



Partnering with American Indian and Alaska Native Families to Support Children's Development

The Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC) visited urban, rural and reservation American Indian and Alaska Native communities to talk with families of young children and with early childhood professionals (home visitors, teachers, and health care providers).

The information below is based on what we learned from those conversations to help guide families through the developmental screening process.

We found that families need five things for effective screening: to **understand why screening matters** for their children; to **know what to expect** in the screening process; to **trust the people** guiding them through the screening process; to **have confidence that culture will be considered** in interpreting results; and to **get feedback** on screening results.

UNDERSTAND WHY SCREENING MATTERS

Explain that screening can help children reach their full potential

Screening can help families identify both children's strengths and areas where they may benefit from developmental support.

Screening can help families catch little things they might otherwise overlook and connect them to early intervention – and early intervention can make a real difference in their children's successful development.

Explain that screeners are sensitive

Screeners are *sensitive* so they alert families when children's development is off course, to get early and effective support. It helps keep their needs from being overlooked.



The trade-off is that there are some *false positives* – positive results for some children who do not actually need extra support.

Tell families about sensitivity *before* screening so they know that positive results do not always mean children need extra support.

Suggest that if children do screen positive, parents should ask questions about steps to take to best to support their development.

NOTE: This resource is a living document that the TRC is continually working to improve. Please email tribalearlychildhood@cuanschutz.edu with comments, questions, or suggestions.

KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE SCREENING PROCESS

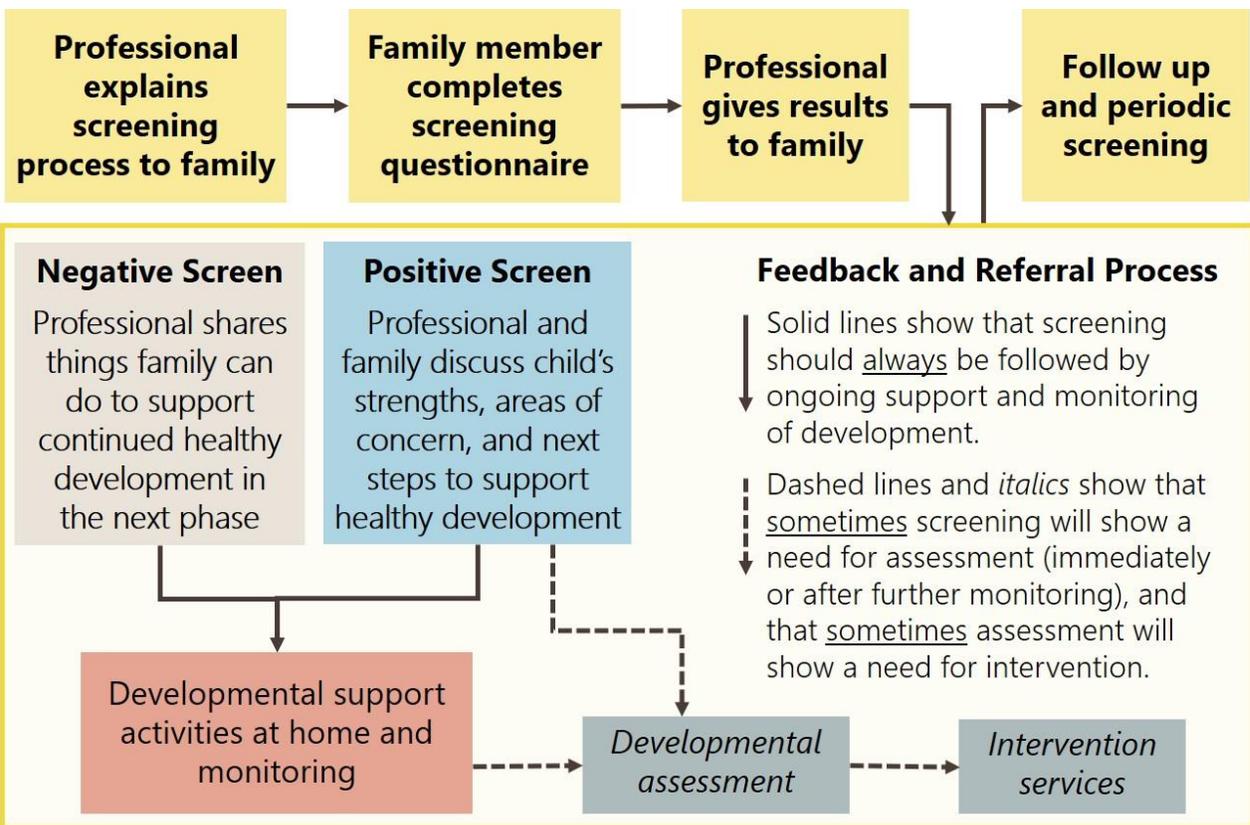
Help families know what to expect in the screening process

The screening process can be confusing to families. The more you can help them know what to expect and the more they trust you to help them through the process, the more accurate screening will be. Screening questionnaires are just one part of the screening process.

Explain that families' observations are needed for screening; they will be asked to share what they know about their children. Ask the family member who spends the most time with a particular child to complete the screener for that child so that observations will be most accurate.

Warn that some questions may be hard to answer, and it's okay to answer as best they can. Remind families that answers are confidential and used only to help support their children.

Give families a chance to ask questions or bring up any concerns throughout the process.



Remind families that regular, periodic screening is important

Explain that *universal screening* is when ALL children are screened – such as at Head Start, on home visits or at well-child check-ups.

Indicated screening, on the other hand, is when a family member or professional has a concern and screening is used as a first step to see if a more thorough evaluation is needed.



TRUST THE PEOPLE GUIDING THEM THROUGH SCREENING

Early childhood professionals play an important role in screening

Screening is an opportunity to partner with families to observe and encourage children's physical, language, behavioral, and social-emotional development.

Together with families, you can:

- celebrate developmental milestones and identify children's strengths;
- identify early signs when children need support for development and help to find appropriate support;
- discover strategies for supporting children's optimal development in the next phase.



Screening can also guide your work with children and families – planning classroom activities or home visits to meet needs identified through screening.

EXPECT THAT CULTURE WILL BE CONSIDERED IN SCREENING

Effective screening requires sensitivity to culture and community

Use what you know and have observed about children, their families, communities and cultures to interpret screening results. Below are **some** examples of social and developmental norms where a specific question on a screener might not align with a particular culture:

- 'Pointing' may be considered inappropriate, direct 'eye contact' can be a sign of disrespect, and 'observing and listening' rather than speaking up is highly valued.
- If you are not a part of the tribe or cultural community, consult with someone who is.
- Be sensitive to families' concerns about the use of screening results to label their children or to evaluate their parenting.
- Be aware that historical experiences can cause some families to worry about how screening results will be used.



GET FEEDBACK ON SCREENING RESULTS

Families want to learn the results of screening, positive or negative

Share negative screening results – findings that children are doing well. Reassure families and talk about ways they can continue supporting growth and development.

Share positive screening results – findings that indicate children may have developmental delays. Help families figure out next steps, things they can watch for, and connect them with further evaluation, if necessary.

How screening results are shared with families is important

Remind families that results summarize answers they gave on the screening questionnaire.

Start and finish by emphasizing children's strengths. Point out what families are doing well to support children and suggest new things they can try as well.



Be specific; use concrete examples of both strengths and areas for growth.

Provide clear ideas for supporting development.

Listen carefully to concerns.

Avoid labeling children using words like *normal* or *delayed*; avoid words such as *test*, *pass* or *fail*. You can use words instead like '*on track*', '*in need of support*', '*check on children's development*.'

Additional resources on developmental screening

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - Learn the Signs. Act Early. | <https://tinyurl.com/y4drlttt>
 - How to Get Help for Your Child Tip Sheet | <https://tinyurl.com/y2dgsb5t>
- ZERO to THREE: Age-based Tips from Birth to 36 Months | <https://tinyurl.com/y7ngezns>

