

BREAKING

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### **Their Voice: How to support children with disabilities**

Addressing the Needs of Children Early

Monica Villar Their Voice Apr 8, 2018



**Monica Villar**

Courtesy

In parenting, there are many occasions where the old adage “what you don’t know won’t hurt you” is completely accurate. It is common and often comical when parents hear stories from their now-adult children about some things they did in their youth that probably would have brought on early gray hair and sleepless nights had they known then.

However, there are some cases where not knowing something could have very long-term, adverse consequences for the parent and the child, such as the presence of a developmental disability.

Although there are many disabilities that are easily diagnosed during pregnancy and at the time of delivery, there are also a list of “invisible” disabilities or delays that aren’t detectable for some time later.

When it comes to detecting the existence of a learning or developmental disability, sometimes all a parent has is instinct. Sometimes, the parent will notice the child is not developing or learning new skills at the same rate as an older sibling or peer.

I think there are a number of reasons that parents might not seek help or try to obtain a diagnosis including fear of hearing that there is something wrong, afraid their child will be labeled or stereotyped and even that their child won’t be successful.

From personal experience, I would offer my own advice for any parent who thinks that their child might have a developmental or learning disability.

Don’t look for answers on the internet. In our age of technology, Google seems to be the best place to go for any information because it is fast and there is so much available. However, in most cases, the information is generalized and not specific to your child.

Don’t assume your child will grow out of a delay over time.

Don’t assume that if your child has a delay, someone else will eventually discover it and take the necessary steps to correct it.

Don’t let fear, shame or embarrassment keep you from doing the right thing for your child.

Don’t think that by not validating your concerns, you are actually protecting your child.

Do go to the experts for advice. Start with your child’s pediatrician, and be thorough and clear about the information you give. In most cases, if your pediatrician shares your concern they will refer you to an early intervention program. Even without the referral of a pediatrician, early intervention can be a resource for parents. By calling early intervention with concerns, parents are entitled to a complete developmental evaluation at no cost. Each school district has early intervention: Alpine has Kids on the Move, Provo has Easter Seals/Goodwill, and Nebo has Kids Who Count.

If your child is already struggling in any way, do advocate for additional resources through the school. These resources are available through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, it is critical to be diligent in advocating on behalf of your child. Remember that no one is going to fight harder for your child's success than you.

And finally, do remind your child that a disability or deficit does not define them. Help them learn about accommodations available to them to offset some of the areas where they struggle.

There are a lot of reasons why it is important to be proactive when it comes to your child's development. Most importantly, when you are able to put a name or diagnosis on a condition, you are much more able to treat or correct it. Our community is full of resources, many at no cost, to support the child and family.

Children with disabilities become adults with disabilities, but the children who have been given support and resources will become the adults who are more equipped to be successful.

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