
Information on Unilateral (One-Sided) Hearing Loss

It is not uncommon for someone to have normal hearing in one ear and a severe hearing loss in the other. An individual can be born with this problem or can lose the hearing in one ear due to illness or injury.

A child who is completely deaf in one ear will learn to speak normally as long as the hearing in his “good” ear is normal. We only need one ear to learn. This is why one-sided hearing loss is often not detected until a child goes to school because he does not act like he has a hearing loss. However, the one-sided listener sometimes has a harder time listening than you or I. There are a number of things which you as the parent of a one-sided listener, or your child himself, can do to minimize these potential problems.

One main advantage of having two ears is the ability to tell from which direction a sound is coming. To a one-sided listener, all sounds are coming from the same side – the ear with normal hearing. Directional hearing also allows us to focus on what we want to hear so we can separate the voice we want to listen to from the background noise around us. Two-eared listening is more efficient because it makes it easier to distinguish various sounds from one another. Therefore, a one-sided listener may have trouble understanding our voices in a noisy situation.

How to Make Life Easier for a Child Who is a One-Sided Listener

1. **Preferential Classroom Seating:** Your child should be seated in the classroom in such a way as to make listening easiest. He should sit with his bad ear to the wall and away from the speaker, and his good ear toward the teacher and his classmates. This means, if your child has a hearing loss in the left ear, he should sit on the left side of the classroom. If he has a hearing loss in the right ear, he should sit on the right side of the classroom. If the teacher is working with a group of children in a semi-circle, he should be seated at one end of the group, with the teacher and other children on his good side.
2. **Teacher Awareness:** Your child’s classroom teacher must be aware of your child’s special listening needs. Only if the teacher is aware of a potential difficulty can she/he help your child overcome it in the classroom. This is also true of relatives, babysitters and anyone who has regular contact with your child.
3. **Getting your Child’s Attention:** It is difficult for a one-sided listener to understand when you talk to him from a distance, especially if you are in one room and he is in another. If the bad ear is to the doorway, the person may very well not hear you at all! Make sure you have your child’s attention - that he has heard you – before you give him directions. And when you do, realize that if it is noisy, or several people are talking at one, it may be hard for him to understand what you are saying. This awareness will make communication less frustrating – for you and for him.

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4. **At-Home Listening:** You can help your child position himself to make listening easier for him at home. At the dinner table, your child should sit at the end of the table with his good ear nearest the rest of the family. If your child sits with his bad ear toward the TV, you may notice he turns the volume up too loud for the rest of the family. Sitting with his good ear toward the TV will give him a listening advantage.
 5. **Safety Tips:** Because listening with one ear makes it difficult to determine from which direction a sound is coming, a one-sided listener, especially a child, should be taught to be extra alert visually when crossing the street, riding a bicycle, and so on. He must be trained to look for traffic and not to depend on hearing oncoming traffic. If your child rides a bicycle, equip it with two rear-view mirrors to help him see traffic he might not hear.

Annual Check-Ups

It is essential that your child be seen by an otologist (ear specialist) and audiologist (person trained to evaluate hearing loss) once every year, or as soon as any change in hearing is noticed. It is especially important that a child who is a one-sided listener be treated as soon as possible if any earache or hearing complaint is noticed. A little ear infection may not be much of a handicap for a child with two good ears – but it can be a real problem for a one-sided listener.

Remember

Your child will learn just as children with normal hearing in both ears do. He may have difficulty understanding in noisy situations or at long distances, and it may be difficult for him to tell from what direction a sound is coming. These are situations that you and your child can learn to control.
