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Establishing Trusting Relationships with Families and Caregivers through Developmental Surveillance and Screening

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Early health supervision visits, where families learn how to care for their newborn and support their young child's development, are a great opportunity to develop trusting relationships with families. Assessing children's development, measuring growth, and providing anticipatory guidance are integral parts of these visits. Strengths-based developmental surveillance and screenings can identify children with developmental concerns and build trusting relationships. This trust can support families in sharing concerns about their child's development in addition to other sensitive issues, like parental depression or social determinants of health.

Practical strategies to incorporate during health supervision visits that promote trust:

Strategy: Integrate developmental surveillance into each health supervision visit.

Rationale:

- Raises awareness of the importance of health supervision visits.
- Teaches families about typical development.
- Supports anticipatory guidance/safety education (i.e., fine motor skills/feeding/choking).

Example: Consider integration within electronic health records.

Strategy: Thank families for completing any developmental surveillance or screening tools.

Rationale:

- Families want to know the information they provided has been reviewed.
- Families are more likely to complete future forms.
- Families know office is a safe place to discuss developmental questions/concerns.

Strategy: Take a strengths-based approach.

Rationale:

- Families want to know you see their whole child and value their child and family's strengths.
- Review AAP [resource guide](#) for identifying strengths, risks, and protective factors.

Strategy: Avoid using deficit-based language.

Rationale:

- Deficit-based language (e.g., "testing/checking for problems" or "that isn't normal"), can reinforce ableism, the belief that people with typical abilities are superior.

- Medical professionals can support families in recognizing their child’s unique strengths while supporting their child’s resiliency and development of new skills and abilities. Description of developmental surveillance and screening in such terms can help parents to understand the process and how it helps support the child and family.
- Many families find it unsettling to hear their child may have developmental delays and disabilities because they did not have any concerns or find it initially overwhelming to think their child may face additional obstacles in life.

Strategy: Discuss surveillance and screening responses.

Rationale:

- Reviewing surveillance and screening responses with families, even if no concerns were identified, may allow them to feel more comfortable with discussions if concerns arise later; it also provides an opportunity to celebrate a child’s progress.
- Families and Pediatricians report value in developmental discussions (families feel they are receiving higher quality care; pediatricians report these discussions as rewarding/enjoyable and decrease “burn out”).

Strategy: Incorporate developmental discussions within other parts of the visit.

Rationale:

- Model how to observe and support a child’s development.
- Make the most of the time available for the visit.

Strategy: Avoid associating a child’s development with parenting success.

Rationale:

- Parents can feel judged (some feel surveillance and screening tools are a test of their parenting skills) and some want to please the pediatrician with expected answers.
- If a clinician associates a child’s development with being a good parent, it may be more difficult for a family to share concerns in the future
- Recognize how a family is creating safe, stable, nurturing environment for their child can set the stage for discussions on other positive parenting strategies.

Strategy: Support continuity of care.

Rationale: Methods to provide continuity of care build trust.

Examples:

- Introduce yourself.
- Wear name tag.
- Distribute business cards with your schedule.
- Share your availability verbally (“I am usually here on Wednesdays”).
- Help schedule follow-up appointments.

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