

First Words for Parents Learning About Hearing Loss



This is a short list of beginning words for parents of children newly diagnosed with hearing loss. It is meant to be simple not comprehensive. Many other terms are discussed in publications, explained on the Internet or defined in depth in dictionaries. Use can vary from country to country and even within the communities in one country. To understand these new words and begin to use this unfamiliar vocabulary parents will need to keep asking about the meaning and correct use of terms.

Parents want their children to be seen for what they can do, who they are and what wonderful people they will become. Children are not defined by their hearing. Families wish to obtain for their young children with hearing loss what is needed for success. Parents can begin assisting their children by learning about the words used in reports, meetings and appointments. Understanding terms helps parents to ask better questions and make informed decisions.

Amplification: increased loudness of sound, or hearing devices that change sound levels

Articulation: production of speech sounds

ASL: American Sign Language, a complete language used by many Deaf North Americans with its own grammar and sentence order separate from English. Meanings are conveyed by hand shapes, finger, hand and body movements as well as facial expressions. Each country's sign language is different and there is no universal sign language.

Audiogram: graph showing an individual's responses to sounds during a hearing test

Audiologist/Doctor of Audiology: a specialist in hearing and balance who does evaluations, diagnosis and selection and managing of listening devices

Audition: sense of hearing or act of listening

Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR): a test used to measure how the auditory nerve and brainstem respond to sound

Air-Conduction Testing: hearing evaluation using head phones or insert earphones

Auditory Neuropathy (dys-synchrony): hearing disorders characterized by the inability of the auditory nerve to transmit sound clearly to the brain

Auditory Nerve: the VIII cranial nerve which carries sound from the cochlea to the brain

Auditory-Verbal Therapy: intervention that emphasizes guiding parents in teaching their children to listen, understand spoken language and speak

Behavioral Observation Audiometry (BOA): hearing test that documents observable responses to sound such as facial expressions, eyebrow furrowing and eye movements

Bilingualism: fluent in two languages

Bilateral Hearing Loss: occurring in both ears.

Binaural Hearing: hearing with both ears

Bone Conduction Testing: measuring hearing through a small vibrator on the skull which stimulates the inner ear (cochlea)

LSLs Cert. AVT: Listening and Spoken Language Specialists include Certified Auditory Verbal Therapists and Educators, professionals trained in coaching parents to help their children use hearing to develop spoken language.

Cochlea: inner ear that contains the sense organ for hearing

Cochlear Implant (CI): a device implanted in the inner ear that provides electrical stimulation to the auditory nerve which the brain perceives as hearing

Combined Approaches: using more than one language or method to encourage communication development

Conductive Hearing Loss: occurs in the outer or middle ear, is often temporary and may be medically or surgically correctable

Consonants: sound in spoken language formed by stopping the flow of air through the mouth; in English all the letters except /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, and /u/

Cued Speech: system of eight hand shapes and four hand positions used to make speech visible in any spoken language

Decibel: a unit of sound loudness (see Intensity)

DIP: patterns or rhythm in spoken languages expressed in duration (long and short), intensity (loud and quiet), and pitch (high and low)

Discrimination: ability to distinguish between sounds

Ear

Outer ear: the auricle or pinna (the part of the ear on the outside of the head) and the ear canal

Middle ear: the eardrum and air filled space containing three small bones (the ossicles) that transfer sound vibrations to the inner ear

Inner ear: the cochlea (organ of hearing) and semi-circular canals (the balance organs)

Eardrum: tympanic membrane which separates the outer ear from the middle ear

Earmold: small part of a listening device inserted in the outer ear that helps keep the device in place and/or transmits sounds

Expressive Language: conveying feelings, ideas and experiences to others through a formal communication system

Feedback: whistling sound caused by amplification when an object is too close to the microphone of the hearing aid or when the earmold is not inserted fully, does not fit or is damaged

FM System: wireless device that allows a person to speak into a microphone and the signal is sent to an individual's hearing aids or cochlear implants

Frequency: the pitch or tone of sounds, measured in Hertz (Hz); most speech sounds fall within the range of 250 (low pitch) to 4000 (high pitch) Hz

Gain: measurement of sound increased by a listening device

Hearing Age: extent of time usually measured in months or years that a young child has consistently used and benefitted from a listening device

Hearing Aid: an electronic device that amplifies sound

Hertz: (see Frequency)

Intensity (Loudness): a measurement of sound in decibels (dB) used to categorize hearing loss as mild, moderate, severe or profound in degree

Jargoning: typical pre-language developmental stage where a child imitates the rhythm, inflection, intensity and quality of his family's language

Language: sharing ideas, experiences and emotions by a formal communication system of speech, signs or writing

Localization: ability to notice the direction of a sound

Mixed Hearing Loss: combination of sensorineural and conductive loss

Motherese: speaking to babies in a sing-song voice, done by parents worldwide in their languages

Otoacoustic Emissions (OAE): a test that measures the responses of the outer hair cells in the cochlea

Otolaryngologist: a medical doctor specializing in the ear, nose and throat (ENT)

Otologist/Neurotologist: a medical doctor specializing in the ear

Conditioned Play Audiometry (CPA): a technique for a hearing test where children use toys to respond to sound

Pragmatics: using appropriate social and verbal communication behaviors

Prelinguistic Communication: vocalizations and gestures used before a baby develops language

Real Ear Measurement (Probe Microphone Measurement): a small microphone in the ear canal that provides information to program hearing aids and verify amplification levels

Receptive Language: understanding the feelings, ideas and experiences conveyed through the formal communication of others

Residual Hearing: the measurable amount of remaining hearing that a person with a hearing loss has without use of a listening device

Semantics: meanings of words

Sign Language: formal system of hand shapes, positions, movements and facial expressions and body movements used to convey meaning in a complete language with its own syntax and sentence structure

Sign Systems: communication methods that often include parts of a formal sign language; Manually Coded English (MCE) and Pidgin Signed English use a mix of ASL signs and English grammar; Baby Sign includes signs for beginning words

Sound Field Testing: using loudspeakers to present signals for testing with or without listening devices

Sensorineural Hearing loss: a permanent hearing loss resulting from problems in the cochlea and/or auditory nerve

Speech: articulation of words, expressing thoughts and feelings through spoken language

Speech Banana: area of an audiogram showing where the sounds of spoken language occur at an average conversation level

Speech-Language Pathologist: a health care professional who provides therapy for speech, language or communication concerns

Threshold: the softest sound an individual can hear

Total Communication (TC): using multiple methods to communicate but primarily defined as the use of speech and signs together

Tympanometry: a test that measures the condition of the middle ear, the mobility of the eardrum, movement of the middle ear bones and middle ear pressure

Unilateral Hearing Loss: hearing loss only in one ear

Vestibular System: balance organ located next to the cochlea

Visual Reinforcement Audiometry (VRA): a technique in a hearing test using objects that light up or move when an individual responds to a sound

Vowels: speech sounds produced by breath from an open mouth, In English these include: a/, e/, i/, o/, u

Words commonly used in English in the USA when a child is identified include “hearing loss,” “deaf,” “hard of hearing,” “Deaf,” and “hearing impaired”. There is not one standard definition for each. When Deaf is capitalized it indicates the cultural group sharing values and language (ASL) of the Deaf community. Medical professionals may use terms for the causes or amount of hearing loss. Education or intervention staff may use words connected to eligibility for services. Individuals might be described with the same term but have very different ways of hearing and communicating in addition to varied personal preferences for what words feel acceptable.

Parents can ask other families, persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and professionals working with their family what words are appropriate and respectful. Individuals might sometimes be described as a person using a hearing aid, cochlear implant or listening device. Words are powerful and need to be chosen carefully but labels provide limited information. Children can be best described by the wonderful skills they are learning and the beautiful personal names given to them by their families. As parents become their children’s advocates they will find the words!