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Prioritizing and Facilitating Developmental Referrals

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Referrals to appropriate resources should be considered if any person on the patient's care team has concerns about the patient's current development or identifies the patient to be at increased risk of developmental delays. This includes family members, caregivers, daycare workers, teachers, and healthcare team members. When in doubt, offer additional resources.

When making referrals, consider all possible resources and do not hesitate to make simultaneous referrals that offer different resources. For example, an infant who has delayed gross motor skills and low tone may warrant simultaneous referral to both Early Intervention and a neurologist. Learn about your local referral resources (e.g., know who in your community can do autism evaluations like developmental-behavioral pediatricians, child neurologists, or child psychologists, as this can decrease wait times for children who need diagnostic evaluations).

Consider the following when making referrals:

- Could this patient and family benefit from additional referral resources to support their development?
- Should this patient have the expertise of a specialist to make a diagnosis, provide explanation, or provide information on additional supports?
- What are the barriers for the family/caregiver to access these referral resources? (Including travel/transportation, care of siblings, out-of-pocket expenses/insurance network participation, waiting times, etc.)
- What is the appropriate timeframe in which the patient ideally should be seen? Are there timing barriers about which you or the family should be aware?

When initiating a referral:

- Document the referral in the electronic health record (EHR) so that the care team can facilitate the appropriate administrative requirements and enter into their tracking system. Having a system in place increases referral completion rates.
- Relay the importance of the referrals to the family/caregiver with appropriate timeframes.
- Consider using the AAP Family Friendly Referral Guide, available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), to help explain the steps in the referral process to families/caregivers.
- Explore any barriers to completing referrals with families/caregivers.

- Use [shared decision-making](#) with families for prioritizing referrals and follow-up.
- Give clear directions to the family/caregiver on when and how to reach out should they have difficulties or additional questions accessing referral resources.
- Give clear directions to the family/caregiver on how to follow-up with the practice/trainee on results of any additional screenings and adjustments to the care plan that can then be used to update the medical record and offer additional support.

Learn about and understand your state's early intervention program.

- Read about the program and what families can expect on the program's website.
- Ask families in the program about the process and services (What works well? What was difficult? What do they wish they had been told by their pediatrician?).
- Arrange a visit with your local early intervention regional office.

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