



Improving Early Detection and Diagnosis of Autism

As a special education teacher of nearly 25 years, Barbara Tames is always looking for new tools and opportunities to educate the teachers and parents of her local community in Virginia. Last spring, Barbara discovered the “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” campaign.

Because we do not know how to prevent autism, early identification and intervention hold the most promise for affected children and their families. CDC is working with partners to reach parents, health professionals, and childcare providers with information on developmental milestones and the early signs of autism. The campaign— Learn the Signs. Act Early.—is helping to change perceptions about the importance of identifying developmental concerns early. Barbara believes her community lacks general child

development awareness, and all parents would benefit from knowing the specific milestones and early warning signs of a potential delay. “Parents understand the importance of physical milestones, but they aren’t as aware of social and language milestones. It’s important to know all of the milestones your child should be reaching,” said Barbara. “It’s astonishing to see how a child can grow with therapy and support.”

Barbara and her colleagues have worked to blanket their county with “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” materials and information. “Every local physician has the campaign materials, and the fact sheets have been placed at parent help desks in county schools,” said Barbara. She has also distributed materials at women’s clubs in the area.



Barbara Tames and students from her class

Thanks in large part to committed volunteers like Barbara, the campaign has reached more than 11 million health care professionals, parents, partners, and child care providers since its launch in the fall of 2004. And, the campaign is achieving an important goal—encouraging target audiences to “Learn the Signs.” CDC’s evaluation of the project shows:

- Increases in the percentage of parents who report that the best time to get help for children with autism is before 2 years of age (22% in 2004 to 42% in 2007);
- Increases in the percentage of parents who report that a nurse or doctor asked them about how their child plays, acts, speaks, or learns during their child’s last well-child visit (73% in 2005 to 81% in 2007); and
- Increases in the number of pediatricians who agree that a child with autism can be diagnosed as early as the age of 18 months (71% in 2004 to 80% in 2007).

To download “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” materials, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/ActEarly/default.htm>.

For more information about CDC at Work, please contact us at (202) 245-0600 or go to <http://www.cdc.gov/washington/>.