



Birth to 5:

WATCH ME THRIVE!

An Early Intervention and Early Childhood
Special Education Provider's Guide 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

INTRODUCTION

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

Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! was created as an unprecedented multi-faceted initiative to encourage developmental and behavioral screening and support for children, families, and the providers who care for them through a coordinated effort by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U. S. Department of Education (DOE), as well as a number of other federal partners.¹ The initiative helps families and providers:

- Celebrate developmental milestones,
- Promote universal screening,
- Identify possible delays and concerns early, and
- Enhance developmental supports, by leveraging the related efforts of participating agencies and making resources available electronically for family members, as well as a wide range of professionals and community providers delivering services and supports to families with young children, including health, early learning, and community and social service providers.

¹Administration 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**

The Help Me Grow system is a comprehensive, integrated, cross-sector 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 through 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 also grows awareness of the system and the services that it offers to families and community-facing 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 Help Me Grow National Center serves as a resource to support the implementation of Help Me Grow systems throughout the country, leading a network of nearly 100 systems in 28 states. The mission of the Help Me Grow National Center is to enable and support Help Me Grow systems to implement effective, universal, early surveillance and screening for all children and link those children at risk for developmental and behavioral problems to appropriate programs and services.

Resources developed for *Birth to 5: 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 Audience Guide is designed to support **Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Providers** in supporting developmental promotion, surveillance, referral and linkage efforts. A comparable guide has been

designed for other providers, including Child Health Care Providers, Child Welfare Caseworkers, Early Care and Education Providers, Home Visitors, Shelter or Housing Assistance Providers, and WIC Providers. Throughout the guides additional resources are highlighted, such as *Learn the Signs. Act Early.* from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and *Bright Futures* of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), as well as many others, which can be found in the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources* section of the Help Me Grow National Center website.

This Audience Guide for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Providers discusses:

- The Goal: All Children Reach Their Full Potential
- The Need: Gaps and Challenges in Early Identification and Linkage to Appropriate Services
- The Solution: An Early Childhood Systems Approach to Developmental Promotion, Surveillance, Screening, and Linkage to Services
 - How do I support developmental promotion and surveillance efforts?
 - How do I help primary referral sources select the right screening tool to fit their needs?
 - How do I support the connection of families to the right services after screening?

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. Thus, the Audience Guides developed by *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!* represent a key resource for those directly involved with, as well as future partners of, the Help Me Grow National Network. The 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.

What Influences Child Development and Behavior?

Many factors can influence child development, including biology and early experiences with caregivers and peers. Factors like warm and secure relationships, enriching learning opportunities, proper nutrition, exercise, and rest can make a big difference in healthy child development. On the other hand, poverty, unstable housing, parental stress and adverse events such as household dysfunction, maltreatment, abuse, neglect, exposure to alcohol or substance abuse, violence, and/or trauma can have serious negative impacts on child development and behavior. To learn more about the effects of adverse early childhood experiences, check out the *Identifying and Providing Services to Young Children Who Have Been Exposed to Trauma* materials in the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources* section. Developmental and behavioral surveillance and screening plays an important role in early detection and linkage to appropriate supports for children who may be experiencing delays for any number of reasons.

THE NEED:

Gaps and Challenges in Early Identification and Linkage to Appropriate Services

Early detection and connection to services leads to the best 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.

The children you serve who have qualified for early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) are services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); however, a far greater proportion of children may have developmental delays or are at risk for developmental delays that do not meet your 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 ensure optimal development for all children, developmental and behavioral promotion, early detection, and linkage to services is an effort 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.

Your Role as an Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Provider

You are directly engaged in supporting the development of children identified with a qualifying delay or disability. As an **Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Provider (EI/ECSE) Provider**, you

are also a partner with primary referral sources to help ensure that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities are identified and get the services they need as soon as possible. Primary referral sources include, but are not limited to, early care and education providers, home visitors, physicians and other health care professionals, therapists, social workers, and families. As an EI/ECSE provider, raising public awareness about the importance of developmental and behavioral screening and timely follow-up is a critical role you can play by sharing informational materials that promote screening, and helping primary referral sources understand and connect with the State IDEA Part C office and Part B 619 office services. Additionally, as an EI/ECSE provider, you have the opportunity to ensure that children at developmental risk are also identified and connected to appropriate community-based services.

- ★ In many states, Help Me Grow plays a critical role in ensuring children with developmental concerns are identified early and, where appropriate, referred for an evaluation. Help Me Grow also plays a role in connecting families to the appropriate supports and services. If you are working within a community implementing a HMG system, the **Centralized Access Point** supports these critical efforts as HMG Care Coordinators provide support to families and providers in developmental promotion and surveillance efforts, conduct developmental screening, refer and link children and families to appropriate supports and services, and track and communicate these activities to the child's health care provider with parental permission.

When families are referred to you from another source for a determination as to whether a child has a disability and is eligible for services under the IDEA, it is important to provide feedback to those primary referral sources, in accordance with the applicable IDEA, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act confidentiality requirements. It is also important to track any referral to specialists, to ensure that the children actually receive the follow-up services and that the results of any diagnosis and/or treatment are received and notated in their health records. We know that if developmental screening and referral systems are effectively coordinated, then developmental disabilities and delays are more likely to be identified early so that children can be linked to the appropriate services and receive the supports that they need and for which they are eligible, which will ensure that all children have the best possible start to a bright future.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROMOTION, SURVEILLANCE, SCREENING, AND LINKAGE TO SERVICES

Developmental promotion, surveillance, screening, referral and linkage to services are each an integral component of an ongoing and cyclical process to ensure that all children reach their full potential.

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.

How Do I Support the Developmental Promotion Efforts of Primary Referral Sources?

There are many resources you can share with your primary referral sources and families to further their understanding and recognition of developmental milestones. Celebrating developmental milestones together can help assure that children's development is being monitored and that children are progressing in their development

Resources

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers a wide range of information, resources, tips and strategies to better understand, support and celebrate children's developmental milestones.

Learn the Signs. Act Early. program aims to improve early identification of children with autism and other developmental disabilities so children and families can get the services and support they need. The program is made up of three components: health education campaign, Act Early Initiative, and research and evaluation. Additionally, the program supports 55 Act Early Ambassadors in 54 states and territories that collaborate with early childhood programs in their states, including Help Me Grow, to advance developmental monitoring and support developmental screening.

The *Milestones Moments booklets* describe developmental milestones from 2 months to 5 years in the areas of social/emotional, language/communication, and cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving) development, 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* The new app offers interactive milestone checklists for children ages 2 months through 5 years, 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 the doctor and other care providers.

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

Identify Vulnerable Children: Effective, Universal, Early Surveillance and Screening

Developmental surveillance and screening are both part of a comprehensive, integrated process of developmental monitoring that engages parents, implements the core components of surveillance, and interprets screening in the context of what is known about the child.

Surveillance and screening are not, then, separate activities, but instead work in combination to ensure that a provider is maximally effective in supporting early identification. As an **Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Provider (EI/ECSE) Provider**, you can support primary referral sources to engage in these efforts in order to identify and support children at risk for developmental delay.

Resources

CDC Watch Me! Celebrating Milestones and Sharing

Concerns: This free 1-hour online training addresses how to support regular monitoring of each child's development by primary referral sources, such as early care and education providers, and by families at home, as well as how to act on developmental concerns.

How Do I Support the Developmental Surveillance and Screening Efforts of Primary Referral Sources?

Children's development should be monitored on an ongoing basis, in the home, child care settings, and anywhere else children spend their time. Developmental monitoring can help primary referral sources track their daily observations and decide if a child should receive a formal developmental screen or see their healthcare provider sooner than expected. It is also important that they engage families (birth families, foster families, kinship caregivers, etc.) in the process of developmental monitoring. Encouraging families and caregivers to use developmental monitoring checklists can help clarify what behaviors they should be observing in their children. The *Learn the Signs. Act Early.* developmental factsheets and the *CDC Milestones Tracker App* can support their observations on a child's strengths and challenges.

Developmental and behavioral screening is informed by ongoing developmental surveillance efforts and parent engaged developmental monitoring, and follows as a first line check of a child's development using a developmental and behavioral screening tool. It is important for primary referral sources to understand that screening does not provide a diagnosis, rather, it indicates if a child is on track developmentally and if close monitoring, further evaluation, or intervention is warranted. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends developmental and behavioral screening with a standardized developmental screening tool when a child is 9, 18, and 24 or 30 months of age. These screenings may be done in early childhood settings, schools, community based intervention programs, or in the child's medical home, the model of comprehensive children's care recommended by the AAP. Although there are specific ages that screening is recommended, primary referral sources should be encouraged to conduct a screening at any age if there are concerns about a child's development.

- ★ If you are working within a community implementing a Help Me Grow system, the Centralized Access Point, typically housed within a local call center, often employs Care Coordinators who are able to conduct a developmental screening (or connect families to community providers that conduct screenings), as well as refer and link children and families to appropriate supports and services. The screening results, as well as record of the referral and linkage to services, may be communicated to the child's health care provider with parental permission. 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. Additionally, your HMG system's Family and Community Outreach is key to promoting the use of HMG throughout the community and providing networking opportunities among families and community-based service providers. Family and Community Outreach staff establish and maintain relationships with community-based service providers, and work to engage families by participating in community meetings, forums, public events, fairs, and facilitating sessions that help families learn about child development and the role of HMG. A community presence encourages support for and participation in the HMG system and facilitates efforts to gather and update information on local programs and services to include in the early childhood resource directory.

As primary referral sources work with a child and their family, it is important they find out whether a child has previously been screened. A ***developmental and behavioral screening passport***, similar to an immunization card, is a tool to help parents keep track of their children's screening records, and it can be used to inform all providers that support the child of their screening record. A passport is included in the ***Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources*** section. Families are encouraged to use it and share it with all of the professionals that support their child's development. With everyone on the same page, children can get the support they need in every setting.

Resources

Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive ! Passport is a tool for helping parents to monitor developmental progress is the use of a screening passport, which is similar to an immunization card or booklet. This tool can help parents keep track of their child's screening records and share screening information with providers.

CDC Milestones Tracker App: This app also supports the tracking of developmental screening that has occurred, and provides notification alerts when subsequent screening is recommended. Additionally, they add provides photo and videos of each milestone, and tips and activities to support children's development at every age.

These resources are included in this ***Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive Resources Kit*** and can be shared with primary referral sources and families.

How Can I Help Primary Referral Sources Select the Right Screening Tool to Fit Their Needs?

The ***Compendium of Screening Measures for Young Children*** that accompanies this Guide may help primary referral sources learn more about the tool their agency or organization is currently using or help them find a new screening tool to fit their needs. This list describes the evidence base behind certain standardized screening tools. Information is included on the cost, time to administer, training requirements, ease of use, and other factors that can help them find the right tool. They should not interpret this list as recommending or requiring the use of a particular tool. Rather, it should be used to learn about a selection of screening tools that are supported by research and help them make informed decisions about the best fit for their program.

ENHANCE DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS

How Do I Support the Connection of Families to the Right Services After Screening?

There are many people in and around your community who can help children with developmental concerns and their families. Encourage primary referral sources to talk with families about their options and local resources if a developmental concern has been identified.

★ **Linkage to Community-based Services: Centralized Access Point**

If you are working within a community implementing a Help Me Grow system, the Centralized Access Point call center serves as the “go-to” place for family members, child health care providers, and community providers seeking information, support, and referrals to services for children at risk for behavioral and/or developmental problems. This central portal of entry provides 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. New technology such as texting, apps, and online access to referrals, resources, and services are being employed to enhance call center services

Many children have a regular primary health care provider or medical home that can look at developmental concerns more closely. Primary referral sources can encourage families/caregivers to take the results of their screen or a milestones checklist to their child's primary health care provider or medical home. Your state's *Maternal and Child Health Hotline*, included in the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources* section, can help families locate a pediatric health care professional and connect to local parent training information centers or family health information centers.

In addition to sharing information with your primary referral sources on your state's EI/ECSE services, it is important to remember that some children with delays may not be eligible for early intervention and early childhood special education services through Part C and Part B of IDEA. 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. Primary referral sources can connect families to their state's parent training information centers or family to family health information centers. Information on these family support centers is also available in the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources* section. And, a HMG Centralized Access Point has access to knowledge about the landscape of available services and supports in a community and can provide the care coordination support needed to link families to appropriate community-based programs, 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. The short time it takes to conduct a developmental and behavioral screen can change the trajectory of a child's life forever. By promoting a system of regular developmental and behavioral 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 this User Guide, Screening Compendium, and the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources* section 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

