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# Parents Miss Major Milestones

Their children could be at risk for delayed development, survey reports | By E.J. Brown

A survey done last year among American parents showed that 64 percent of respondents did not recognize their children's developmental milestones in the first three months of life, and only half of the parents knew what to look for at six months.

The results indicate that despite early intervention screening in the 0-3 population for more than 15 years, parents haven't yet learned developmental basics. Failure to meet these first milestones is the first predictor of early motor delays.

The survey, a research project reported by the Pathways Awareness Foundation, also gathered information on how much parents understood about occupational, physical and speech therapy. Among high school graduates, only 35 percent were aware of OT, while 86 percent were aware of PT, and 72 percent of speech therapy. The OT and PT/SLP numbers jumped into the 70th and 90th percentiles, respectively, for parents with post-graduate degrees.

The foundation is a national non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness

about the benefits of detecting early motor delays in very young children. Established in 1988, the foundation has published critical infant milestone literature endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The foundation is connected with Pathways Center, a pediatric therapy facility in Glenview, IL.

The 2006 survey was sent to 423 adults, reflecting the demographic of balance of parents with at least one child younger than three. Survey demographics were balanced to reflect gender, income, ethnicity, age and the geography of the population. The survey has a 5-percent margin of error.

According to the survey, only 36 percent of parent responders knew that by three months of age, their children should raise their heads, and by four months should be pushing up with their forearms. Only 5 percent said they would seek help at that point if their babies failed to

meet these milestones.

Beginning at the sixth month, parents' awareness of their children's developmental milestones was over 55 percent, and climbed steadily with each succeeding milestone so that by 12 to 15 months, 90 percent of parents in the study were aware of the motor skills their children should be displaying. Still, even of parents who recognized later delays, only 51 percent said they would act immediately upon them.

According to a Pathways release, one in 40 children is born with an actual motor delay, and 400,000 babies born are at risk of developmental delay. By missing the earliest developmental milestones, parents may let their children's problems escalate, making them harder to deal with later on.

In response to the report, Michael Msall, MD, chief of developmental and behavioral pediatrics at the University of Chicago's Comer Children's Hospital, told Pathways that "many parents just don't know what to look for, or that they should take their child in for an evaluation as soon as possible."

According to the report, other research has shown that parents, when they know what to watch for, are often the best judges of their babies' development because they see the children every day.

Milestones on the survey were divided into three-month intervals. By six months, children should be able to sit forward, using their hands for support, roll from back to tummy, and accept their entire weight on their legs while standing with support. By nine months, babies should be able to sit and reach for toys without falling, move from tummy to back into sitting, and creep on hands and knees with alternate arm and leg movement. By 12 months, most children can pull themselves up and cruise along furniture and may take several independent steps; and by 15 months, children should be walking independently with few falls, and be able to squat down to pick up a toy.

With their understanding of therapy for infants so limited, where would parents turn for help with developmental issues? According to the survey, 79 percent said they would go to their family practitioners. But almost as many—68 percent—said they would look it up online. Fifty-three percent said they would be likely to ask their childcare providers. ■

*E.J. Brown is editor at ADVANCE.*

