



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

Resource 001 | Developmental delays

Global developmental delay

What it means

Global developmental delay (GDD) describes significant delays in at least two developmental areas in a child usually younger than 5. Areas include movement, communication, learning, relationships, and everyday skills. It is a clinical description, not an explanation of the cause or a prediction of the child's future. [1]

Causes and risk factors

Possible contributors include genetic or chromosomal conditions, differences in brain development, complications around birth, infections, and metabolic conditions. Hearing or vision difficulties may also affect performance. Sometimes a cause is not found. The combination of areas affected helps clinicians decide what to investigate; one child's explanation may differ from another's. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



Signs and everyday impact

Families may notice slower progress in several areas: sitting or walking, understanding or using communication, exploring and solving simple problems, or learning daily routines. Uneven skills are common. Missed milestones deserve discussion, but a milestone checklist alone cannot diagnose GDD. [1,2]

Assessment and diagnosis

A pediatric or developmental assessment reviews pregnancy and birth history, health, family history, growth, neurological findings, hearing, vision, and skills across settings. Standardized developmental measures support clinical judgment. Genetics, laboratory testing, or brain imaging are selected according to findings; they are not automatically required for every child. Reassessment may clarify the diagnosis as the child grows. [1,2]

Treatment and therapy

Support addresses the child's particular needs. Speech-language therapy may support communication, occupational therapy daily activities, and physical therapy movement. Treatable underlying conditions need medical care alongside therapy. Early intervention can begin while the cause is investigated. Goals should improve participation in meals, play, mobility, and family routines rather than focus only on test scores. [1,2,3]

Support at home

Choose one or two priorities with the team. Use short, enjoyable practice within existing routines and allow time for responses. Record new skills and what support helped. Include the child's strongest communication methods and preferred activities; relatives do not need to turn every interaction into therapy.

When to seek help

Seek prompt medical assessment for loss of skills, new seizures, marked weakness, or swallowing changes. Breathing difficulty or reduced responsiveness requires emergency care.

Questions for your care team

- Which developmental areas need support, and what are the child's strengths?
- Which investigations could change care, and why?
- What two everyday goals will we review at the next visit?



Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss global developmental delay. Global developmental delay (GDD) describes significant delays in at least two developmental areas in a child usually younger than 5. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

Opening: Define the topic and its developmental context.

Understanding: Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

Assessment: Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

Support: Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

Closing: Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: A GDD diagnosis does not mean every skill will develop at the same pace or that a fixed outcome is already known.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

Terms in plain language

- Global: involving several areas.
- Developmental assessment: a detailed review of skills and health.
- Early intervention: supports for young children and their families.

Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

[1] Assessing Developmental Delays in Children

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Assessing-Developmental-Delays.aspx>

[2] About Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDDs)

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/idds/conditioninfo>

[3] Developmental Monitoring and Screening

<https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/about/developmental-monitoring-and-screening.html>