



Birth to 5:

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# WATCH ME THRIVE!

**CHILD HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS:**

A Systems Approach to Developmental Promotion,  
Surveillance, Referral and Linkage to Services

This document is an updated version by the Help Me Grow National Center to resources originally developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education.

[WWW.HELPMEGROWNATIONAL.ORG/HMG-PARTNERS/WATCHMETHRIVE](http://WWW.HELPMEGROWNATIONAL.ORG/HMG-PARTNERS/WATCHMETHRIVE)

## INTRODUCTION

### **History of *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!***

*Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!* was created as an unprecedented multi-faceted initiative coordinated across multiple federal agencies<sup>1</sup> to encourage the celebration of developmental milestones, promotion of universal developmental and behavioral screening, identification of possible delays and concerns early, and enhancement of developmental supports by a wide range of professionals delivering services to families with young children.

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<sup>1</sup> Initiative by the Administration for Children and Families, Administration for Community Living, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Medicaid and Medicare, Health Resources and Services Administration, Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at the Department of Health and Human Services as well as the Office of Special Education Programs at the Department of Education

## ★ **Help Me Grow: A System Model Approach to Developmental Promotion, Early Detection, and Linkage to Services**

Help Me Grow is a comprehensive, integrated, cross-sector system model designed to help states and communities leverage existing resources to ensure the identification of vulnerable children, link families to services, and empower all families to support their children's healthy development. The Help Me Grow National Center serves as a resource to support a network of nearly 100 Help Me Grow systems in 28 states in the implementation of four Core Components:

**A Centralized Access Point** integrally assists families and professionals in connecting children to appropriate community-based programs and services;

**Family & Community Outreach** supports education to advance developmental promotion, and increases awareness of the system and the services it offers to families and community providers;

**Child Health Care Provider Outreach** supports early detection and intervention, and loops the medical home into the system;

**Data Collection and Analysis** supports evaluation, helps identify systemic gaps, bolsters advocacy efforts, and guides quality improvement so the system is optimally supporting families and ensuring children receive what they need, when they need it.

Within the Help Me Grow system model, developmental screening efforts may be provided by care coordinators at the *Centralized Access Point*, by community providers, or by child health care providers, all with the shared goals of promoting universal developmental surveillance, avoiding redundant screenings across providers, and consistently connecting the families of children at developmental risk to the *Centralized Access Point* for referral, linkage and follow-up to community based services.

The resources developed by *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!* represent a key resource for those directly involved with the Help Me Grow National Network, and illustrate how these systems can be a valuable resource for health, early learning, and community and social service providers in supporting connection to community-based supports for vulnerable or at-risk children.

Resources developed for *Birth to Five: Watch Me Thrive!* initiative include a [\*Developmental Screening Passport, A Compendium of Screening Measures for Young Children\*](#) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014), and a series of Audience Guides that describe the role of various stakeholders in supporting developmental promotion, screening, referral, and linkage, which have been updated by the Help Me Grow National Center and are available in extended form on the *Help Me Grow National Center Partners - Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!* webpage. This resource for **Child Health Care Providers** describes the role of medical professionals in supporting a systems approach to these efforts.

Throughout this document additional resources are highlighted which can be found in the [\*Birth to Five: Watch Me Thrive! Resources\*](#) section of the Help Me Grow National Center website.

## This Audience Guide for Child Health Care Providers Discusses:

- The Goal: All Children Reach Their Full Potential
- The Need: Gaps and challenges in early and linkage to appropriate services
- The Solution: An Early Childhood Systems Approach
  - Celebrate Milestones: Developmental Promotion
  - Identify Vulnerable Children: Effective, universal, early surveillance and screening
  - Enhance Developmental Supports: Referral and linkage to services
- Making a difference

Developmental promotion, surveillance, screening, and linkage to services represent an important continuum to ensuring optimal outcomes for children. The focus of the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!* initiative on increasing community capacity to support developmental promotion, screening and supports aligns with the mission of Help Me Grow, an initiative designed to strengthen systems in support of early detection, referral, and linkage. The *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!* Audience Guides provide essential guidance for a wide range of sectors and professionals, and reference how Help Me Grow systems can be a valuable resource for health, early learning, and community and social service providers in supporting connection to community-based supports for vulnerable or at-risk children.

## **THE GOAL:** **All Children Reach Their Full Potential**

Research indicates that the first five years of a child's life are critical to brain development, academic achievement, and later life outcomes, and evidence gathered over the last forty years demonstrate that health promotion in the earliest years lays the groundwork for lifelong well-being. Identifying and linking children vulnerable to developmental or behavioral delays to community-based supports as early as possible is essential to ensuring optimal child development.

## **THE NEED:** **Gaps and Challenges in Early Identification and Linkage to Appropriate Services**

Early detection and connection to services leads to optimal outcomes for children with developmental or behavioral concerns, but there are multiple challenges to ensuring a seamless continuum of developmental surveillance, screening and timely linkage to services. At present, those sectors critical to ensuring developmental surveillance and screening do not do so universally, which serves as a barrier to early identification of developmental delays or behavioral health issues. When early detection does occur, linkage to appropriate services is critical, yet accessing such programs can be confusing and time-consuming for parents and providers as the landscape

of programs available within a community is often difficult to navigate due to variation across programs in eligibility criteria, availability, and types of services provided.

Early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) are services available in every state and territory of the United States under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A subset of children will qualify for services under the IDEA; however, a far greater proportion of children may have developmental delays or are at risk for developmental delays that do not meet the State's eligibility criteria for IDEA services. In such instances, families face the frustrating situation in which concerns have been identified, but there is not a clear path to access community supports or services that would be most appropriate in addressing concerns. Without such services, children and their families may not have their developmental needs met at a time when intervention is most effective and could arrive at kindergarten without the skills they need to be most successful. A strategy that effectively and efficiently identifies and supports the developmental needs of all children during their earliest years can ensure that more young children and their families will achieve their developmental potential.

## THE SOLUTION:

### An Early Childhood Systems Approach to Developmental Promotion, Surveillance, Screening, and Linkage to Services

To ensure optimal development for all children, developmental and behavioral promotion, early detection, and linkage to services is an ongoing and cyclical process that must be supported by a variety of individuals and agencies across a comprehensive early childhood system. Parents, caregivers, and other family members are at the center of children's support teams and these efforts. Additionally, a variety of professionals and service providers whom interact regularly with children and families have the opportunity to encourage developmental promotion, surveillance, screening and linkage to services. As a **Child Health Care Provider**, you play a critical role within this process to partner with families and community service providers to enhance developmental promotion efforts, to embed developmental surveillance activities into your medical practice, and to ensure that children with identified delays access the necessary supports and services designed to meet their developmental needs.

## Celebrate Milestones: Developmental Promotion

When members of a community have a shared understanding of child development and the critical significance of the first five years of a child's life to brain development, academic achievement, and later life outcomes, adults are able to better recognize and celebrate children's important developmental milestones.

The *Learn the Signs: Act Early* program and the *Milestone Tracker App* of the Center for Disease Control Prevention offer a wide range of information, resources, tips and strategies for families and providers to better understand, support and celebrate children's developmental milestones.

### Learn the Signs: Act Early:

CDC's program aims to improve early identification of children with developmental disabilities and linkage to services through three components: Health education campaign, Act Early Initiative, and research and evaluation.

The program supports 55 Act Early Ambassadors in 54 states and territories that collaborate with early childhood programs, including Help Me Grow, to advance developmental monitoring and support developmental screening.

## Identify Vulnerable Children: Effective, Universal, Early Surveillance

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that developmental surveillance is performed at every well-child visit, which includes five components: 1) eliciting and attending to parental concerns; 2) documenting and maintaining a developmental history; 3) observing the child; 4) identifying risks and protective factors; and 5) maintaining an accurate record of findings over time, including input from others, such as early education and community service providers.<sup>2</sup> As a **CHILD HEALTH CARE PROVIDER**, you often engage in longitudinal relationships with families that promote trust, and in which families value your opinion and engagement. Soliciting family members' input is critical to developmental surveillance as research has shown that parental concerns are important indicators of problems.<sup>3</sup> Encouraging families and caregivers to use developmental monitoring checklists can help clarify what behaviors they should be observing in their children. (See the July 2006 American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement for recommendations on how child health providers can use developmental surveillance.)

Additionally, the utilization of specific screening instruments complements developmental surveillance. It has been shown that child health providers are able to more accurately identify estimates of children's developmental status with the use of developmental screening tools, in comparison

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<sup>2</sup> Council on Children with Disabilities, Section on Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics, Bright Futures Steering Committee, Medical Home Initiatives for Children with Special Needs Project Advisory Committee. Identifying infants and young children with developmental disorders in the medical home: An algorithm for developmental surveillance and screening. *Pediatrics*. 2006;118(1):405-420.

<sup>3</sup> Glascoe FP, Dworkin PH. The role of parents in the detection of developmental and behavioral problems. *Pediatrics*. 1995;95(6):829-836. Glascoe FP, MacLean WE, Stone WL. The importance of parents' concerns about their child's behavior. *Clinical Pediatrics*. 1991;30:8-11.

to a reliance of clinical impressions alone.<sup>4</sup> “Screening and surveillance are too often viewed as separate activities,” writes Paul Dworkin, M.D., Founding Director of the Help Me Grow National Center. “This perspective minimizes the effectiveness of both. Surveillance without screening is likely to contribute to children eluding early detection, while lofty expectations for the isolated use of screening tools may result in over- or under- identification”.<sup>5</sup> Surveillance and screening are not, then, separate activities. Rather the periodic use of screening tools enhances the effectiveness of ongoing surveillance to ensure a provider is maximally effective in supporting early identification and to further inform decisions about how best to support a particular child and family. Properly employed, developmental surveillance is family-focused, accurate, efficient and can guide clinical decision-making.

★ If you are working within a community implementing a Help Me Grow system, Child Health Care Provider Outreach efforts support early detection and intervention in the child health setting by promoting universal surveillance and screening during well child visits, including a **Help Me Grow Quality Improvement Maintenance of Certification Project**. Additionally, the Centralized Access Point, typically housed within a local call center, often employs Care Coordinators who are able to provide anticipatory guidance to family members and community services

<sup>4</sup> Council on Children with Disabilities, Section on Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics, Bright Futures Steering Committee, Medical Home Initiatives for Children with Special Needs Project Advisory Committee. Identifying infants and young children with developmental disorders in the medical home: An algorithm for developmental surveillance and screening. *Pediatrics*. 2006;118(1):405–420.

<sup>5</sup> Dworkin, P. (12/01/12). Reframing the Early Detection and Early Intervention Pathway. Help Me Grow National Blog. Retrieved from <https://helpmegrownational.org/reframing-the-early-detection-and-early-intervention-pathway/>

providers, and to conduct a developmental screening (or connect families to community providers that conduct screenings), and to communicate the screening results, as well as record of the referral and linkage to services, to the child's health care provider with parental permission. Additionally, your Help Me Grow system's Family and Community Outreach is key to promoting awareness and use of the system among families and community-based service providers, as well as educational programming to help families and community providers learn about child development.

## Resources to Share with Families

The *Learn the Signs. Act Early. Milestones Moments booklets* describe developmental milestones, and provide suggested activities to support children's development, as well as information on when to act early talk to the child's doctors about concerns.

The *CDC Milestones Tracker App* offers interactive milestone checklists, illustrated with photos and videos, as well as tips and activities to help children learn and grow, information on when to act early and talk with a doctor about developmental delays, and a personalized milestone summary that can be easily shared with doctors and other care providers. This app also provides notification alerts for appointments and when subsequent screening is recommended.

*Birth to Five: Watch Me Thrive! Passport*: This screening passport, similar to an immunization card, can help parents keep track of their child's developmental screening records and share screening information with providers.

Resources are included in the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive Resource* section and can be shared with families.

## Enhance Developmental Supports: Referral and Linkage to Services

It is imperative that efforts to detect developmental delays be complemented with efforts to connect children and families to appropriate services to support children's healthy development. Ellen Perrin, M.D., Director of Research at the Center for Children with Special Needs and professor at Tufts University School of Medicine, questions the ethics of detection without the capacity to connect to needed services. She states, "Detection without referral/intervention is ineffective and may be judged unethical".<sup>6</sup>

Early intervention and early childhood special education services are available for children with a diagnosed disability in every state and territory of the United States under the IDEA. *The Birth to Five: Watch Me Thrive! Resource* section provides information on the early intervention system (Part C) for children under age 3 and Preschool Grants Program (Part B Section 619) from children age 3 to 5.

If certain concerns or an "at risk" screening result prompt a referral to Part B or Part C, but a child is later determined to be ineligible, consider other services or programs in the community that may be beneficial. For example, playgroups are a great strategy to promote children's social development; community-based classes that involve physical activity can promote the development of gross motor skills. Information on parent training and family to family health information centers is also available in the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resource* section.

## ★ Centralized Access Point

In many states, Help Me Grow plays a critical role in ensuring children with developmental concerns are identified early and, where appropriate, referred for EI/ECSE evaluation, as well as connected to the appropriate supports and services for all children, including children with mild to moderate delays that may not qualify for EI/ECSE services. The *Centralized Access Point* serves as a central portal of entry to provide an effective, single point-of-access to community resources that is cost-effective, easy to promote, efficient in identifying needs, and successful in supporting callers and triaging to appropriate services by trained care coordinators. The *Centralized Access Point* has access to knowledge about the landscape of available services and supports in a community, which may include:

- Allied health professionals
- Advocacy or legal assistance
- Basic needs
- Behavioral services
- Child care
- Communication, speech and language
- Developmental screening
- Early intervention (Part C)
- Early literacy
- Educational/enrichment
- Equipment
- Feeding
- Funding
- Health care provider
- Infant follow-up clinic
- Medical subspecialist
- Mental health/counseling
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Parent support
- Parent/child participation
- Parenting education
- Psychoeducational testing
- Recreation
- School district/Part B
- Respite care
- Social skills programs
- Specialized services (aquatic, dance)

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Research indicates that the first five years of a child's life are critical to brain development, academic achievement, and later life outcomes. By incorporating a system of regular developmental and behavioral promotion, surveillance and screening as a strategy to ensure early detection, referral, and linkage, YOU can play an important role in making sure all children thrive. We hope you find the [\*Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources\*](#) useful in supporting young children and their families on their developmental journey.

Visit the [\*Help Me Grow National Center Partners - Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!\*](#) webpage for a complete set of resources.

## BIRTH TO 5: WATCH ME THRIVE!

- Celebrating Developmental Milestones
- Implementing Universal Developmental Promotion, Surveillance & Screening
- Improving Early Detection
- Enhancing Developmental Supports

