

# Tips for Talking with Parents about Developmental Concerns



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## TIPS

## EXAMPLES

### Always:

#### Talk about development regularly

Talk with parents regularly about their child's development – not only at times of concern -- and provide them with resources so they can track milestones at home.

I am so happy to be Taylor's new teacher! I care a lot about making sure all my children are on track in terms of how they play, learn, speak, act, and move for their age, so I will be looking for and tracking Taylor's developmental milestones and sharing his progress with you regularly. It would be great if you would look for milestones at home, too, and let me know what you're seeing as well. I have some free milestone checklists that can help.

#### Share resources

Encourage families to use [milestone checklists](#) or the [Milestone Moments booklet](#) to monitor their child's development at home.

A great way to monitor Taylor's developmental milestones is with these checklists. They can help you understand typical milestones he should be reaching for his age and those to look for as he gets older. You can place them on the refrigerator for quick and easy reference throughout the day.

#### Use good listening skills

- ✓ Listen closely, make eye contact, nod when appropriate, and be silent when the parent is speaking
- ✓ Repeat the parent's main points when you respond so he or she will know you heard and understood
- ✓ Consider how the parent feels about what he or she is saying
- ✓ Watch and listen closely for clues to those feelings and acknowledge them when you respond
- ✓ Probe for more information when necessary

It sounds like you are pretty worried and I hear you saying that you do not hear Taylor speak clearly at home. Is that correct?

Let's talk about what you have noticed at home. Can you describe specific situations?

Is there anything else about Taylor's development you'd like to talk about?

### When you have concerns to share:

#### Highlight the child's strengths

- ✓ Let the parent know what the child does well and the milestones he or she is meeting
- ✓ Keep the conversation positive

We love having Taylor in class. He follows the classroom rules and really loves to sing, dance, and act during our circle time.

#### Make sure you are well prepared

- ✓ Invest time in building meaningful relationships with the parents and discuss developmental progress regularly
- ✓ Complete a milestone checklist for the child's age to help the parent know that you are basing your comments on facts and not just feelings

Since our last meeting, I have noticed a few things about Taylor that I would like to discuss with you. I've been completing a milestone checklist for him, like I do for all the children, and I see he is meeting his cognitive milestones very well. However, he is not meeting a few of his language/communication milestones. For one, I have noticed that Taylor doesn't speak clearly enough for most people to understand. As you can see on the checklist, a five-year-old typically speaks clearly.

#### Encourage the parent to share any concerns with the child's doctor

- ✓ Remember it's not your role to make or even suggest a diagnosis
- ✓ Remind parents of the importance of acting early on concerns

There might not be anything to be concerned about, but I do think it's important to talk to Taylor's doctor about this in the next few weeks to be sure. Take this checklist with you when you go, share it, and ask the doctor for a developmental screening. This will help the doctor and you to know whether Taylor might need a little extra help. Getting help early can make a big difference! Let me know if you need anything from me for that doctor's appointment.

#### Follow-up with the family in a few weeks

Thank you for taking time to meet with me again. I know the last time we talked about Taylor's development, we were concerned about his language skills. Have you been able to talk with Taylor's doctor about this?

If you want to know more, ask your doctor.

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## How to Respond

### If parents disagree with you about their child's behavior or abilities

**Try:** Sometimes children behave differently at home than they do at school. I'm only able to share with you what I've seen in the classroom. How does Taylor act when he's around other children in the neighborhood?

### If a parent gets angry or upset

**Try:** I understand that you are upset. Like you, I want what's best for Taylor. That's why it's so important for me to share with you what I am seeing. If he does need some extra help, I want him to have the opportunity to get it as soon as possible. Do you want to discuss your questions and concerns now, or would you rather think about this a little more and meet again (in a couple of days, next week, etc.)?

(If the parent hasn't already been given a milestone checklist, give one and suggest that he or she fill it out and bring it back.)

### If a parent reports that the doctor said to wait and see

**Try:** While it's true that every child develops at his or her own pace, there are certain milestones we typically see from most children by Taylor's age. If you are concerned, you can reach out to early intervention directly to see if Taylor qualifies for help through free or low-cost services. You don't need a doctor's referral. Acting early may make a real difference for Taylor, so it's better to find out for sure. If his development is delayed enough to qualify for help, you can get those services started right away and then follow-up with the doctor.

## Be Mindful of Cultural Differences

Not all cultures place the same emphasis on particular developmental milestones. When communicating with families, be aware of your own cultural biases in making decisions about how to communicate with families.