

Global Developmental Delay

Introduction

According to Mithyantha *et al* (2017) between 1 and 3 percent of children under the age of 5 years are affected by Global Developmental Delay, however, Choo *et al* (2019) claim this number to be as high as 10 to 15 percent, making it the most common ailment presented at paediatric clinics.

Global Developmental Delay is explained by Mencap (2024) as being a child experiencing a delay in their development, whether this be a physical delay, such as being later than expected with walking or holding a toy, and the more severe cases who have an additional learning disability. Remembering that all children are unique and develop in their own time. Children with Global Developmental Delay require extra support and therapy, to enable them to fulfil their full potential. Some children only require this support for a short period of time, while others who have additional learning delays, require the support for an extended period.

Global Developmental Delay differs from developmental disabilities, such as Autism, as the development is delayed and with the correct interventions and support, the child's development can catch up with their peers (ClevelandClinic, 2023)

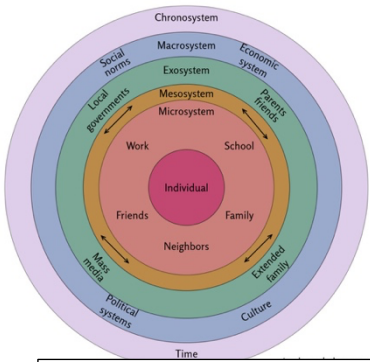


Source: Simply psychology(1), no date.

Diagnosis and Identification

Global Developmental Delay is described by the NHS (2025) as not meeting more than two of the expected developmental milestones, such as fine motor skills, using their hands, gross motor skills, walking or crawling, communication, expressing themselves and communicating, and social skills, playing and interacting with others. Some children have factors such as Down Syndrome or Cerebral Palsy, which can affect the development of muscles, as well as affect the brain's development, and delay the gross motor functions of the individual. Other causes could be complications during pregnancy, premature birth, severe infections or it may also be hereditary. Sometimes there is no clear cause for Global Developmental Delay (NHS, 2025).

Diagnosis of Global Developmental Delay will be completed by a medical practitioner and involves many observations of the child, followed by tests, including blood and urine tests. The child may also be referred for hearing and vision tests (NHS, 2025).



Source: Simply psychology(2), no date.

Barriers to Diagnosis

Barriers to a diagnosis could be that a parent is not fully aware of the developmental milestones their child should accomplish by a certain age. First-time parents, for example, may not have the knowledge or support to fully understand that not meeting many developmental milestones could be an issue. After all, we are continually told that children are individuals and will develop in their own time (BedslutonChildrensHealth, no date). Identifying Global Developmental Delay in children under five is crucial for their treatment and recovery, as the sooner support and therapy are started, the sooner the child can progress in their development (Scherzer, *et al*, 2012).

Barriers to Education

Children with GDD can become frustrated watching their peers, as they may be immobile and not be able to join in with games and activities. They may also have communication delays, in which they cannot express their frustration. As a result of this, children with GDD may become isolated and have difficulty forming relationships (LangoneHealth, no date). As Maslow (1943) explains, individuals who have difficulties with their social interactions, cannot feel completely self-fulfilled.

Strategies

Practitioners in early years settings encourage all of these strategies through inclusive play, engaging environments and enabling adults. Following the guidelines set out by the Welsh Government (2022) early years settings offer an inclusive environment for all children. Key persons work with children on targets for their individual needs, following assessments carried out in setting, as well as information given from parents and Health Visitors during transition to nursery (Freud, no date).

Practitioners, parents, Special Educational Needs Coordinator, as well as any specialists/therapists involved with the child can then collaborate to create an Individual Play Plan (sometimes known as an IEP) for children with many targets to achieve (NationalAutisticSociety, 2020). Activities in the setting will then reflect the skills and development stages required to support the children in their ongoing development (Leaf, no date).

Conclusion

In conclusion, children diagnosed with Global Developmental Delay benefit from an early diagnosis and although the condition is not curable, many of the children with Global Developmental Delay will significantly catch up with their peers, through early interventions and support.