Act Early: When You Disagree With Your Pediatrician

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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ACT EARLY: WHEN YOU DISAGREE WITH YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

This is the second article in a series on overcoming barriers to early intervention.

by Utah’s Act Early Ambassador Tracy Golden

In our first installment, Utah’s Act Early ambassador explored the barriers a parent might experience before recognizing the need for early intervention.

Now she addresses the question: what happens when parents believe their child has a developmental delay, but their pediatrician disagrees?

Let’s wait and see

Sometimes pediatricians tell parents their fears and concerns are not warranted. Many parents with a child who is later diagnosed with a developmental delay were at one time told that what their child was experiencing was “normal” and the recommended strategy was to “wait and see.”

This advice is heartbreaking to parents who then lose several years of early intervention services to well intentioned providers who did not recognize the early warning signs of delays.

Pediatricians are well trained in the medical treatment of children, but sometimes they have less expertise in recognizing the more subtle signs of a developmental delay. Due to the typical length of a pediatric visit, they may not have the opportunity to observe the behaviors the parent is concerned about.

When parents are faced with this dilemma, there are a number of steps they can take. First, they can bring materials to their doctor that describe in a more objective format their concerns (see the Milestones Moments materials below). Second, they can obtain feedback from teachers and babysitters to bolster their case about their concerns. Third, they can request a longer visit with the pediatrician. During that appointment they can simulate the conditions which may evoke the behaviors they are concerned about.

If continued dialogue with the pediatrician is not fruitful, they should seek a second opinion. As good consumers of healthcare, it is perfectly reasonable for a parent to want to seek services elsewhere if they do not believe their concerns are being adequately addressed.

Resources

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have a website through which parents can learn more about developmental milestones, healthy child development and the early warning signs of delays. Free, parent-tested materials are available for ordering, or can be viewed online and printed by parents.
Coming up: Additional concerns after the diagnosis

Previously in this series: Learning to recognize the need

Dr. Tracy Golden is Utah’s Act Early Ambassador for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) “Learn the Signs. Act Early” program. Its mission is to improve early identification practices for those providing services to very young children. Golden received her Ph.D. in Social Work from the University of Utah and has a private clinical practice for teens and adults with High Functioning Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome. She is also a staff member at the CPD.

For additional resources in Utah, please see:

Utah’s Act Early and Help Me Grow webpages.