

Early Support for Children with Special Needs and Disabilities Improves Their Quality of Life

In California, more than 67,000 children ages 0 to 5 have been diagnosed with special needs and disabilities. However, still more remain undiagnosed and go without beneficial services and support that would help them learn and play. In Yolo County, approximately 8 percent of all children live with special needs; many of them benefiting from early diagnosis and access to local supportive services helping to improve their quality of life.

First 5 Yolo realizes every child develops at a different rate and in different ways. However, parents and caregivers can watch for general developmental milestones and seek help when there are questions about a child's progress and needs. Recognizing that special needs and disabilities cover a wide range of social, emotional, physical and mental issues, First 5 Yolo offers the following indicators to help parents and caregivers identify potential challenges as the children in their lives grow. Parent and caregivers are urged to talk with each other, ask questions and consult a doctor when a child:

Does not like being held or talked to by 6 months of age	Often acts out; seems to be very stubborn and angry
Does not make, or rarely makes, eye contact with others	Does not like having certain materials or clothing next to his or her body
Does not pay attention or stay with a task for as long as other children of the same age do	Does not know when there is danger; may walk into traffic or jump from high places
Does not like being touched	Tends to break objects frequently
Gets very upset when trying to do simple tasks that most children of the same age can do	Is sick often; may have stomachaches and headaches more frequently than other children
Does not like being soothed and comforted	Stares into space or rocks his or her body
Has sleeping, feeding, eating or toileting problems	Talks to self more than other children do
Has trouble putting thoughts, actions and movements together	Often bangs head on an object, floor or wall
Has tantrums, fights, screams and hits daily	May try to harm other children, animals or objects
Does not seek praise from a parent or caregiver	Is overly active; does things hastily or is easily distracted
Acts extremely shy or withdrawn	Breathes through the mouth

First 5 Yolo suggests parents or caregivers who spot possible developmental delays in a child follow these steps:

Get help early: If you think there might be a problem, seek help from a doctor and/or contact one of the county's resource agencies to find out what's available to the child.

- Alta Regional Center (530) 666-3391
- First Steps Infant – Preschool Program (530) 668-3860
- Lekotek (916) 979-1121
- Warmline Family Resource Center (800) 660-7995
- Yolo County Office of Education – Greengate School (530) 668-3800

Learn more about a child's disability: Go to the library or search the Internet to learn about a child's disability. Consult experts and do not be afraid to ask questions.

Look for support: Children, their caretakers and parents may need emotional support and/or advice for finding the right information and resources. The most encouraging help may come from other parents who have children with disabilities or special needs or from caregivers who have experience in working with children facing similar challenges.

Love, encourage and nurture the child: As children grow, they need opportunities to play and learn regardless of their disabilities. Help them find ways to do things independently or with little assistance. Involve him or her in making decisions, which will build confidence and help the child become a self-assured and capable adult.

If you think a child in your care may have special needs, or if you would like more information on recognizing development signs, please contact First 5 Yolo at (530) 669-2475.

First 5 Yolo is committed to improving the lives of children 0 through 5 years of age and their families in Yolo County. First 5 Yolo focuses on ensuring young children are healthy and ready to learn by providing grant funding to programs in Yolo County that benefit them by improving their health and providing access to developmental activities. For more information about First 5 Yolo programs, visit www.yolochildren.org.

###

In November 1998, California voters passed a statewide ballot initiative to add a 50-cent-per-pack tax on cigarettes. The funds collected are utilized to fund education, health, and childcare programs that promote early childhood development from prenatal through age 5.