

# A Step in the Right Direction

## Pathways Awareness Foundation is empowering parents and making a difference in the lives of kids

**A**s a new parent, you're delighting in your baby — in watching her discover new things, changing and growing along the way. You anxiously await the day she rolls over, sits up, crawls, stands ... But many babies seem to miss these milestones. While it typically isn't a cause for concern, many children who exhibit delayed or difficult physical movement may in fact have movement disorders.

Cerebral palsy and other movement disorders are basically a matter of muscle control — but it can mean much more. Some children diagnosed with movement disorders have difficulty only with movement while others also have problems with vision, hearing, speech or learning. Movement disorders can vary considerably from child to child — some children

appear stiff, tense or uncomfortable while others seem limp or as if they're in constant motion. Some are only clumsy, while other children may be unable to learn to sit or walk alone.

Confronting the possibility of a movement disorder is frightening for a parent — how do you know if your child is exhibiting symptoms? Should you address this with your child's doctor? What treatment options are available? The questions — and answers — can be overwhelming.

Enter the Pathways Awareness Foundation, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to education for and about children with movement and physical challenges and their families. Established in 1988, the Illinois-based Foundation aims to provide support, information and a sense of community for families.

"Every child is important," says Maggie Daley, co-founder and president of Pathways Awareness. "All children at some point face challenges, but they all have the same potential — enormous potential. We need to make sure we give them all opportunities to lead a successful and meaningful life."

At the Foundation — and its sister organization, the Pathways Center, an outpatient pediatric therapy clinic — early intervention is key. Children with movement disorders benefit greatly from early diagnosis and therapy, so the Foundation urges parents to stop playing the "wait and see" game. They offer checklists, brochures, videos and more to help parents determine if their child may have a movement disorder. In fact, each year the Foundation — in partnership with the Illinois governor's office — mails greeting cards to new parents encouraging them to watch for signs of these often-overlooked problems. Each card includes a growth and development chart and information outlining symptoms to look out for.

By empowering parents with information, the Foundation hopes that more children will benefit from early diagnosis.

"We need to keep moving ahead so we can let more and more people know the value of early intervention," Daley says.

*For more information, call the Pathways Awareness Foundation at 1-800-955-2445 or visit [www.pathwaysawareness.org](http://www.pathwaysawareness.org).*

### Know the Signs

Knowing the signs and symptoms of movement disorders is the key to early detection and intervention. The Pathways Awareness Foundation suggests that parents be on the lookout for some of these early symptoms:

- Poor head control after 3 months of age
- Stiff or rigid arms or legs
- Pushing away or arching back
- Floppy or limp body posture
- Cannot sit up without support by age 8 months
- Uses only one side of the body, or only the arms, to crawl
- Extreme irritability or crying
- Failure to smile by age 3 months
- Feeding difficulties
- Persistent gagging or choking when fed
- Tongue pushes soft food out of the mouth after age 6 months