Assessing Feasibility and Impact of CDC's “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” Program in Early Head Start Settings

CDC estimates that about one in six children has a developmental disability. The CDC’s Learn the Signs. Act Early. (LTSAE) program aims to improve early identification of children with developmental disabilities by developing high-quality, evidence-based materials to promote and facilitate developmental monitoring among parents of children from birth to age five. The program seeks to integrate materials and messages in national, state and local programs that serve young children and their families. Early Head Start is a target program for integration as it provides comprehensive developmental support to low-income infants, toddlers, families and pregnant women. As part of the Head Start Performance Standards, Early Head Start (EHS) grantees are required to monitor children’s development through an assessment process and to complete or obtain a current developmental screening for all children upon entry. LTSAE materials promote family engagement, complement developmental screening, and are evidence-based resources for early child care education professionals to use as part of the thorough assessment process.

As part of the AUCD-CDC cooperative agreement, four UCEDDs including the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Indiana University, University of Wisconsin-Madison Waisman Center, and the University of Iowa, are conducting an evaluation that assesses the feasibility of including LTSAE materials in EHS. This evaluation project is investigating the impact of pairing developmental monitoring using LTSAE materials with screening practices in the EHS context. Phase one of the project involves assessing the barriers and facilitators of integrating LTSAE materials for routine use in tracking children’s developmental milestones. During phase two, the project will support the implementation and assess the effects of developmental monitoring using LTSAE on developmental screening and other outcomes of interest in an EHS setting, such as influence on awareness, number of referrals, follow-up, connection to services, and dialogue between parent and provider. These four AUCD Network Centers are currently integrating LTSAE materials into diverse EHS center-based sites and home visiting programs across these states. For more information, contact Abbey Alberico.