

FOCUS

on
Early Childhood
Mental Health

helping children soar



PROJECT LAUNCH

**Pennsylvania
Project LAUNCH
Partnership**

717-213-3730
brafox@berksiu.org

Factsheet #76, 7/15

The Importance of Screening during the Early Childhood Years

When a child is born we look into his or her eyes and see the potential for a bright future. For some children, healthy development may be full of struggles and supports are needed to achieve that bright future. Screening plays an important role in assessing a child's development and provides early detection so that supports for children experiencing delays for any number of reasons can be identified.

What we know:

- As many as one in four children ages 0-5 are at risk for developmental, behavioral, or social delays¹.
- 29% of PA children under age 6 receive developmental screenings and 22% of parents are concerned about their child's development².
- Children develop at their own pace, so it's impossible to tell exactly when a child will learn a given skill. However, screening can help to track a child's development and uncover potential delays.
- Screening practices do not provide a diagnosis, but can indicate if a more in-depth look at a child's development is needed.
- Screening can lead to early and effective use of supports and interventions.

What we need to do:

- Keep educating parents, early childhood professionals and our communities about the importance of screening practices in the early childhood years.
- Trust that parents and caregivers are the expert with regard to their child. Their gut feelings, concerns, and observations matter!
- Provide resources to parents on universal screening practices and available supports, such as early intervention, when concerns arise.
- Increase the use of validated screening tools in all early childhood settings to ensure that developmental and behavioral issues or concerns are identified and addressed early.
- Create a comprehensive system that provides early identification, preventive and treatment services, and family supports, so that health providers and others can recognize developmental concerns early and respond to children's needs.

Resources

- **Related FOCUS on ECMH factsheets:** "Understanding developmental differences" (#12); "Screening for delays in social-emotional development"? (#20); http://www.parecovery.org/services_child.shtml#focus
- ¹"Birth to Five: Watch Me Thrive", US Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education; <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive>
- ² Child Trends analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH); <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>
- "Screening and Assessment", Project LAUNCH; <http://www.healthysafechildren.org/topics/screening-and-assessment>
- "Achieving the promise of a bright future: Developmental Screening of Infants and Toddlers", Zero to Three; <http://www.zerotothree.org/public-policy/policy-toolkit/devscreeningmar5.pdf>
- PA ECMH Consultation Program; http://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Programs_ECMH

