

THE VALUE OF PEACE OF MIND WHEN PARENTING



By: Gail Stasiw, BA

It's that time of year... summer vacations and day trips are over. School buses pass you on your way to work or when you are out and about running errands. Dry leaves begin to crunch under your feet when you are walking on wooded paths. Being observant about the outward changes that unfurl during the change of seasons comes naturally to many of us. It is also a time to begin to turn our skills of observation inward to our families and our children.

During the past several months, you may have been making some observations about your young child or toddler. Along with that is a sense of wonder. You begin to consider whether your child's skills are like those of other children. Some of your thoughts might sound like this: Should they be walking yet? Is scooting on their bottom instead of crawling ok? Do they have enough words? Do they follow my directions? These are fairly concrete concepts or milestones that most pediatricians or family practice doctors cover on your child's well visit. If there are any concerns, the doctor will generally refer you to Early Intervention for an evaluation.

However, many times parents grapple with issues that are less concrete such as severe food limitations, getting overwhelmed by loud sounds or big crowds, disliking any changes to

routines, and behavior problems. You might be wondering whether it is a typical toddler tantrum or something else. These issues are less concrete, but nonetheless they can be just as upsetting to parents. I've had many moms contact me and say, "I just don't know whether this is typical or not." Unfortunately, while there are a lot of good guide books regarding typical milestones, there are many items that can be in the "gray" area, and books may not be as explicit regarding those issues. They are always a good first step in order to gain education regarding development. However, I always think that if, as a parent, you are wondering about something, it probably warrants looking into it further—even if it is just to give you peace of mind.

This is where Early Intervention can be a useful resource to moms and dads caring for their children. Early Intervention (EI) in Pennsylvania are services and supports designed to help families with children from birth to age 3. In order to qualify for EI, children need to have a 25% delay in any area of development. In addition, children with a diagnosis with a high probability of developmental delay would also qualify.

EI is based on a family-training model and is routine-based intervention, meaning that our work is with families/caretakers to provide them with strategies and ideas that they can easily incorporate into their existing routines with their children. We support children where they are—in their homes, in childcare, or with grandparents or other caretakers. We establish eligibility by conducting multidiscipline evaluations that are focused on all five areas of development: cognitive, language, physical, social, and self-help. During this critical 0-3 age range,

all areas overlap and affect each other, so it is important to take a look at the whole child to gain a total understanding of his or her development.

As a first step, you can place a call to the director of your local EI program to express your thoughts and concerns about your child's development. At Penn Foundation, I would then assign a Service Coordinator to contact you and make an initial home visit to obtain further details about your current routines. This important information becomes a part of your family's assessment.

The next step is the evaluation to establish

eligibility. We would share the family assessment information with our evaluation teams so that they can offer ideas and strategies that make sense for your day with your child. All of this happens in your home so that your child and you are most comfortable. We play with your child with age-appropriate toys to elicit the information we need without making the child or you feel like your child has to perform.

If your child qualifies based on the criteria, we can then develop a plan and talk about how we can support him or her in EI (if you wish). During this process, we pay particular attention

to what is most important to you, and we generate outcomes based on your thoughts and concerns. You are an important member of the team. We also will give you information and ideas throughout the process and talk about all the great things your child is able to do as well as those areas in which he or she might need a bit of support.

We are partners in this journey of discovering more information about your child and figuring out the best way to assist him or her on the road to continuing development. Let's take the journey together!

Gail Stasiw is the Director of Early Intervention Services at Penn Foundation. She has always had a passion for working with children, dedicating the first 10 years of her career to county Children and Youth agencies and the last 20 years to Penn Foundation. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Social Work from Shippensburg University.

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