

Birth to 5:

---

# WATCH ME THRIVE!

A WIC PROVIDER'S GUIDE FOR  
DEVELOPMENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL  
SCREENING

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 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

---

<sup>1</sup>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**

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 **WIC Providers** in 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, Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Educators, Home Visitors, and Shelter or Housing Assistance 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 WIC 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**
  - What is developmental promotion, and how do I engage families?
  - What is developmental and behavioral monitoring and screening, and how do I engage families?
    - How often should children be monitored and screened?
    - How do I select the right screening tool to fit my needs?
  - How do I refer 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?**

Starting at birth and continuing throughout childhood, children reach milestones in how they play, learn, communicate, act, and move. Skills such as taking a first step, smiling for the first time, and waving "bye-bye" are called developmental milestones. Children develop at their own pace, so it can be difficult to tell exactly when a child will learn a given skill. However, the developmental milestones give a general idea of the changes to expect as a child gets older. 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.

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 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 WIC Provider

WIC Providers, of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant and Children, play a vital role in bolstering the healthy development of young children in the families you serve, and that is why we are providing you with this guide to support your connection to these efforts within the broader comprehensive, cross sector early childhood system. You don't need to become a child development expert or add any additional staff or services in order to play an important role in child and family wellness through developmental and behavioral surveillance and screening. Developmental and behavioral screenings are intended to be brief and low cost, but have the potential to make a large difference in the lives of children and families at a critical time.

As an **WIC Service Provider** you are a valuable and trusted resource to parents. In addition to supplemental food, families look to you for information about the nutrition and healthy development of their child, as well as health care referrals. Because of this, you are well positioned to support families in developmental promotion and surveillance activities that support the health and development of their child. Families receiving WIC support are low income and many are from underserved communities, therefore, it is especially important that you are informed about and

involved with the process of developmental and behavioral surveillance and screening, as children from lower-income families are at higher risk for developmental concerns, but they also tend to be identified later. If developmental concerns are caught early, you can help ensure that children receive the extra support they need and are linked to appropriate services. As a WIC service provider, we encourage you to work with your agency or director to implement universal developmental and behavioral screening that will reach children served within your office.

- ★ 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.

## 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. These milestones are things most children can do by a certain age and address how children play, learn, communicate, act, and move, which offers important clues about how a child's development is progressing.

### **How Do I Engage Families in Developmental Promotion?**

Family members (birth families, foster families, kinship caregivers, etc.) are critical partners in developmental promotion efforts, and building relationships with families in a manner that is culturally appropriate, considerate of home language, and provides opportunities for authentic

engagement are vital considerations in this important effort. You should discuss healthy development with all families on a regular basis to support families' understanding of their child's development. Celebrating developmental milestones together can help assure that children's development is being monitored and that children are progressing in their development. This is what we mean when we speak of developmental health promotion. In addition, you can encourage families to talk to their primary healthcare provider at their medical home about their child's development at every well child visit.

## Resources

The *Learn the Signs. Act Early.* program and the *Milestone Tracker App* of the Center for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) offer 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.

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

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

### **What is Developmental Monitoring?**

Developmental monitoring is a flexible and repeated observation of children's developmental milestones over time and is different from screening in that it is less formal and it is done on a regular basis. You may have the opportunity to observe children's development closely by watching how they play and grow day after day. Developmental monitoring can help you track your daily observations and can help you decide if a child should receive a formal developmental screen or see their healthcare provider sooner than expected.

Your efforts to monitor children's development is an important element of developmental surveillance, which is a continuous process in which knowledgeable professionals perform observations of children while providing care. Development is monitored overtime within the context of overall well-being, rather than viewed in isolation during a testing session, and 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, which includes input from others such as yourselves (child care providers, schools, etc.).

## How Do I Engage Families in Developmental Monitoring?

As a **WIC Service Provider**, it is especially important to engage families 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.

### Resources

Resources to support providers and families in developmental monitoring are included in the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources* section.

The *Learn the Signs. Act Early. 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* 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.

## What is Developmental and Behavioral Screening?

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. A developmental and behavioral screening tool is a formal research-based instrument that

asks questions about a child's development, including language, motor, cognitive, social and emotional development. A 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. All children should receive a screening, especially if you are concerned about their development. The results of a screening can help you plan how to best support the development of the children in your care, specifically through referral and linkage to services for children with developmental concerns. Connecting families to a doctor or specialist is an important next step to determine if a child needs a formal evaluation. A formal evaluation is a much more in depth look at a child's development, usually done by a trained specialist like a developmental pediatrician, child psychologist, or speech-language pathologist, and may involve child observation, standardized tests, and parent interviews or questionnaires. The results of formal evaluations are used to determine if a child has a disability and is eligible for early intervention, or special education and related services under IDEA.

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 a community and social service provider, you often engage in longitudinal relationships with families that promote trust, and in which families value your opinion and engagement. Thus, you are well positioned to engage in surveillance, to elicit and respond to parent concerns, and, administer developmental and behavioral screening tools to further inform decisions about how best to support a particular child and family.



★ 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 you 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.

## How Often Should Children Be Monitored and Screened?

Children's development should be monitored on an ongoing basis, in the home, child care settings, and anywhere else children spend their time. 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, screening should be done at any age if you and/or the family or caregivers are concerned about a child's development.

When you begin to work with a child and their family, it is important to find out whether they have been screened, and to either learn about the results of the screening or make sure that screening takes place. This will help to ensure that the child gets any individualized support and services needed. 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! Resource* section. Encourage families to use it and share it with all of the professionals that support their child's development. Be sure that any sharing of information about the child is done in accordance with your organization or agency protocols and guidelines around confidentiality. With everyone on the same page, children can get the support they need in every setting.

### Resources: Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Passport:

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 provides notification alerts for appointments and when subsequent screening is recommended.

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

## How Do I Select the Right Screening Tool to Fit My Needs?

The **Compendium of Screening Measures for Young Children** that accompanies this Guide may help you learn more about the tool your agency or community organization is currently using or help you find a new screening tool to fit your 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 you find the right tool. You 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 you make informed decisions about the best fit for the program.

## Find the Right Screening Tool

- **Ages:** What age groups do I serve and what screening tools are made for those ages?
- **Time:** How much time does it take to use this screening tool? Which tool is practical within a child care or Head Start program?
- **Cost:** What is the cost for the screening tool and its ongoing use within early care and education programs?
- **Training:** Is there training required to use this screening tool? How much training is required? What type of training is recommended?
- **Languages:** Does the screening tool need to be available in different languages to fit the needs of the families I serve?
- **Culture:** Is it culturally appropriate?

Many early intervention service programs and medical homes have adopted their own standardized developmental screening tools. When choosing a screening tool, it may be helpful to align with local referral and child service agencies to support developmental screening activities. It is also important to learn about whether or not the screening tool in use measures what it is supposed to measure with accuracy. Read about the tool in the compendium of screeners that accompanies this Guide to make sure the tool is of high quality and accurate in tracking development.

## Resources: Compendium of Screening Measures for Young Children

included in the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive Resources* section is made up of two sections: a section of summary tables and a section of individual profiles. If you are looking for a new tool, start at the summary tables as they provide an overview of many different tools. The tables may help you narrow the range of tools to consider. Once you narrow down the screening tools that may fit your needs, you might choose a smaller set of tools to read about in more detail in the individual profile section. If your program already uses one of these tools, you can go straight to the profile section to read more about it.

## Additional Concerns

We recognize that in the course of conducting screening, providers may discover situations of concern within the family. We know that adverse experiences like being a victim of child maltreatment or exposure to domestic violence have been shown to negatively affect brain and cognitive development, attachment, and later academic achievement and may have enduring physical, intellectual, and psychological repercussions into adolescence and adulthood.

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, contact your local **Child Protective Service (CPS)** or law enforcement agency so professionals can assess the situation. Early childhood professionals are required by law to report suspicions of abuse or neglect to state CPS agencies. Keep in mind that CPS agencies are better equipped to investigate the home situation and have the resources to provide needed family support. Many States have a toll-free number to call to report suspected child abuse or neglect. To find out where to call, consult the **Child Welfare Information Gateway** publication, **State Child Abuse Reporting Numbers**. If you find that a child is currently part of a family that is experiencing domestic violence, find a safe time and place to speak to the parent. Let her or him know that there is help available by calling the National Domestic Violence Hotline which provides crisis intervention and can help the parent plan for safety and next steps. Contact them at 1.800.799.7233.

For additional resources, check out **Childhelp®**, a national organization that provides crisis assistance and other counseling and referral services. The **Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline** is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with professional crisis counselors who have access to a database of 55,000 emergency, social service, and support resources. All calls are anonymous. Contact them at **1.800.4.A.CHILD (1.800.422.4453)**.

## How Do I Engage Families in the Screening Process?

You should talk to all families about developmental and behavioral screening and make sure to explain that it is a typical process that all children go through, like hearing or vision screens. You should have a more

in-depth conversation about screening if you have concerns about a child's development. As soon as you notice that a child is not developing at quite the same rate as other children, it is important to talk to the family to determine appropriate next steps. Remember, all children are different and we do not expect them all to develop at the same pace, but over time, if you notice a child is behind his peers socially, emotionally, or in any other way, you should speak up.

Before conducting any screening, make sure you have the family's permission and that you are following your community organization or agency protocols in terms of required consent and confidentiality. Once you have the first conversation, engage families every step of the way, from explaining what developmental and behavioral screening is to linking them to people and services that can help. Be sure to encourage families to talk to their child's health care provider and share the results of the screen. You can even help them come up with questions they could ask their doctor as a result of the screen.

- ★ If you are working within a community implementing a Help Me Grow system, the care coordinators of the Centralized Access Point can provide support, resources and referral to support family and community providers in all phases of this developmental promotion, early detection and referral and linkage process.

Here are a few helpful tips to help you partner with families throughout the screening process.

## Talk to Families Before Screening:

- When talking to families, it is best to use the language that they use at home. (Avoid using clinical jargon.)
- If you have previously worked with the family or are familiar with the child: Start off by pointing out something positive. Name a skill or behavior the child is doing well and express how excited you are to see their progress.
- If you are offering to conduct the screening at an intake point, start by expressing how important the first five years are for a child's development and that developmental and behavioral screenings are suggested with children under age 5.
- If you are concerned about a child's development, point out the specific behavior the child is struggling with and ask if they observe the same behaviors at home. It is ok to say "I may be overly concerned, but I just want to make sure."
- Use the *Learn the Signs. Act Early* developmental factsheets and the *CDC Milestones Tracker App* to support your observations on the child's strengths and challenges. This will assure families you are basing your comments on facts.
- Explain what developmental and behavioral monitoring and screening is. Make sure you note that it is a normal process that children go through to make sure they are on track in their development.
- Stress that a screening does not provide a diagnosis.
- Ask if they know whether their child has been screened in the past. If so, talk about the results in a confidential environment. Ask the parent/caregiver what that experience was like for them.
- If the child has not been screened in the past, ask the family for permission to perform a screening using a standardized tool, or connect them to the HMG Centralized Access Point for screening support.

- Provide birth families, foster families, and caregivers with informative materials and places they can go to learn more, or connect them to the HMG Centralized Access Point for care coordination services.
- Try to make it a discussion. Give the birth family, foster family, and/or caregiver time to listen, reflect, and provide input. Show the birth family respect for their knowledge about their own child. The birth parent(s) may be able to share additional information and offer another perspective on their child's behavior that can be helpful in this process.
- Remind them that you do your job because you love and care for children and that you are their partner on their child's developmental journey.

### **Walking Families Through the Screening Process:**

- If a family informs you that their child has not been screened in the past or they have concerns about their child, ask the family for permission to perform a screening using a standardized tool and explain the survey will take about 5 minutes. Feel free to let the parent or caregiver know that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children be screened for general development at 9, 18, and 24 or 30 months of age or whenever a parent or provider has a concern.
- If the family gives written consent, find a confidential space to conduct a developmental and behavioral screening using a tool that is appropriate for the families you serve. Most tools are surveys about children's development that parents can fill out themselves or have read to them.
- Score the developmental and behavioral screening in accordance with the instructions in the tool's manual.
- If you do not feel comfortable going through the screening process with the parent yourself and would prefer to refer the parent elsewhere for the screening, the HMG Centralized Access Point can help in finding appropriate places to refer, including the child's medical home, an early intervention specialist, the school district's special education office, or a community-based organization.



## Talk to Families After an “At Risk” Screening Result:

- Remind them that this is not a diagnosis. An “at risk” screen simply means the child should be evaluated more thoroughly by their primary health care professional, medical home, or another specialist, and that the parent or caregiver may benefit from supportive tools and resources to learn more about promoting children’s development through certain activities, as well as continuing to monitor their child’s development.
- Even if you are not concerned, an “at risk” result indicates further evaluation is needed. Standardized screening tools detect many delays before delays are overtly apparent. As such, connect the family to appropriate resources, such as the HMG Centralized Access Point, which can help determine helpful programs and services. In some cases, referral to early intervention or the local school district’s special education office, or to a specialist may be warranted.
- Work together to create a list of questions to ask their pediatrician or developmental specialist as a result of the screen.
- Suggest activities that families can practice with their children to help in their development. The tips and learning modules in [CDC Milestones Tracker App](#) and the [Watch Me!](#) webpage offer many ideas for activities. For example, if a child is in foster care, the foster parent(s) can practice these activities with children in the home, and birth families can be supported in using the activities during parent-child visits.
- Use the information in the [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resource Resources](#) section to learn more about development and screening so that you can answer families’ questions as best you can. If you do not know the answer to a question, it is ok to say you are not sure but will find out.

## Talk to Families After a “Low Risk” or “No Risk” Screening Result:

- Discuss the results with the family and ask them to share results with the child’s primary health care provider or medical home. Remind them that monitoring children’s development should be

ongoing in the home, child care settings, and elsewhere. The HMG Centralized Access Point can provide care coordination to identify and link families to appropriate services.

- Give them materials that describe their child's next developmental level. The *Learn the Signs. Act Early Milestones Moments booklets* and the *CDC Milestones Tracker App* included in the *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources* section can serve this purpose.
- All children have strengths and challenges. Use the screening results to talk about them. The *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources* section offers ideas for activities that families can do with their children to help in their development.
- If you are still concerned about a child's development after a "low risk" or "no risk" screen, speak with the family and ask them to share your concerns with their child's primary health care provider who may administer another test or refer the child to a specialist who can do a more thorough evaluation. The HMG Centralized Access Point can provide care coordination to identify if additional evaluation is necessary and if so, where to go for support.

## ENHANCE DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS

### How Do I Refer 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. 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. Ask families/ caregivers to take the results of their screen or a milestones checklist to their child’s primary health care provider or medical home. If you are interested in helping the family locate a pediatric health care professional for the child, contact your state [\*Maternal and Child Health Hotline\*](#). [\*The Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources\*](#) section provides information on how to get connected.

Whether or not the child has a medical home, if a child under 3 years of age has an “at risk” screening result, connect the family to a local early

intervention service program. Early intervention service programs under Part C of the IDEA are available in every state and territory of the United States and offer child evaluations free of charge if a child is suspected of having a disability to determine if a child is eligible for services under IDEA. *The Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Resources* section accompanying this guide provides a description of the early intervention system and a state by state directory of early intervention coordinators, often called “Part C coordinators.” If the child is age 3 or older, you can help connect the family to their neighborhood public school, which can provide information on evaluation under Part B of IDEA, even if the child is not in kindergarten yet.

Importantly, 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. You also can connect all 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 incorporating 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

