



# DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

*Developmental Disabilities, per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), are “a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language or behavioral areas. About one in six children in the U.S. have one or more developmental disabilities or other developmental delays” (CDC, 2015). Problems are usually lifelong and can affect function. Causes may include genetic abnormalities, prenatal exposure to substances, or certain viral infections during pregnancy and preterm birth (NIH, 2015). When delays are seen in all areas of development, this may be referred to as Global Developmental Delays.*

Developmental milestones tend to fall within certain time frames. For example, most children walk between 9 and 12 months (BabyCenter, 2015). Other motor-related milestones include sitting, rolling, crawling and pulling to stand. When these milestones are not met, a child may be referred by the pediatrician for testing to determine gross and fine motor skill levels. This testing is generally done by an occupational or physical therapist. Other developmental milestones include social and emotional, language and communication, and cognitive. For example, at 6 months, babies typically are responding to their name (language), at 9 months may be afraid of strangers (social and emotional) and by 12 months are finding hidden objects (cognitive). Many resources are available that list developmental milestones and many standardized tests are designed to assess developmental levels in each of these areas.

Developmental delays are typically seen at birth or during early development. As such, intervention in childhood is critical. Depending on the cause and extent of the delays, some children may “catch up” with their peers through therapeutic intervention and maturity. Other children may reach a plateau where improvement is no longer seen. At this point, compensatory skills and accommodation is required.

Children grow into adults. Adults with developmental delays may also require intervention in the form of therapy, caregiver assistance, medical support and equipment. As these clients age, further needs may emerge as well. This issue of DIRECTIONS includes two articles that specifically address seating and mobility needs in clients who are aging with Developmental Disabilities.

While some diagnoses are quite specific, developmental disability is an umbrella diagnosis with many specific diagnoses underneath. A client may have a more specific diagnosis, such as cerebral palsy, in addition to the diagnosis of developmental disability. Interventions must address all areas of client need.

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## RESOURCES AND REFERENCES:

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