

Project Factsheet

Testing Act Early Messages for “Learn the Signs. Act Early.”

Background

- Unidentified developmental disabilities are a serious public health problem in the United States; when a child’s developmental delay is identified late, the cost of future interventions go up, and the impacts on that child’s ability to learn in the future are compromised.
- Research has shown that parents can be reliable sources of information about their children’s development. Studies suggest that efforts can and should be made to encourage parents to take action if they suspect that their child could be showing signs of a developmental delay.

Learn the Signs. Act Early.

Since 2004, CDC’s “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” (LTSAE) program has worked to empower parents to act if they have concerns about their child’s development in an effort to improve the likelihood that children with developmental disabilities are identified and connected with appropriate services at the earliest age possible.

The campaign encourages parents to:

- Learn the signs of early childhood development
- Act early if there is a concern
- Talk to their doctor

Evaluation Study

CDC has contracted with Westat to conduct an evaluation of the “Act Early” campaign messages. This research will explore the information needs, relevance and comprehension of campaign messages among members of the campaign’s target audience. The project has 2 tasks.

Task 1 will ensure that both parents and health care professionals understand why it is important to “Act Early,” know how to “Act Early,” and are motivated to “Act Early.” The ultimate goal will be to identify “Act Early” message(s) that are correct and appropriate for parents to take action; these messages will then be embedded in existing campaign materials. Task 1 will include 4 focus groups with parents (2 in Maryland and 2 in Georgia) and 9 in-depth interviews with providers (5 in Maryland and 4 in Georgia).

Task 2 will allow CDC to hone in on key messages identified in Task 1 to assess further. The goal of Task 2 will be to obtain structured feedback from both parents and providers on specific materials that include revised message or messages. Task 2 will include 4 focus groups with parents (2 in Maryland and 2 in Georgia), 9 in-depth interviews with the providers who participate in Task 1, and 40 intercept interviews with parents in clinic waiting rooms.

Study Criteria

A total of 6 clinics will be recruited to participate in the study. Clinics participating in the study should meet the following criteria:

- Serve predominately low income families
- Located in the metropolitan areas surrounding Atlanta, Georgia and Baltimore, Maryland.

Clinic Role

One representative from each of the 6 clinics will serve as the contact person for the study.

Parent Recruitment: The clinic representative will hang promotional posters and place handouts at the front desk. These materials will promote focus groups that we would like parents/guardians ages 18 - 55 of your patients (ages 5 and younger) to take part in. Clinic staff will be provided with copies of this project factsheet so that they are prepared for potential questions they may receive from interested parents.

Data Collection: Task 1

Focus Groups with Parents of children age 5 or younger who receive treatment in 1 of the 6 clinics, to explore their understanding and interpretation of the concept “acting early” and to gather feedback on existing “Act Early” messages. Parents interested in participating in focus groups will be instructed to contact Westat (via phone or email). Westat will be responsible for screening and scheduling parents into the groups. **Parents will receive \$80 as a token of appreciation for their interest in the 2-hour focus group.**

Data Collection: Task 2

Focus Groups with Parents to gauge their reactions to the LSTAE materials embedded with revised messages. Parents interested in participating in focus groups will be instructed to contact Westat (via phone or email). Westat will be responsible for screening and scheduling parents into the groups. **Parents will receive \$40 as a token of appreciation for their interest in the 1-hour focus group.**

This study is being sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities). If you have questions about this research, contact the Westat Project Director, Erika Bonilla, at (301) 610-4879 or at erikabonilla@westat.com. You can also contact the CDC study director, Dr. Denise Levis, at (404) 498-0237 or igc1@cdc.gov.

If you have questions or complaints about the rights of study participants, please contact Sharon Zack at the Westat Institutional Review Board at (301) 610-8828 or 1-800-WESTAT1.