

TIPS FROM A PARENT TO OTHER PARENTS of CHILDREN WITH HEARING LOSS

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Our son Scott was diagnosed as profoundly deaf at eight months. We knew nothing about childhood deafness at that time. I remember the grief, the pain, and the especially the anxiety, "He can't hear me," "I don't know how to teach him," "How will our baby learn to talk?" "What of his future?"

Our son is now an adult and all of the above fears have been laid to rest. Good news! Our children can hear! They can learn to talk and we are one of the key factors in their learning to do so. I wish to share some of the key ingredients that I have learned over the years that will impact our children. We do know how to teach our children! We can create the same listening, language learning environment that helped us learn to talk as babies. Unfortunately, the diagnosis of hearing impairment in our children often disrupts natural interactions between parent and child. We perceive our children differently. We need to open those lines of communication once again.

How Can We Create An Environment Where Children Can Learn To Listen And Talk?

Create a favorable listening environment with good acoustics. Without knowledge of a language a child cannot understand the auditory input from TV and radio. If a TV or radio is left on it contributes to background noise thereby making it more difficult for a child to hear while communicating with others. Sharing a book with your child encourages healthy interactions, an opportunity to input effective language and strengthens your child's love of books. This can be critical in their learning to read, so important in their accessing knowledge in the future. The website, trelease-on-reading.com, provides information to help you.

Talk close to the hearing aid of the better ear or the cochlear implant microphone to make speech more audible.

The closer you are to the hearing aids or cochlear implant, the softer you should speak to prevent the stronger vowels in sentences from overpowering the softer consonants. Weak sounds such as (f), (sh) and (s) are not heard well in running speech when speech too loud.

A-V practice relies on optional amplification. This will mean many trips to audiologists and hearing aids dealers. As you gain more information about your child's hearing loss, the hearing aids can be adjusted accordingly and gradually with further programming the child's map of his cochlear implant will enable speech to become clearer.

If feedback is experienced due to a poorly fitting earmold, turning the volume down is only

a temporary and totally inadequate solution. Immediately arrange for a retake to ensure a tighter fit for the mold.

Remember the hearing aids go on first thing in the morning before clothes and taken off last thing at night before your child goes to sleep.

Children learn language best through enjoyable, natural, meaningful, one to one interactions with someone special to them---YOU!

Include your child in your daily activities; children love to act out your adult roles. There is a wealth of language in cooking, cleaning, repairing, washing, shopping, and walking activities.

Numbers and colors are not the foundation of language! Although it may reinforce us as parents that our child knows numbers, it does not teach him how to communicate. Speak in a variety of verbs, nouns, adjectives and pronouns. "Where's your shoe? Oh! You have just one shoe. Where's your other shoe?" "Is it under the chair? Help me! Help me find it! Find your shoe!" Give your child every opportunity to hear clearly. Use lots of repetition and speak in short phrases, NOT single words that are hard to hear.

Speak with expression showing a desire to communicate by giving your full attention, using increased pitch and rhythm.

Observe and listen to your child. When your child uses natural gestures to communicate with you, express for your child what he/she is trying to say. For example, when he pushes you away, you might say, "Oh! You say, don't touch it Mommy, I will do it. I want to do it." If he points to something say " Oh! You want the ball, here's the ball, bounce the ball."

Create language learning opportunities to interact with your child. You might put the top of a jar on too tightly for him to open. Have fewer chairs than is necessary for the number of the people present. Arrange to have necessary utensils missing.

Precede activities with speech, giving your child opportunity to listen.. listen.. listen - then match what he has heard with meaningful action. For example, "Do you want some milk? Where's the milk? I'll get you some milk!", only then go for the milk and then as you pour the milk, confirm the input, "Pour the milk, brr- it's cold."

Remember hearing babies take about a year of listening before they begin to use meaningful speech. Gradually, by listening to meaningful interactions repeatedly your child will develop a foundation of language. He/She will begin to link known words to convey thoughts, actions, feelings and meanings.

Yes you do have a very special child but remember—you ARE SPECIAL TOO! You are the link to your child learning to listen and talk.