

Healthy Development Checklist

Giving Voice to the Needs of Very Young Children

Because babies and toddlers do not communicate using words, CASA volunteers need to speak for them. The following tips were adapted from *Ensuring the Healthy Development of Infants in Foster Care: A Guide for Judges, Advocates and Child Welfare Professionals*, a joint publication of the New York Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children and the Zero to Three Policy Center.

Be a powerful advocate for babies and toddlers simply by asking the right questions:

1.) Has the child had a comprehensive health exam since entering foster care, including: hearing and vision, lead exposure, dental services? Young children need frequent pediatric check-ups because they are growing so fast. Children in foster care are likely to have medical problems that make these check-ups even more critical. And they need a “medical home” where the pediatrician knows them and their caregivers.

2.) Has the child had a development screening by a provider with experience in child development? Because of the high likelihood of development delays for children in foster care, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a comprehensive assessment within a month of entering foster care. Has the infant been referred to an Early Intervention Program?

3.) Has the child had a mental health assessment? This assessment will pave the way for the professional support that can mean the difference between a stable foster care placement and disruption. An assessment can also better prepare families for reunification or adoption.

4.) Has the family been informed about Early Head Start? High-quality early care and education programs can support foster, kinship and biological parents by directing them to other support systems, providing information, and connecting them with other parents they may turn to for advice and support. Comprehensive early childhood programs, such as Early Head Start, combine home visitation, comprehensive services and technical assistance as well as provide the specialized services that very young

children in the child welfare system need. Early Head Start is a federally-funded program available at no cost to eligible infant, toddlers, and their families.

5.) Is the child placed in a stable, loving home with a caregiver who is knowledgeable about the special needs of babies and toddlers in foster care? The single most important predictor of a child's healthy growth and development is the attachment formed with a consistent, loving caregiver. A secure emotional bond with a loving caregiver lets infants know they are worthwhile and gives them the ability to nurture themselves, care about those around them and develop the motivation to learn about their world. When parents cannot care appropriately for their young children, it is critical that the children spend the time apart from their parents in a family setting where they can form a close bond with a warm, attentive caregiver. What are the specific challenges faced by this caregiver in caring for this infant (e.g., addiction to drugs, alcohol, or both; mental illness; cognitive limitations)? What are the learning requirements for caregivers to meet the infants needs? What are the specific illustrations of this caregiver's ability to meet the needs of this infant? What resources are available that could enhance this infant's healthy development and prospects for permanency?

Additional Resources:

Zero to Three	www.zerotothree.org
Birth to Three	www.birthto3.org
Child Trauma Academy	www.childtraumaacademy.com
The National Foster Parent Association	www.nfpainc.org
Prevent Child Abuse	www.preventchildabuse.org
Children's Bureau Express	www.cbepress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm
American Academy of Pediatrics	www.aap.org
Advocate Resource library at National CASA	www.casenet.org/library/index.htm