

Early Childhood Specialists

Why is important to look for health and development specialists?

Like many stages in life, the early childhood years, prenatal through eight years old, are unique. Unlike any other stage in life, however, the first years of life produce the most rapid development physically, mentally, and neurologically than any other time. In fact, in the first three years of life, there are one million neural connections formed every second! By age five, approximately 90% of the brain has developed. The first years set the foundation for the lifelong health of that child.

Because of this rapid and unique growth and development during the first eight years of life, it is crucial to have a specialist who understands the trajectory that is set and the implications this trajectory has for the lifelong health and wellness of the child.



When seeking services and support for health and development, one should look for a development specialist who works in a specialized field. For example, there are developmental psychologists, developmental pediatricians, developmental specialists in speech or fine motor, etc. Most importantly, these specialists understand the developmental stages of a young child and can recommend services or supports tailored to meet each child's unique needs.



Developmental Screenings

If there is a concern about the development of a child, typically, the first step is to have a screening completed by a healthcare professional or community-based organization trained in the screening tool. It is also important that the screening tool be validated and given for the recommended age of the child. Below is a list of commonly used validated screening tools and the developmental area they screen:

Screening Tool		Developmental Area
Ages & Stages Questionnaire 3 ASQ-3	→	Behavior, language, motor skills, problem solving
Ages & Stages Questionnaire - SE ASQ-SE	→	Social and emotional skills
Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers - MCHAT R/F	→	Autism
Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status - PEDS	→	Behavior, language, motor, problem solving
Pediatric Symptom Checklist	→	Behavior, social and emotional skills
Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire	→	Social and emotional skills & social determinants of health
Social Communication Questionnaire	→	Autism
PEARLS - Pediatric ACEs Screening and Related Life Events Screener	→	Trauma & social determinants of health

American Academy of Pediatrics: Star Center: Screening Technical Assistance & Resource Center:

<https://screeningtime.org/star-center/#/>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/screening.html>

Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/child-screening-assessment/article/developmental-screening-children-ages-birth-5>