

# Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!

An Early Intervention Service and Early  
Childhood Special Education Provider's  
Guide to Support Developmental and  
Behavioral Screening Initiatives

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# Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!

## An Early Intervention Service and Early Childhood Special Education Provider's Guide to Support Developmental and Behavioral Screening Initiatives



As an early intervention service and early childhood special education (EIS/ECSE) provider, you are on the front lines of watching children develop. You are also a partner with primary referral sources to help ensure that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities are identified as early as possible and get the services for which they are eligible and that they need as soon as possible. Primary referral sources include, but are not limited to, early care and education providers, home visitors, physicians and other health care professionals, therapists, social workers, and families. We know that if developmental screening and referral systems are effectively coordinated, then developmental delays are more likely to be identified early so that children can be linked to the appropriate services and receive the supports that they need and for which they are eligible. Partnering with primary referral sources to [\*Learn the Signs. Act Early\*](#) will ensure that children have the best possible start to a bright future.

This guide includes tips and strategies to raise community awareness about the importance of early screening and how to best support primary referral sources to ensure that young children are screened early with high quality screening tools. Accompanying this guide is a list of standardized developmental and behavioral screening tools and the [\*Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit\*](#), which includes information about healthy development, developmental and behavioral concerns, where to go for help, how to talk to families, and tips on how to best support children. The [\*Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit\*](#) was developed for several audiences and will be invaluable to you as you work with primary referral sources to support them in screening and referral. The compendium of screening tools contains valuable statistical and demographic information that will help referral sources in choosing a screening tool that fits their needs. It is important that referral sources have access to information on high quality screening tools so that they can make appropriate referrals to the Part C early intervention or preschool programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Once referred, early intervention or preschool programs under the IDEA may conduct screenings and evaluations to help determine whether a child is eligible for services under the IDEA.

### ***What influences child development and behavior?***

Starting at birth and continuing throughout childhood, children reach milestones in how they play, learn, speak, act, move, and socialize with others. Skills such as taking a first step, smiling for the first time, and waving "bye-bye" are called developmental milestones. As you know, children develop at their own pace, so it can be difficult to tell exactly when a child will learn a given skill.

However, developmental milestones give a general idea of the changes to expect as a child gets older. Developmental and behavioral screening plays an important role in early detection and obtaining appropriate supports for children who may be experiencing delays for any number of reasons.

Many factors can influence child development, including biology and early experiences with caregivers and peers. Factors like warm and secure relationships, enriching learning opportunities, proper nutrition, exercise, and rest can make a big difference in healthy child development. On the other hand, adverse events such as household dysfunction, maltreatment, abuse, neglect, exposure to alcohol or substance abuse, violence, and/or trauma can have serious negative impacts on child development. To learn more about the effects of some adverse early childhood experiences, check out the [Early Childhood Trauma and Identifying and Providing Services to Young Children Who Have Been Exposed to Trauma](#) resources in the [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit](#).

### ***How can I help raise public awareness about Child Find and developmental and behavioral screening?***

As EIS/ECSE providers, you know that the purpose of [Child Find](#) is to screen all children and identify those who are eligible for, and need, additional services or supports through early intervention and special education and related services. Raising public awareness about Child Find and the importance of developmental and behavioral screening conducted by primary referral sources and timely follow-up is a critical role you can play in your community to enhance or establish local screening efforts. The [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit](#) has several resources to help you raise awareness about healthy development and recommended screening and follow-up practices. In addition, the Tracking, Referral and Assessment Center for Excellence (TRACE) Center provides excellent resources to help you to determine the best [research-based strategies](#) that will assist you in raising public awareness about the benefits of screening and early identification.

Informational materials are also typically available on each State's early intervention and early childhood special education websites. You can share these materials with primary referral sources to help them learn (1) that early intervention and early childhood special education services are available to eligible infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities from birth through age five; (2) how to connect with the State IDEA Part C office (early intervention) and State Part B 619 office (early childhood special education); and (3) how to refer a child potentially in need of EIS/ECSE services. TRACE offers strategies for [customizing printed materials](#) to increase their effectiveness in educating the community.

### ***How can I help primary referral sources improve their developmental and behavioral screening and referral efforts?***

Primary referral sources are likely to interact often with young children, giving them a unique perspective in identifying potential developmental concerns. EIS/ECSE providers play a pivotal role in ensuring that primary referral sources have the resources they need to screen and refer children with suspected developmental delays or disabilities. You can help primary referral sources improve their screening and referral efforts by establishing an ongoing relationship. As an EIS/ECSE provider you can [implement a variety of strategies](#) to help build rapport and establish credibility with primary referral sources including physicians, early care and education providers, home visitors and other early intervention professionals. This includes providing information that promotes screening using high quality screening tools; providing materials on early intervention and preschool special education services; and scheduling follow-up visits to respond to questions and provide additional information.

It is important to track any referral to specialists, to ensure that the children actually receive the follow-up services and that the results of any diagnosis and/or treatment are received and notated in their health records. When families are referred to you from another source for a determination as to whether a child has a disability and is eligible for services under the IDEA, it is important to provide feedback to those primary referral sources, in accordance with the applicable IDEA, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act confidentiality requirements.

As part of the [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit](#), there are comparable guides on developmental and behavioral screening developed specifically for and distributed to early care and education providers, mental health service providers, home visitors, child welfare workers, and physicians that you can use in your Child Find public awareness outreach efforts.

### ***A Partnership Approach***

Establishing a system for developmental and behavioral screening and support requires partnerships between EIS/ECSE providers and primary referral sources. There are many different professionals who interact with children and families. Parents and families are at the center of children's support teams. Other important members of the partnership that supports the child include early care and education providers, medical providers, home visitors, and behavioral health specialists. As an important partner, you should encourage and remind families to communicate developmental or behavioral concerns, screening results, and support plans to all those who work with their child. With everyone on the same page, children and families can get the support they need in *every* setting.

A developmental and behavioral screening passport, similar to an immunization card, is a tool to help parents keep track of their children's screening records. It can be used by parents to inform all those who work with their child about their child's screening record. A passport is included in the [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit](#). Encourage primary referral sources to give this resource to parents and educate them on its use.

### ***Building an integrated child-serving system***

Many communities take a more formal approach to ensuring that all of the providers in a child's life are connecting and offering care in a coordinated manner. The [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit](#) includes a guide for helping communities take practical steps to better integrate care. For example, professionals such as pediatricians, home visitors, and child care providers might put a system in place to ensure that they are communicating often with a child's parents and with each other (with parent consent where needed) so that the care these professionals provide to a young child is consistent and supportive of that child's needs. Some communities develop policies, protocols, and even technology to make good team work possible and easy.

#### **Birth to Five: Watch Me Thrive! Passport**



One tool for helping parents to monitor developmental progress is the use of a screening passport, which is similar to an immunization card or booklet. This tool can help parents keep track of their child's screening records and share screening information with providers. A passport is included in this *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive Toolkit* and can be shared with parents.

See the *Community Guide* included in the [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit](#) for examples that might be of interest to you and your community.

### Find the Right Screening Tool

- ✓ **Ages:** What age groups do I serve and what screening tools are made for those ages?
- ✓ **Time:** How much time does it take to use this screening tool? Which tool is practical within a child care or Head Start program?
- ✓ **Cost:** What is the cost for the screening tool and its ongoing use within early care and education programs?
- ✓ **Training:** Is there training required to use this screening tool? How much training is required? What type of training is recommended?
- ✓ **Languages:** Does the screening tool need to be available in different languages to fit the needs of the families I serve?
- ✓ **Culture:** Is it culturally appropriate?

### *How can I help primary referral sources select the right screening tool to fit their needs?*

If you work with an early childhood program or as part of a network of primary referral sources, be sure to check the program's policy on developmental and behavioral screening to have an understanding of when screening occurs. Ask programs, network directors, or other primary referral sources if there is already a screening tool being used and who usually does the screening. You can assist primary referrals sources with understanding the screening tool compendium that accompanies this guide to help them learn more about the tools they use or to help them find a new screening tool to fit their needs. You can also explain screening under the IDEA, which is conducted by EIS/ECSE providers once a child is referred to them under the IDEA is to determine if a child is suspected of having a disability and, if so, to evaluate the child (with parental consent) for eligibility for services under the IDEA.

The *Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!* screening tool compendium describes standardized screening tools that research has shown are high quality and accurate in tracking development. Information such as the cost, time and training requirements, ease of use, and other factors that can help providers choose the right tool are included. While this list is not all-inclusive and is not intended to be an endorsement of any particular tools over others, it is based on a wide search of the literature and inclusion criteria such as comprehensiveness, tool specificity, and inclusion of family input.

The compendium of screening tools that accompanies this guide is made up of two sections: a section of summary tables and a section of individual profiles. If programs are looking for a new tool, start at the summary tables as they provide an overview of many different tools. The tables may help you narrow the range of tools to encourage referral sources to consider. The profile section also provides more detailed information about the tools that you can share with other professionals and families.

### *How can I ensure that families receive individualized support and are referred to the right specialist after screening?*

As part of this screening initiative, primary referral sources are being encouraged to talk with families about their options after their child has been screened. Remember to share with primary referral sources that, if a child is under 3 years of age and has a screening result that indicates potential risk, the family should be referred to their local early intervention service program. The [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit](#) accompanying this guide provides a description of [the early intervention system and a state-by-state](#)

[directory of early intervention coordinators](#). For children older than 3, families should be encouraged to contact their neighborhood public school, which can provide information on evaluation under the IDEA if the child is suspected of having a disability, even if the child is not in kindergarten yet.

The [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit](#) also provides information on how to help families locate a pediatric health care professional by contacting the Maternal and Child Health Hotline. It also provides information on connecting families to local parent training information centers or to family health information centers.

We encourage you to work collaboratively with your community's early childhood network to raise awareness and implement universal developmental and behavioral screening activities that will reach every child. We hope this guide, together with the [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive! Toolkit](#) and compendium of screening tools will support your work with primary referral sources to help children develop and reach their full potential.

### ***Making a difference***

Research indicates that the first five years of a child's life are critical to brain development, academic achievement, and later life outcomes for that child. The short time it takes to conduct a developmental and behavioral screen can change the trajectory of a child's life forever. By helping primary referral sources to incorporate a system of regular developmental and behavioral screening, YOU can play an important role in making sure all children thrive. We hope you find this User Guide, Screening Compendium, and the series of [Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!](#) toolkits useful in supporting young children and their families on their developmental journey. Visit [www.hhs.gov/WatchMeThrive](http://www.hhs.gov/WatchMeThrive) for a complete set of resources.

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## **Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!**

Celebrating Developmental Milestones • Implementing Universal Screening •  
Improving Early Detection • Enhancing Developmental Supports