

# Responding to Parent Concerns About Learning, Development & Mental Health

## Ask for & listen to parent concerns

- Ask parents directly about concern using language they understand
- Parent concern may identify upwards of 70% of children with learning, development, and mental health problems (ref 1, 4, 5, 6)
- Consider a systematic tool to elicit concern, such as the Early Years Check In or Pediatric Evaluation of Developmental Status

## Act if you SUSPECT a problem

- Parent concerns may correspond with a significant or diagnosable learning, developmental or mental health problem about ½ of the time in a *general population* sample (not service seeking) (ref 1, 6, 12)
- When several clues/indicators are present, this likelihood may be much higher (see SUSPECT acronym)
- Even where there is no diagnosis, some learning, development, or mental health difficulties are likely to be present if parents are concerned (ref 1, 3, 5)

## If unsure, don't defer

- Early intervention is essential for childhood learning, development, and mental health conditions
- If you are unclear as a provider, consider additional screening or seeking further information/consultation rather than taking a “wait and see” approach
- See following screening resources

## When there's doubt, tune it out

- Doubt is common in parents' concern process and parents present many alternative explanations for child difficulties (ref 4, 11)
- Doubt or alternative explanations do *not* suggest lesser likelihood of issues so should not sway decision making (ref 4)

# SUSPECT a problem if:

S

- **Severe concerns** (see ref 3, 4)

U

- **Unusual/atypical behaviours** (see ref 8, 13)

S

- **Several/multiple concerns** (see ref 3, 7)

P

- **Persistent concerns or problems (e.g., over a year)** (see ref 13)

E

- **Emotional or behavioural impact (distress/impairment)** (see ref 10)

C

- **Clear comparisons (e.g., child to sibling or classmates)** (see ref 2)

T

- **Teacher or other professional is concerned** (see ref 3)

# Resources- Developmental Screening

- Developmental Milestone Checklists- FREE
  - US: Learn the Signs, Act Early: [cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html)
  - LookSee checklist (formerly Nipissing) – free in Ontario [lookseechecklist.com](https://www.lookseechecklist.com)
- Developmental Surveillance Tools- FREE
  - Survey of Well Being of Young Children: [pediatrics.tuftsmedicalcenter.org/The-Survey-of-Wellbeing-of-Young-Children/Overview](https://pediatrics.tuftsmedicalcenter.org/The-Survey-of-Wellbeing-of-Young-Children/Overview)
  - Early Years Check-In: [eyci.healthhq.ca/](https://eyci.healthhq.ca/) (similar to PEDS)

# Resources- Mental Health Screening

- Consider [evidence based “Action Signs”](#) for mental health difficulties
- Many free, brief screening tools available, see [cps.ca/en/mental-health-screening-tools](https://cps.ca/en/mental-health-screening-tools)

Area	Examples
Broad Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 17-item Pediatric Symptom Checklist <a href="https://massgeneral.org/psychiatry/treatments-and-services/pediatric-symptom-checklist">massgeneral.org/psychiatry/treatments-and-services/pediatric-symptom-checklist</a></li><li>• 25-item Strengths &amp; Difficulties Questionnaire <a href="https://sdqinfo.org">sdqinfo.org</a></li></ul>
ADHD & Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 26-item SNAP-IV-26- <a href="https://caddra.ca/wp-content/uploads/SNAP-IV-26.pdf">caddra.ca/wp-content/uploads/SNAP-IV-26.pdf</a></li></ul>
Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 38-item Spence Children’s Anxiety Scale <a href="https://scaswebsite.com">scaswebsite.com</a></li><li>• 41-item SCARED <a href="https://pediatricbipolar.pitt.edu/resources/instruments">pediatricbipolar.pitt.edu/resources/instruments</a></li><li>• 25-item RCADS Short - <a href="https://childfirst.ucla.edu/resources/">childfirst.ucla.edu/resources/</a></li></ul>

# Resources- Learning Screening

- Curriculum Based Measures can be a quick way to determine if a learning problem exists (FREE in theory)
  - Oral Reading Fluency Norms: <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/fluency-norms-chart-2017-update> → if # of words student reads correctly is <25<sup>th</sup> percentile at any time point, a problem likely exists
  - Written Expression Fluency Norms: [https://www.interventioncentral.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pdfs\\_blog/wright\\_Learning\\_Spark\\_Blog\\_29\\_March\\_2013\\_Grs\\_1\\_5\\_Identfy\\_Writing\\_Difficulties\\_NORMS\\_Table.pdf](https://www.interventioncentral.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pdfs_blog/wright_Learning_Spark_Blog_29_March_2013_Grs_1_5_Identfy_Writing_Difficulties_NORMS_Table.pdf)
- The TOWRE-2 (available for purchase) can identify word level reading difficulties in <5 minutes

## References

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