



Development is a Journey Implementation Guide

A Conversation Roadmap for Early Care and Education Providers

Early care and education (ECE) providers play an essential role in early childhood development. Beyond the developmental enrichment from the relationships and stimulation you provide every day, you also conduct developmental screenings and ongoing monitoring, help identify delays, make referrals, and address parental concerns. Conversations about developmental screening results and concerns can be time-consuming and anxiety-provoking for families and providers. As early educators, you are already expected to do so much with so little time during parent-teacher conferences and more spontaneous conversations! Yet the benefits are clear: when families and their child's ECE provider have productive conversations about a child's development, they are better equipped to work as a team to co-create and follow through on a collaborative plan that supports the best outcomes for the child, especially when parents and providers might not see things the same way.

To **simplify, support, and strengthen** these important and often challenging conversations, the Brazelton Touchpoints Center, in partnership with Ariadne Labs, has created a **Conversation Roadmap for Early Care and Education Providers**. The Roadmap is designed to facilitate these conversations via **seven short and simple steps** to actively **engage parents and other caregivers**) in planning for their child's developmental needs, and **enhance the provider-parent partnership**. The Roadmap is designed to:

- Follow the formal screening process, not rescreen or diagnose
- Begin with appreciation of developmental progress, even if a screening tool raises concern
- Prompt collaborative conversations that build on the family's perspectives and concerns *or lack of concern*
- Help providers understand family perceptions of the child's development
- Intentionally discover and safely discuss points of *disagreement* and agreement
- Address screening findings and referrals
- Support families to learn about and advocate for resources for their child
- Provide a physical take-home document that clearly outlines next steps and resources

Conversation Roadmap Instructions

When to use: For children ages 0–5 years, after a regularly scheduled or extra developmental screening tool has been completed before the conversation. Please note that this tool can also assist in having needed conversations when providers would like to recommend that a parent complete developmental screening tool outside of regularly scheduled times, because of a concern the provider or parent might have. Developmental screenings typically occur when children are 9, 18, and 30 months of age; autism-specific screenings are recommended at 18 and 24 months. Additional screenings can be conducted as needed.

How to Use the Roadmap's 7 Steps

Sit down alongside the parent or caregiver with the printed [Development is a Journey Conversation Roadmap](#) so that you both can see it clearly.

1. Celebrate Progress!

Begin with the child's strengths and progress:

- Thank the parent for completing the screening tool, and let them know that their insights about their child help you understand the child better.
- Observe and describe something you see the child doing in the moment, or that you've seen in the course of caring for the child in your program.
- Mention one activity from the screening tool that the child is capable of doing. This helps you enter into the conversation from a strengths-based stance.
- Invite conversation about the child's progress. Ask the parent about their knowledge of their child.
- Describe something you see in the parent-child interaction child that demonstrates how well they are doing together.

WHY: Conversations about developmental screening tool results provide opportunities for the provider and family to celebrate the child's development and honor the family's primary role in the child's life. Finding common ground in strengths-based provider and parent observations of the child can help reduce anxiety raised by any concerns identified in the screening tool. It also can help to prepare caregivers to process potentially upsetting information, if the screening tool indicates a possible developmental delay or concern.

Sample language: "It is good to see you and ____ today. I noticed when you came in that she was reaching for you and wanted you to pick her up, so she said 'Uppy. Uppy.' When you did, I saw her smile such a big smile. It's so nice to see that she is using words to tell you what she wants. What other things do you see her learning to do?"

2. Does anyone have a concern?

Mark the boxes accordingly to indicate whether the provider, parent, or screening tool have any concerns about the child's development. Note the concerns.

WHY: This continues honoring the family's perspective and role, and begins the process of inviting parents' concerns, sharing any you may have, and discussing the screening findings. It also opens up the process of discovering differences in perspective, and normalizes these.

Sample language: "Today, I'm hoping we can talk together about how your child's development is going. Thank you so much for filling out the screening tool. It helps me to understand the child you see and know at home. I wanted to offer to discuss together what you said on the screening tool and the new things your child is doing at home that we can celebrate. We can also talk about any concerns that you may have. If there are any concerns, we can work together on determining the steps we can take next. Does that sound okay?"

3. Do we agree?

Mark the boxes accordingly to indicate whether there is full agreement among the provider, the parent, and the formal screening tool, or not.

WHY: Different perspectives are to be expected and can be quickly and safely discovered so that consensus on next steps can be reached and openly include any such differences.

Sample language: "It sounds like she's made a lot of progress in many areas. We've seen a lot of that here as well! Are there others where you have a concern? No. Okay. So you don't have any concerns about her development. It sounds like things are going pretty well. Now let's look at what you noted on the screening tool. You shared great examples of things she's able to do in a lot of areas of development. The scored screener suggests that we could take a closer look at her language. So, I am going to mark this box as "No" since, right now, there is some disagreement, and so that we can keep talking about it to discover more."

4. What is the child's behavior telling us?

Discuss together the parent's responses on the screening tool and whether there is anything about the child's behavior that may be saying the child is feeling the effects of a developmental delay. For example, a child with a language delay might exhibit frustration. This step helps parents experience your concern for the child. Make a note of the parent's observations in the margin of the Roadmap.

WHY: Children communicate through their behaviors. By observing a child's behavior, we can learn what the child is telling us. Early childhood educators can inquire about or describe children's behavior without interpreting, inviting the parent to offer what they feel the child's behavior means.

Sample language: "I heard her talking when you walked in, and you've told me she's learned a lot of new words. Let's look at how many words she's using right now to get a better understanding of where she is developmentally, since the screener is flagging a possible language delay. I want to learn more from you about what you are hearing her say at home. Do people understand what she is saying? When they can't understand her, what does she do?"

5. What are your hopes for your child?

To set the tone for the discussion that follows, ask the parent about their hopes and goals for their child's development over the next few months. This offers an opportunity to connect with the parent even — perhaps especially — if there was not earlier agreement on a concern. All parents want their child to make progress, and you can join them in their hopes and goals.

WHY: Asking parents about their hopes for their child is a powerful way for you to communicate your concern — and intention to support the parent's priorities. It signals to parents that you care about the whole child. It paves the way for engaging parents in next steps and referrals in service of their hopes and goals, even if they don't agree with you or the screening tool about a potential delay.

Sample Language: "Given the progress your child is making and the questions we may have about how things are going in some areas, I want to be sure I understand your hopes for _____. What would you like to see in her development in the next few months?"

6. Let's discuss

Ask for the parent's observations, and explore together areas of agreement and differences in perspective, digging into the developmental domains listed at the bottom of the Roadmap. Confirm your understanding of areas of agreement with the parent. If necessary, agree to disagree. Commit to partnering together on next steps, which may include a plan to learn together and revisit areas of disagreement as the child continues to develop. The plan may also include being open to what subsequent screening or evaluation might reveal.

Why: It is essential to your alliance with parents to ask for details that honor their perspectives. When you show interest in these details, parents are more likely to open up and engage, even if they disagree with you about concerns related to their child's development. If you show willingness to not have this become a conflict of opinion but rather a plan for progress, parents will more likely warm to your concern for their child.

Sample Language: "Given that we see some things differently, I want to be sure I understand what you see so that we can work together to help your child make the progress that you want."

7. Let's make more progress:

Assess what the parent is ready for. Discuss follow-up steps to consider together, including those indicated in the Roadmap's "Possible Next Steps" on page 2. Check in with the parent to determine their level of understanding of and support for these steps. Ask about any concerns or hesitations. Discuss possible timelines for these steps. Write out next steps with the caregiver. The Roadmap includes a template for you and the parent to fill in potential next steps and local resources that can help with these steps. The parent can take home a copy of the Roadmap and these next steps.

WHY: Documenting next steps gives parents a reminder of this important conversation that they can take home with them, and share with other providers involved in their child's life. Seeing the variety of possible steps gives them an understanding of their options and potential resources. When parents know that there are options for them to choose from, they may feel more in control and better able to cope.

Sample language: "We can sort out our next steps by starting with this list of ideas and options. Let's take a look at your choices. I will _____. You can _____. These are the steps that we both think are important, and here are a few more that I would suggest. Do you have others that we should add here? Here are a few resources that you can call for additional information. (If available, you may offer another support person from your program. You may also suggest that the parent bring the screening tool results to their child's pediatrician for a conversation.) Do you have other questions? Let's also set up a time for another conversation so we can talk more about areas we still see differently, check in on how your child is doing, and discuss how our next steps are going."

For more information about developmental screening, review these related resources for providers and parents:

- [Learn the Signs. Act Early.](#) Developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- [Birth to Five: Watch Me Thrive!](#) Developed through a Partnership between [Help Me Grow](#), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S Department of Education.

For questions about the Development is a Journey Conversation Roadmap or this Implementation Guide, contact the Brazelton Touchpoints Center at touchpoints@childrens.harvard.edu.