Developmental Delays

Parents are often have concerns about their children's development, especially when they see other children of the same age who have already attained a milestone that their child still hasn't met, causing them to think that their child is 'slow' or 'seems behind.' It is important to keep in mind that for each milestone, there is a range of ages during which a child will normally meet it. For example, some children may walk as early as 11 months, while others may not walk until they are 15 months old, and it is still concerned normal.

Developmental milestones are determined by the average age at which children attain each skill, therefore, statistically, about 3% of children will not meet them on time, but only about 15-20% of these children will actually have abnormal development. The rest will eventually develop normally over time, although a little later than expected.

A developmental delay occurs when your child has the delayed achievement of one or more of his milestones. This may affect your child's speech and language, his fine and gross motor skills, and/or his personal and social skills.

Developmental delays, especially if they involve a language delay which may be secondary to a hearing loss, should be identified as early as possible.

A child with a global delay will have delays in all areas of development. It is usually caused by a static (does not worsen with time) encephalopathy caused by a disorder before or near the time or birth. Causes of global delays include prematurity, cerebral malformations, chromosomal disorders, infections, and progressive (may worsen with time) encephalopathies (metabolic diseases, hypothyroidism, neurocutaneous syndromes (neurofibromatosis, tuberous sclerosis), Rett syndrome, and hydrocephalus). Testing to look for the cause of a global developmental delay may include a head MRI.

Some signs that an infant may not be meeting his normal motor milestones include not being able to bring his hands together by 4 months, not rolling over by 6 months, having head lug when pulled to a sitting position after 6 months, not sitting by himself without support by 8 months, not crawling by 12 months, and not walking by 15 months. Remember that mild delays in motor development can be normal, and there is a range during which these milestones are usually met, so your child may not meet each one at the same time as other children. Delayed motor development, with normal language skills, can be caused by a neuromuscular disorder or mild cerebral palsy.

A delay in fine motor skills in older children may be manifested by not being able to use a spoon or fork, tie his shoes, button his clothes, write his name, draw shapes, color inside the lines, or hold a pencil correctly at the age appropriate time, or by having poor handwriting. A delay in gross motor skills in older children may include not being able to ride a tricycle or bicycle, being clumsy, or not walking correctly.

Delayed speech and language development can be caused by a developmental language disorders (DLD), hearing loss, mental retardation and autism.