

Development Delays and WIC Resources - Topic of the Month

UPDATED OCTOBER 2025

Did you know that one in six children experiences developmental delays or disabilities? Many begin before birth, and their causes are often unknown. These delays can affect children of any background, though those from low-income families are at greater risk. Early intervention can make a lasting difference—improving a child’s ability to learn and grow. Read about available support for parents in this topic of the month.

Developmental milestone tools

Children develop at their own pace, yet milestone expectations provide a general guide for parents and professionals to follow. Through monitoring of these age-based development milestones, we can assess whether there may be a need for intervention.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed the [CDC’s Developmental Milestones](#) website to support families in learning about the various stages of child development. The website resources include milestone descriptions and a milestone checklist that is available in twelve languages.
- The [Milestone Tracker App](#) can be easily downloaded for iOS and Android devices. Additionally, staff and parents have access to [Learn the Signs. Act Early.](#) materials that can be either printed or ordered for home delivery.
- The [Miles in Action](#) is a free photo and video library to show parents what developmental milestones can look like.
- The [Developmental Milestone Checklist Program for WIC](#) was developed by the CDC to support WIC staff in monitoring children’s developmental milestones during their WIC visits. The simple messages and easy-to-use checklists are a learning tool for staff to better understand when a referral may be needed. The checklists can also be printed out for participants to discuss at a future well-child checkup with their family doctor or pediatrician. The program has three core components:
 - **Environmental graphics:** can be placed in offices or waiting rooms to provide engaging graphics to help introduce milestones to families.
 - **Administering checklists:** can offer parents the milestone checklist to complete at home offering the benefit of parental education and understanding.
 - **Making referrals:** can use the checklist to have a better understanding of when to make appropriate referrals this tool can also be used for staff development.

Public health resources

- The [Family Home Visiting Program - MN Dept. of Health](#) offers the benefit of involving the parent in discussions and activities in their child's developmental progress. Family home visiting is a voluntary program offered prenatally through the early years of a child's life. The program supports the social, emotional, health-related, and parenting support information families need to thrive. Best of all, these programs are completely free!
- The [Follow Along Program](#) can aid in parents' discovery of developmental delays. The program offers a way for parents to track their child's development by filling out questionnaires at intervals from birth to 36 months. The program provides tips, activities, referrals, and may include an at-home visit. Participants can enroll online on the [Follow Along Program](#) page or call 1-800-728-5420.
- The [Help Me GROW](#) program connects families to their local school district to receive the services and support they need in addressing concerns in a child's development. A referral online through [Minnesota Help Me Grow- Refer a Child](#) or by calling 1-866-693-GROW can be completed by any parent, professional, or family member.

Baby behaviors

Staff can begin conversations surrounding development prenatally with the use of the [Baby Behavior Prenatal Key Messages \(PDF\)](#) and the tools found on [WIC Baby Behaviors](#) webpage. Staff can begin to bring awareness to the topic of behavior and development by helping parents understand what to expect from their newborn. Parents need to understand "what is normal" while building a bond with their newborn, as they are the first line of defense in detecting developmental delays.

Baby behavior tools

- [Getting to Know Your Baby \(PDF\)](#) (Brochure)- Available in English, Spanish, and Somali.
- [MN WIC Baby Behavior Education Clips](#) (MDH YouTube)- Includes 27 video clips to support parents' learning.

Note: Both resources are available on the [Welcome to WIC!](#) website (under Nutrition- Nutrition and Your Family) and the My Minnesota WIC App (under Nutrition- Health and Nutrition Tips).

WIC's role

WIC staff can engage parents in learning more about their child's development and empower families to take action. Parents and other caregivers are a child's first teacher, and WIC can support them in having the resources they need to succeed. With tools that identify delays or disabilities, it makes it easier to connect parents to a timely, appropriate referral and provide them with tips to support their child's health and development.

- Staff can learn more about [Red Flags by Age for Referral of a Child](#) to better assess a participant's need for referral and support.
- Staff can choose one of the many referrals and resources available to offer to families and empowering them to be their own advocate for their child's developmental needs.

Participant-centered services

As with any WIC topic, it is extremely important that we are [Asking Permission](#) before engaging parents in topics that may be more sensitive. Handling sensitive topics, such as a development delay or disability, may be difficult for some parents and can make the discussion challenging. To support parents in [Rolling with Resistance](#), allowing them to guide the discussion may make it easier to manage.

Asking about sensitive topics

- **Use open-ended questions:** "How do you feel about..."
- **Normalize the situation:** "Many parents experience...you are not alone."
- **Reduce bias:** Practice a non-judgmental assessment!
- **Ask permission before providing information:** "May I share what I have learned about..."
- **Be transparent about concerns:** "We are asking this question to help..."
- **Provide a range of options with recommendations**, such as a referral, webpage information, or free resource materials.

Remember, it is okay if the parent chooses not to share or discuss their child's development. If this happens, move on. It may be helpful to express confidence in their ability to support their child with a phrase such as "You're doing a great job helping Oliver learn." Wrap up by thanking them for their willingness to share and provide referrals or resources to take home if they are open to it.

Counseling remotely

Child nutrition and development go hand-in-hand. As WIC staff, we know the value of timely education and referrals. Remote counseling can present a challenge in offering visuals to participants.

- The [Remote Nutrition Education](#) webpage offers a variety of tools to support staff in connecting with participants remotely.
- Staff can also use the information on this page to direct families to valuable resources online and through the [Minnesota WIC App](#).

With the many tools developed to assist families, we can support the growth and development of our most precious participants both face-to-face and remotely!

Putting it into practice

Example scenario:

A participant arrives at the WIC clinic for a nutrition education visit. You have gone over nutrition topics related to age-appropriate feeding and discussed the changing food package. Mom (Stephanie) has her 6-month-old infant (Sarah) with her and is expressing some concerns about her infant's development. You heard her initial concerns and recognized this as an opportunity to delve further and determine what resources for support you can offer.

CPA: Stephanie, first, let me thank you for sharing your concerns about Sarah. May I ask if you have had a chance to share this with Sarah's pediatrician?

Stephanie: No, I haven't spoken to her yet. We missed the 6-month well-child check, and they are so booked out that it will be another month before I can get in for her next appointment.

CPA: That is frustrating; I am glad you were able to get the appointment rescheduled. What I hear you saying is that Sarah is not trying to crawl yet, and that concerns you, correct?

Stephanie: Yes, when I put her down, she just moves from her back to her stomach. It depends on how I lay her, but she really doesn't move much from there.

CPA: It's really great that you are getting her down to explore movement. Are there other things that you have noticed about Sarah that concern you?

Stephanie: Well, not really. Breastfeeding is going well. I tried sitting her in the highchair, and she was able to stay up with support, so I started cereal this week. It has only been a few days, but she is really liking it!

CPA: That's great! Trying her first food is really exciting for both of you.

Stephanie: It is fun. I was worried she might not be ready yet since she isn't sitting up all by herself or moving forward on the ground but seems to be liking the cereal so far.

CPA: I hear you; it can be scary when you are unsure. Many parents worry that their child isn't doing what they have seen other kids are doing at the same age. It sounds like it's going better than you expected though. While you were out in the lobby, did you notice the posters talking about developmental milestones?

Stephanie: Oh yeah, I saw the CDC one, that is actually what got me thinking about what Sarah isn't doing.

CPA: That's exactly what the poster is there for, to get you thinking! Do you have any question about the information on the poster?

Stephanie: No, I read on the poster that it is based on what MOST children are doing at a certain age. That it can be used to track your child's development.

CPA: Exactly. There are checklists that you can use to track development based on the child's age. Would you like me to print out the **CDC milestone checklist** for a 6-month-old? It may help give you a better idea about what is normal activity at this age.

Stephanie: Does it take very long to complete?

CPA: Oh, it's a quick list, and actually, I will just send it home with you to fill out. That way, you can bring it to share with Sarah's pediatrician at her next appointment.

Stephanie: Oh, that would be perfect. I always forget things I intend to talk about when I go to those appointments; this would help me remember to bring up my concerns.

CPA: Absolutely, I can print it out for you. If you'd like, I can also share a few free resources that you can access at home to learn more about development as Sarah continues to grow.

Stephanie: Wow, that would be great.

CPA: Let me just grab the 6-month **CDC milestone checklist** from the printer so we don't forget that before you leave.

Stephanie: Sure.

CPA: I'm glad you are open to looking through the checklist, and it's great that it will come in handy when you take Sarah to the doctor.

Stephanie: I'm glad you suggested it. I guess I have just been comparing Sarah to my neighbor's

CPA: I think it is important to remember that every child develops at their own pace. This checklist offers general guidance, and it is also helpful to know when real red flags are happening.

Stephanie: True, I think going forward it will be a good idea for me to pay more attention to Sarah's own pace with development rather than comparing her to someone else.

CPA: I think it's normal to compare, but it can be very misleading. Let me share the free resources I was speaking about before. This one is the **Follow Along Program**; they can send questionnaires to your home at different stages to help track development. Here is a brochure that tells you how to sign up if you're interested. The other is the **CDC milestone tracker app**; this one allows you to keep track of milestones right from your phone. This may make it easier for you to share any future concerns with your pediatrician without having to remember to bring anything extra along to the appointment. I encourage you to explore both and decide what may work best for you and your family.

Stephanie: Okay, this is all really helpful. Thank you!

CPA: You're welcome. I'm so glad that I could help. Your next visit with WIC will be the 9-month appointment, where we take measurements for Sarah and discuss how breastfeeding is going for you too. Remember to schedule that appointment ahead of time, and if you have any concerns about development, we can talk more about that as well.

Tool for staff: The [Developmental Monitoring: Getting the Conversation Started \(PDF\)](#) tool supports both in person and virtual discussions about the milestone checklist. MN WIC staff are not required to complete the checklist with participants, however, the tool provides talking points to consider.

References - complete listing of hyperlinks:

CDC's Developmental Milestones (https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/milestones/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html)

Milestone Tracker App (https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/milestones-app/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones-app.html)

Learn the Signs. Act Early. (<https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/index.html>)

Miles in Action (<https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/milestones-in-action/index.html>)

Developmental Milestone Checklist Program for WIC (<https://www.cdc.gov/wic-guide/php/about/index.html>)

Family Home Visiting Program - MN Dept. of Health
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/fhv/index.html>)

Help Me GROW (<http://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/GetHelpChild/WhyRefer/index.html>)

Minnesota Help Me Grow- Refer a Child (<http://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/Refer/index.html>)

Baby Behavior Prenatal Key Messages
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/bb/messages.pdf>)

WIC Baby Behaviors
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/bb.html>)

Getting to Know Your Baby
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/babybehaviors/english.pdf>)

MN WIC Baby Behavior Education Clips
(<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnv1INVkmxmtYaMmowS5oBHnbgmps7Ai1>)

Welcome to WIC! (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/ppthome.html>)

Red Flags by Age for Referral of a Child
(<http://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/GetHelpChild/WhenRefer/RedFlags/index.html>)

Asking Permission
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/skills/development.html#asking>)

Rolling with Resistance
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/skills/development.html#rolling>)

Remote Nutrition Education
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/edchoice/index.html>)

Minnesota WIC App
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/infosystem/hubert/mnwicapp/index.html>)

Developmental Monitoring: Getting the Conversation Started

(https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/LTSAE_What-to-Say-When_FINAL_508-P.pdf)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL, MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.