

Making the Most of Your Child's Audiology Appointments

Parents can obtain the best access to sound possible for their child by being actively involved in audiology appointments. Audiologists follow a child regularly to identify hearing levels, check devices, and manage auditory health. Parents can ask questions, document listening and discuss decisions. Audiologists can provide information, track progress and build a partnership with the family. Together parents and audiologists can transform appointments into learning sessions on how to help the child.

Becoming comfortable

Developing a good working relationship requires locating an audiologist who has experience with children and interacts well with the individual family. Over time the parent and the child can build trust and become comfortable with the audiologist. If parents wish to change audiologists they can ask their child's Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist or other families for a recommendation. As parents and audiologists increase their contact and deepen their communication, they form a partnership where they both contribute to their understanding of the child's needs.

Scheduling appointments

Families can finish each appointment with a schedule for return testing. Depending on a child's age, hearing loss or type of listening device, testing might be scheduled between 3 and 6 month intervals. Children with hearing loss younger than eight years of age will benefit from visiting the audiologist more than once per year. Hearing levels can change and new recommendations for listening devices might be considered. Even if they are not using a listening device, children with Auditory Neuropathy need to be seen every 6 months or anytime there are concerns about changes in responses.

Asking questions

Parents often ask what their child can hear. The audiologist might mark hearing levels on an audiogram to show what sounds should be audible and at what distance the child should hear them. After a child becomes accustomed to listening, audiologists will inquire about his responses. Parents can discuss changes in sound awareness, concerns about responses, differences in using speech sounds or discomfort with any sounds. A child might answer questions too or ask his own. Asking



and answering questions help audiologists conduct testing, determine if the hearing aid or implant needs adjustments or decide to refer to an ENT specialist.

Checking devices

Assuring access to sound can be done by monitoring if devices are working well. A device that is not functioning properly can impact a child's listening and speech. Parents can learn how to do daily checks on a hearing aid, cochlear implant and/or FM to be sure devices are functioning correctly. They can troubleshoot problems such as distortion, static, or intermittence. The audiologist should be contacted to check listening equipment if there are questions about how it is working. Making appointments when there are concerns can help keep a child's auditory input consistent for clear communication.

Providing information

Parents can request that audiologists give information to the child's service providers. Services can be suggested and expectations can be shaped when other professionals know more about a child's listening abilities. If there are changes made to settings or programs or a child gets a different listening device, observations of his listening behaviors can be reported. The audiologists can help families and providers to understand the amount of time that might be needed to see change and what behaviors to look for and report.

Reporting progress

The child's educational staff can report concerns and successes for parents to tell the audiologist. They can identify how new listening devices, hearing aid settings or cochlear implant maps seem to be impacting the child's school performance. If the child is working with Speech Language or Auditory Verbal Therapists, reports from the audiologists can be used to guide him towards learning new speech sounds, and reports to the audiologist can show his progress. For children with Auditory Neuropathy the times when hearing seems better or when listening becomes more difficult, can be reported to the parents and the audiologist.

Documenting listening

To record fully how a child is responding, examples of listening at home and school can be reviewed along with test results. Families can document a variety of situations to share with the audiologist. Parents can express concerns or identify hopes for improvement by listing specific examples such as:

- Circumstances when the child listens well
- Settings when the child has difficulties
- Distance that seems to be best for responses
- Sounds the child is hearing often
- Sounds which are upsetting or unnoticed
- Inconsistencies that are concerning
- Worries the family has currently
- Questions parents need explained

Discussing Decisions

As families express their concerns, audiologists give suggestions for how to increase listening skills. Parents can ask for their child to be tested in the sound booth wearing his hearing aid or implant to measure the effects of that device. The audiologist could explain the possible need for trying a different device or adding an FM system to help increase access to voices. A child might say what devices he wants and possibly choose colors he likes. If there is a recommendation to change from hearing aids to implants, discussing what this involves is part of the process.

Forming Partnerships

Parents become empowered as they come to audiology appointments prepared to ask questions and consider options. Young children can be encouraged to provide information too. When families communicate regularly with audiologists, shared information becomes more detailed. Discussions between the parent, child and audiologist lead to identifying specific strategies that best fit that child. Together they can make the most of every appointment and form a strong and successful partnership that can last many years.