

FOCUS

on Early Childhood Mental Health



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Screening for Delays in Social-Emotional Development

What if your young child's behaviors don't seem age-appropriate or are causing problems at home or in his or her early learning center? What if your child seems unable to calm down and relax, can't express his or her feelings, seems sad or angry much of the time, or has trouble getting along with other children? Sometimes these things take care of themselves over time as the child matures, but sometimes they are signs of delays in social and emotional development that need to be addressed to avoid bigger problems later on.

Learning disabilities, language delays and social and emotional problems affect about 17 percent of children, but less than half are identified before they begin school. One way to decide whether a child's difficulties are serious enough to need attention is through what is called "developmental screening." While this should happen during regular well-child visits to your pediatrician or family doctor, screening can also be done in partnership with your child's early learning center.

There are many different developmental screening tools available for young children. Pennsylvania has chosen to use the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional (ASQ:SE) in early learning centers. The ASQ:SE "identifies infants and young children whose social and emotional development requires further evaluation to determine if referral for intervention services is necessary." The questionnaire has different versions to be used by parents and teachers/other caregivers. Social-emotional screening helps to identify delays in a child's ability to express and regulate emotions, form secure relationships, and explore the environment and learn.

We all want our children to succeed, get along with other children and have friends. If something is preventing a child from being successful, it is important to find out as soon as possible and identify ways to help the child before the problem interferes with learning and school. The idea of "developmental screening" might sound threatening, but it really is just one of the helpful tools available to help parents and teachers find out what children need to help them achieve the potential we all know is inside each child.

Resources:

- Developmental Screening Fact Sheet: www.cdc.gov/actearly
- "Developmental Screening": www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/child/devtool.htm
- Ages and Stages Questionnaire: <http://agesandstages.com/asq/asqse.html> (description of ASQ:SE)
- "Overview of the ASQ:SE": www.brookespublishing.com/store/books/squires-asqse/ASQ-SE_Overview.pdf (a little technical but gives some examples of the questions)

Social emotional screening is a component of developmental screening of young children that focuses on the early identification of possible delays in the expected development of a child's ability to:

- Express and regulate emotions
- Form close and secure relationships, and
- Explore his/her environment and learn