

HOW TO CONNECT FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS SUPPORT



Your CNC team's support can play an essential role in connecting newcomer children with special needs and their families to life-changing support and early intervention.

Families are often more likely to talk to another professional if they are introduced by someone they know and trust; but sharing concerns can still be challenging. Because your team already has the connection and relationship with the families, it's important to learn about resources, supports and services that are available in your community and to develop connections.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

Call your local community and social services helplines (211 in most provinces) to learn more about what's available (e.g., speech and language, developmental assessments, hearing, vision, behavioural support, children's mental health agencies, physical/occupational therapy, childcare subsidy, family resource programs and/or financial/transportation supports for disabilities.)

The CMAS special needs consultant is also available to support you.

WHAT IF THE FAMILY ISN'T READY?

When approaching a family about a concern you have regarding a child's development, it's important to be aware of parent/caregiver's readiness to disclose information and to discuss their child's development.

- When parents aren't ready... **Build trust**, watch for readiness cues and revisit concerns.
- If parents seem ready to **acknowledge** there might be a concern... Share information slowly. Sandwich positive feedback with your concerns and ask about concerns at home. (e.g., Mika builds great structures out of blocks, but he gets very easily frustrated when other children try to take them away. He has started to work on sharing, but I'm concerned about his angry outbursts. Have you seen any behaviour like this at home?)
- When parents are ready... **support** them in connecting with community resources.

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And remember to:

- Complete the Looksee developmental checklist (previously Nipissing District Developmental Screening Tool) with parents to gather information about the child. This is a great way for CNC staff and parents to connect to identify the child's strengths and needs.
- Be patient, supportive and non-judgemental of families. Some families may have limited awareness or understanding of developmental milestones and the impact delays can have on a child over time if left unaddressed.
- Avoid jargon, labels and complicated terminology. Parents may not always respond well to your observations and concerns, but it helps to take a positive approach; emphasizing school readiness and “ruling out” anything serious.
- Listen to the parents and recognize that the family might have other pressing settlement challenges that take precedence over early identification and support.
- Take “baby steps” towards acceptance and support. Sometimes by helping families connect to one simple support, it can lead to connections with other services.
- Parents must consent for referrals and to be placed on waitlists for services. Consider potential barriers, and keep in mind that the referral source (i.e., CNC staff) needs to make sure that the family understands what they're agreeing to.

For more information, see [Early Identification of Special Needs is Important!](#) and [How to Talk to Parents When a Child Needs Extra Support](#).

Visit cmascanada.ca for more resources to support your work with newcomer families



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