Step four involves advocating for your child in the school system. Noah had to get an IEP before even starting school. An IEP is an individualized education program that provides specific guidelines to meet your child's needs. As a parent of a child with a disability, I want to let you know that having this in place is particularly important and that there is nothing wrong if your child has an IEP in place. Do what is best to get help. Be your child's advocate, take the steps necessary, and most importantly, one day at a time. You will encounter some instances where you will be challenged, and you must know and look for assistance to meet and advocate for your child. Behavioral support, parent networks, mentoring, and engagement are all needed when your child is in school. There are also programs that assist you in advocating for

your child if needed such as CARES- (Community Autism Resources and Education Systems) and the Legal Aid of WV-FAST (Family Advocacy Support and Training) programs which can be found online.

Step five can include advocating for and obtaining assistance with government and community agencies to assist with training, teaching, guiding, and supporting families. This could mean applying for Medicaid (to assist with costs associated with medical care such as appointments and incontinent supplies), Social Security/Supplemental Security Income (to also aid with finances), IDD Waiver to assist with services to teach, train, support and guide leading to the highest level of independence possible, and paying attention to or attending legislative events to bring awareness and secure funding to aid those with autism. Look at your circle of people around you as well. Educate your friends and family on what autism looks like. Explain the need for acceptance and understanding.

To our autism community, you are amazing, and you make this world a better place. Being able to get the resources your child needs is a wonderful thing. Never give up. Plan as you can. Fight for inclusion, help and support. Speak out. Empower yourself with knowledge-read books, ask questions, argue your stance, and keep up with trends. Know that as your loved one grows and changes, you will need to as well. I write this article to you with lots of information, hoping that it spreads awareness to just the beginning of living with autism. I know I have many more years to learn and grow and will never stop advocating for the best for my son and others.

# Tips for Talking with Parents about Developmental Concerns



## TIPS

## EXAMPLES

### Always:

#### Talk about development regularly

Talk with parents regularly about their child's development – not only at times of concern -- and provide them with resources so they can track milestones at home.

I am so happy to be Taylor's new teacher! I care a lot about making sure all my children are on track in terms of how they play, learn, speak, act, and move for their age, so I will be looking for and tracking Taylor's developmental milestones and sharing his progress with you regularly. It would be great if you would look for milestones at home, too, and let me know what you're seeing as well. I have some free milestone checklists that can help.

#### Share resources

Encourage families to use [milestone checklists](#) or the [Milestone Moments booklet](#) to monitor their child's development at home. Find these free resources here: [www.cdc.gov/Milestones](http://www.cdc.gov/Milestones)

A great way to monitor Taylor's developmental milestones is with these checklists. They can help you understand typical milestones he should be reaching for his age and those to look for as he gets older. You can place them on the refrigerator for quick and easy reference throughout the day.

#### Use good listening skills

- Listen closely, make eye contact, nod when appropriate, and be silent when the parent is speaking
- Repeat the parent's main points when you respond so he or she will know you heard and understood
- Consider how the parent feels about what he or she is saying
- Watch and listen closely for clues to those feelings and acknowledge them when you respond
- Probe for more information when necessary

It sounds like you are pretty worried and I hear you saying that you do not hear Taylor speak clearly at home. Is that correct?

Let's talk about what you have noticed at home. Can you describe specific situations?

Is there anything else about Taylor's development you'd like to talk about?

### When you have concerns to share:

#### Highlight the child's strengths

- Let the parent know what the child does well and the milestones he or she is meeting
- Keep the conversation positive

We love having Taylor in class. He follows the classroom rules and really loves to sing, dance, and act during our circle time.

#### Make sure you are well prepared

- Invest time in building meaningful relationships with the parents and discuss developmental progress regularly
- Complete a [milestone checklist](#) for the child's age to help the parent know that you are basing your comments on facts and not just feelings

Since our last meeting, I have noticed a few things about Taylor that I would like to discuss with you. I've been completing a milestone checklist for him, like I do for all the children, and I see he is meeting his cognitive milestones very well. However, he is not meeting a few of his language/communication milestones. For one, I have noticed that Taylor doesn't speak clearly enough for most people to understand. As you can see on the checklist, a five-year-old typically speaks clearly.

#### Encourage the parent to share any concerns with the child's doctor

- Remember it's not your role to make or even suggest a diagnosis
- Remind parents of the importance of acting early on concerns

There might not be anything to be concerned about, but I do think it's important to talk to Taylor's doctor about this in the next few weeks to be sure. Take this checklist with you when you go, share it, and ask the doctor for a developmental screening. This will help the doctor and you to know whether Taylor might need a little extra help. Getting help early can make a big difference! Let me know if you need anything from me for that doctor's appointment.

#### Follow-up with the family in a few weeks

Thank you for taking time to meet with me again. I know the last time we talked about Taylor's development, we were concerned about his language skills. Have you been able to talk with Taylor's doctor about this?



[www.cdc.gov/ActEarly](http://www.cdc.gov/ActEarly)  
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)



Download CDC's  
Milestone Tracker App



Learn the Signs. Act Early.

# Tips for Talking with Parents about Developmental Concerns

## How to Respond

### If parents disagree with you about their child's behavior or abilities

**Try:** Sometimes children behave differently at home than they do at school. I'm only able to share with you what I've seen in the classroom. How does Taylor act when he's around other children in the neighborhood?

### If a parent gets angry or upset

**Try:** I understand that you are upset. Like you, I want what's best for Taylor. That's why it's so important for me to share with you what I am seeing. If he does need some extra help, I want him to have the opportunity to get it as soon as possible. Do you want to discuss your questions and concerns now, or would you rather think about this a little more and meet again (in a couple of days, next week, etc.)?

(If the parent hasn't already been given a milestone checklist, give one and suggest that he or she fill it out and bring it back.)

### If a parent reports that the doctor said to wait and see

**Try:** While it's true that every child develops at his or her own pace, there are certain milestones we typically see from most children by Taylor's age. If you are concerned, you can reach out to early intervention directly to see if Taylor qualifies for help through free or low-cost services. You don't need a doctor's referral. Acting early may make a real difference for Taylor, so it's better to find out for sure. If his development is delayed enough to qualify for help, you can get those services started right away and then follow-up with the doctor.

## Be Mindful of Cultural Differences

Not all cultures place the same emphasis on particular developmental milestones. When communicating with families, be aware of your own cultural biases in making decisions about how to communicate with families.

## Additional Resources

- For a FREE 1-hour online training about developmental monitoring and communicating with parents, including videos of sample conversations (Module 4) visit [www.cdc.gov/WatchMeTraining](http://www.cdc.gov/WatchMeTraining)
- For [tips on why and how to use \*Learn the Signs. Act Early.\* materials](#) in your classroom and to access free materials visit [www.cdc.gov/ActEarly](http://www.cdc.gov/ActEarly)
- Share the [How to Help Your Child](#) and [How to Talk with the Doctor](#) tip sheets with parents: [www.cdc.gov/Concerned](http://www.cdc.gov/Concerned)