

# FAMILY RESOURCE

C O N N E C T I O N

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**“The earlier delays are recognized, the sooner the child, the family, and the caregivers can get help.”**

## *Intervention: The Earlier, the Better*

Children develop skills as they grow. They roll over, smile, babble, begin to crawl, pull themselves up, learn a word or two, begin to walk, and begin to talk. In fact, most children follow a definite pattern as they develop and grow.

Some children walk and talk earlier than others, but in general, they follow a similar course of development. There are, however, some exceptions. Some children develop very late and do not follow a common pattern. While many children may “catch up,” others may suffer from a developmental delay or even a disability. The earlier such delays and disabilities are recognized, the sooner these children, the families, and the caregivers can get help.

New Horizon Academy teachers and staff are in a unique position to recognize a problem or delay because of their educational background and experience. In addition, the teachers have the opportunity each day to observe many children and to experience the full range of child development. Talking about a child’s development and possible delays is often a challenging conversation for teachers and families. This partnership between the teachers and the parents is crucial to helping the child and continuing to meet his/her needs. There are many resources available for teachers and families to assist them in sorting through these conversations and implementing further services.

## *Developmental Delay*

The term *developmental delay* describes a child who is not doing what other children his or her age typically do. These children develop more slowly or differently from the expected. A developmental delay can be physical, cognitive, communicative, social, or emotional. For example, a child who is delayed may not begin to talk when other children typically

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do, may not walk “on time,” or may have some other difficulties which cause concern. In some cases there may be an obvious reason; the child may not be able to see or hear or may have cerebral palsy, but in other cases the reason may be unclear. While a child may “catch up” to other children his or her age with no assistance, many will not. A child who has a hearing loss will ultimately learn to speak, but he or she may learn incorrect pronunciations of words, miss a great deal of social development, and become frustrated and angry. When hearing loss is diagnosed early, a child can be fitted with a hearing aid and work with a speech therapist to avoid falling behind. Thus, it is a good idea to get an early intervention team to examine a child experiencing learning difficulties and determine if special assistance is needed.

### ***Early Intervention***

Early intervention refers to the services designed to identify and treat a disability or developmental delay before a child reaches the age of three. Early intervention services are offered through public and private agencies and can be provided in a variety of settings, including a child’s home or child care program. The needs of the child and family will determine how and where services are provided. Early intervention is covered by the law and referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law protects infants and toddlers in need of early intervention because they: (1) are experiencing developmental delays in one or more of the following areas: cognitive, physical, communicative, social, emotional or adaptive; (2) have a physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in delay; (3) at state discretion, are at risk medically or environmentally for substantial developmental delays if early intervention is not provided.



In early intervention programs, the family is provided with services to help them help their child. Early intervention specialists talk to the family about activities, games, and exercises they can do to assist their child and discuss the family’s needs. Furthermore, an early intervention specialist can determine how much time a child should spend each week doing early intervention activities. A common early intervention service is speech therapy. This type of therapy helps young children whose speech is not clear and who have not begun to talk. Other services help children develop movement skills, such as sitting, crawling, walking, and picking things up. In some cases the early specialist may provide special equipment for the child to use, such as a walker.

### ***Special Education Services***

After a child turns three, services similar to the ones described are provided by the local school system or the State Department of Education. These services, however, no longer fall under the title of early intervention; they are now called special education. Local public schools offer special education and related services, like speech therapy, or special transportation, to eligible children. Much like the services offered in

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early intervention, special education services can be delivered in a variety of settings depending upon the needs of each child. Some children will enter a special preschool, while others may attend their regular New Horizon Academy program. Once a child reaches kindergarten, special education services may be delivered in the regular or special classroom.

These services make a difference. Child development research has established that the rate of human learning and development is most rapid during the early years. Timing of intervention becomes particularly important when a child runs the risk of missing an opportunity to learn during the state of maximum readiness.

### ***Process for Getting Help***

When there is a concern that a child's development is not typical, a referral must be made to a medical or child development specialist. This specialist can observe and assess a child for developmental delays and disabilities. The child may be referred to other professionals and programs as needed. Then a more formal evaluation and assessment takes place through an intervention team of doctors, early childhood development specialists, audiologists (who test hearing), optometrists (who check vision), or speech/language pathologists who can all perform an evaluation. Assessments may include social, psychological, and educational evaluations and are usually done at clinics, schools, or by private agencies. You can learn about your state's policy regarding evaluations and assessments by calling your family doctor, your local school district's special education department, or the state Department of Education.

Your child care teacher and director may be the first to notice delays in a child's development. If so, they will discuss these observations and concerns with the child's family. It is common for a child's parents to have noticed a developmental delay also, but haven't known how to get help for their child or want to admit their child is having difficulty learning. In fact, the New Horizon Academy staff can provide a great deal of support to a family during the formal assessment process and the emotional turmoil of finding out that a child is having difficulties. This can be a painful and

confusing time for families who want the best for their child, but are afraid of what the future might hold.

Referrals for children 3 years old and older are usually made to the special education administrator of the child's local public school district. For children under the age of three, a referral can be made to that state's lead agency for early intervention programs through the state's Department of Education or lead agency for identifying and diagnosing children with disabilities.

### ***Including Children With Disabilities***

There are excellent programs for children who need special assistance which are staffed by professionals trained in early childhood special education. However, many young children who have been found eligible for early intervention or special education services may remain in the child care setting for a variety of reasons. It is important to have them with other children their age and to have the consistency of care they are familiar with. These children may need some special assistance in certain areas, but for most of the day they need the same stimulation and support other children their age receive. ♥



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## ***Early Childhood Intervention Contacts***

The Minnesota Department of Education helps ensure that all Minnesota families with infants, toddlers, and preschool children experiencing developmental delays or disabilities have access to early intervention services close to home when they need them. This is accomplished through the implementation of a comprehensive, coordinated statewide system of local interagency early intervention committees and service providers.

Anoka/Hennepin Counties	763-323-5437 (birth-3 years) 763-506-1475 (3-5 years)
Minneapolis	612-348-8637 (birth-3 years) 612-668-0860 (3-5 years)
Ramsey County	651-604-3700 (birth-5 years)
Carver County	952-368-0160 (birth-5 years)
Dakota County	952-707-4052 (birth-5 years)
Washington County	651-430-6700 (birth-3 years) 651-604-3700 (3-5 years)
Wright County	763-682-8599 (birth-5 years)
Sherburne County	763-241-2750 (birth-5 years)
Scott County	952-707-4052 (birth-5 years)
Northern Stearns County	320-352-6120 ext. 27 (birth-5 years)
Southwest Stearns County	320-256-3308 (birth-5 years)
St. Cloud area	320-252-8427 (birth-5 years)

For further counties or information regarding Early Childhood Intervention, Early Childhood Special Education, Preschool Screening, Kindergarten Readiness or Early Childhood Family Education go to <http://education.state.mn.us>.



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