If you suspect a child has a developmental delay and believe a parent is unaware of it, this sample conversation can give you ideas of how to talk with the child’s parent.

Good afternoon, Ms. Jones. We love having Taylor in class. He really enjoys story time and follows directions well. He is working hard on coloring but is having a difficult time and gets frustrated. I have also noticed a few things about Taylor’s social skills that I would like to discuss with you. Do you have a few minutes? [Cite specific behaviors and when they occurred.]

Have you noticed any of these at home?

Ms. Jones, here is some information that shows the developmental milestones for a child Taylor’s age. Let’s plan to meet again next week [set a date] after you’ve had time to read it and think it over. [Provide information such as the fact sheets.]

Ms. Jones, I know this is hard to talk about, and I may be over-reacting, but I think it would also be a good idea to talk to Taylor’s doctor about this in the next few weeks. You can take this information with you when you go. The doctor can give Taylor a “developmental screening” which can answer some questions about his progress and whether you need to do anything else. Let me know if you need anything from me for that doctor’s appointment! Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. We’ll all do our best to help Taylor. He is a great kid!

Tips for these conversations with parents:

- Highlight some of the child’s strengths, letting the parent know what the child does well.
- Use materials like the “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” fact sheets. This will help the parent know that you are basing your comments on facts and not just feelings.
- Talk about specific behaviors that you have observed in caring for the child. Use the milestones fact sheets as a guide. Example: If you are telling the parent “I have noticed that Taylor does not play pre tend games with the other children,” you could show the parent the line on the milestones fact sheet for a four-year-old that says that a child that age “engages in fantasy play.”
- Try to make it a discussion. Pause a lot, giving the parent time to think and to respond.
- Expect that if the child is the oldest in the family, the parent might not have experience to know the milestones the child should be reaching.
- Listen to and watch the parent to decide on how to proceed. Pay attention to tone of voice and body language.
- This might be the first time the parent has become aware that the child might have a delay. Give the parent time to think about this and even speak with the child’s other caregivers.
- Let the parent know that he or she should talk with the child’s health care professional (doctor or nurse) soon if there are any concerns or more information is needed.
- Remind the parent that you do your job because you love and care for children, and that you want to make sure that the child does his or her very best. It is also okay to say that you “may be overly concerned,” but that it is best to check with the child’s doctor or nurse to be sure since early action is so important if there is a real delay.

Kentucky “Learn the Signs. Act Early.”
For more information call: 502.852.7799
https://louisville.edu/education/kyautismtraining/actearly

Seek early intervention, if your child is under age 3, contact the First Steps Program at (800) 442-0087.

Contact your local school district’s special education department, if your child is age 3 or older to secure special education services your child is entitled to under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).