

## EARLY INTERVENTION

Happy Mother's Day! Today's article is in honor of moms. Something MY mom once said to me gave me the idea. My mom has a doctorate in early childhood education and is a child therapist. She has worked with many families of developmentally delayed children. Unfortunately, she's heard stories of many pediatricians who brushed off a mother's concerns, thus delaying diagnosis and treatment of a child with significant problems. These moms often heard statements like, "if he's not talking by the time he's two, we'll worry about it then." Then, when the referral is finally made, valuable time has been lost when early intervention with speech therapy, for example, could have already been making a difference.

Many professionals in this field use the Ages and Stages questionnaire by Bricker and Squires, a parent-completed child monitoring tool. This helps to determine if a further developmental evaluation is warranted. The question "does anything worry you about your child?" seems to be very potent in finding children with a delay. This reminds me of something one of my mentors in residency told me: "if a mother tells you something is really wrong with her child, she is usually right." He was talking about serious medical illness, but the same holds true for developmental delays, emotional problems, or anything. A loving, caring mom (or dad) knows their own child much better than we pediatricians can in our infrequent, short visits. We rely completely on parents to give us a complete and accurate history. We can't assess a child's development based solely on what we observe in an office visit. If we did, my pediatrician would think that all my daughter could say at the age of two was to scream "NO THANK YOU!" although I knew her vocabulary was quite extensive.

There are rare cases where I think there is a developmental issue that needs to be addressed, and the parent does not agree. Some of these perceived problems have ended up being nothing (and I'm happy to be wrong in those cases), or the kids caught up after some brief early intervention services. Some of these are cases where a parent is in denial and it takes time to convince them to get further evaluation done. I wonder how many of the people who told my mom it was the pediatricians' fault were really in denial themselves. It's hard to look at your beloved child and admit that something is wrong. The whole future that you had planned for your child and your family seems to go up in a puff of smoke. I know that feeling. Instead of looking at it as "something is wrong with my child", how about "we need more help" or "we need to learn how to bring out his talents."

Whether you or your pediatrician (or both) are concerned about your child's development, there are great services available. I am focusing on early intervention (0-3 years old), but services are available for older children through the public school system. In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Virginia has set up the Infant and Toddler Connection of Virginia (also called Babies Can't Wait!) to provide services to children aged 0-36 months with developmental delays, atypical

development, and/or a diagnosed physical or mental condition with a high probability of causing a delay. Locally, this program is also called Parent Education/Infant Development (PEID). I have been lucky to get to know many of the women who work for PEID. They are an extremely dedicated, knowledgeable and hard working group, most of whom are mothers themselves.

A referral to PEID can be made by a parent, physician or other health care provider, simply by calling the phone number listed below. After the referral is made, the family is contacted by a temporary service coordinator, who conducts a developmental screening. If warranted, she will then set up a multi-disciplinary evaluation and assessment to determine what, if any, ongoing services will be needed.

There is no cost to the family for this initial assessment. If early intervention services are recommended, private insurance will be billed. If the services are not covered by insurance, there is a sliding scale based on parental income. Families are never denied services based on inability to pay.

One of the amazing things about the PEID program is that they make house calls. Federal requirements state that children 0-36 months should receive services in their natural environment whenever possible. So, for the most part, these evaluations and services are done in the child's home or daycare. This gives PEID therapists the ability to assess children more accurately, and allows the children to feel safe while being assessed.

There are other private options for speech, physical and occupational therapy through Mary Washington Hospital and Children's Hospital of Richmond. These definitely have their place. But the PEID program is unique in more than just the house calls. In the PEID program multi-disciplinary initial assessments are free. There are multiple other services available including respite care, social work services, transportation, etc. There is ongoing service coordination to help families hook up with other community resources, and to transition smoothly to public school services when the time comes.

For more information on early intervention services, call the PEID program at 371-3561 or the Infant and Toddler Connection website at [www.infantva.org](http://www.infantva.org). Thank you to Tracey Taylor, an occupational therapist with PEID, who is always willing to go the extra mile for her friends and clients.

As always, I welcome reader comments and questions.....

