



# When Concerns Arise: Deciding to Make a Referral

We have all heard the story of doctors telling a brand new mom after birth that “He has all his fingers and toes!” From that point on, families watch their children grow, keeping an eye out for the milestones that help them feel confident that their child is developing typically.

Recommended checkups at important intervals help families work with their pediatricians or other professionals to track development. But sometimes, families find themselves concerned. When questions like “Shouldn’t she already be...” or “Didn’t her big brother already ...by now?” creep into conversations with other family and friends who know the child well, parents have the right to reach out for more information.

## **What should parents do?**

Parents should learn, as early as possible, if their child has some developmental delays. If necessary, they should seek help from professionals and in some cases, ask for second opinions to determine whether or not delays are present.

If one or more delays are present, parents should seek to refer their child to **Minnesota’s Help Me Grow**. The best way to do this is online at [www.helpmegrowmn.org](http://www.helpmegrowmn.org) or by calling 1-866-693-GROW (4769).

Minnesota’s Help Me Grow provides information and resources to help parents and professionals identify children who may be experiencing delays in their development. Help Me Grow is also the state-wide referral source for families and professionals who have concerns about a child’s development.

Early intervention programs established by federal and state law are available in all local school districts. Through screening, evaluation and assessment, the developmental needs of the child are identified and, if the child is determined to be eligible, the needs of the family to help their child develop and grow are considered. Once these needs have been determined, services can be provided at no cost to the family to meet those needs.

Research has shown that accessing early intervention services as early as possible will ensure the best developmental outcomes for a child. Families also benefit by feeling more confident and competent in being able to meet their child’s needs from an early age.

## **How does the system work?**

Once a parent (or professional, with the parent’s consent) has made a referral to Help Me Grow, an early intervention representative from the family’s school district will be contacted. Within two working days, an intake person from that early intervention program will contact the family to discuss the family’s concerns. Depending on the information the family provides, they may be offered either a free screening or an evaluation. An appointment for early intervention staff to go out and meet with the family will be set up. If the family is uncomfortable having staff come into their home, they can discuss a different place to meet. The family must give consent before the screening is done.

If the screening determines that the child does show some developmental delays or if the team has determined that a screening is not needed, the family will be offered an evaluation at no cost. The family must consent to the evaluation before it can begin. An evaluation team of early intervention providers from various specialties will



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meet with the child and family to complete the evaluation. If the child is determined to be eligible, additional child and family assessments will be completed to determine the child's strengths and needs and the family's concerns, priorities, and resources. Once the evaluation and assessments are completed, the family will decide on outcomes for the child and family and an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) will be written with the family's input, detailing the services and supports the family will receive.

If the child is not eligible, the family may be referred to other resources for information, services, and support. The team may also suggest a follow up to at a later date to determine if the child qualifies for services in the future. It is important for parents to remember that they know their child best, and to know that they can ask about additional resources or follow up even if it is not offered by the professionals.

**Learn more** .....

For additional information, please call PACER at (952) 838-9000 and ask to speak with an early childhood advocate. You may also request that a copy of *Families Are Important! An Early Childhood Guidebook for Families of Young Children* be mailed to you. *Families are Important!* is a booklet that helps families of children with disabilities or developmental delays understand and navigate Minnesota's early intervention system, including how to access services for their child. One copy is provided free to Minnesota families.

To view videos that show typical child development, please go to [Minnesota's Help Me Grow](#).

For a list of childhood skills by age, see PACER's handout: ["Childhood Skills Checklists: Should We Be Concerned?"](#)