

Where to Begin

When a young child is identified with hearing loss parents can start with these steps.

Expect emotions

Each family responds in their own way to news of a child's hearing loss. Members within one family can experience very different emotions at the same time. Emotions may change with each appointment or interaction with service providers. Emotions can shift as information is gathered and questions are explored. The range of emotions may vary from calm to confusing. One family member might feel optimistic and another feel overwhelmed. Then each person might feel the exact opposite and not even know why! It takes time to adjust to new situations and cope with changing emotions. Experiencing multiple emotions is to be expected but these varying feelings allow parents to acknowledge their many concerns. Emotions also help parents to react and then be able to act.

Involve others

Parents can decide when to share their news and feelings. By choosing what to say and who to involve, they can proceed in a way that will help them obtain support. Some parents prefer a simple explanation and others find it helpful to share details. Families, friends and co-workers may respond with questions, concerns and opinions. The reactions of others can be another challenge for parents! If they are not ready to involve others, parents can explain the need to process their own feelings first. Families and friends can also provide a sense of shared commitment. Through the involvement of others who may investigate information, identify resources, participate in appointments, assist with community connections or offer assistance, parents can feel supported and strengthened.

Ask questions

Initially parents may be given an audiogram explaining their child's hearing levels. This report with new terms and symbols may raise questions. Each question is a useful part of a process because the answers help parents learn about hearing loss. After the initial identification of hearing loss, some parents may want time to think about the results and others may wish to obtain much more information. Parents can



contact the diagnosing audiologist later to discuss questions again or ask for further explanations. Other service providers can also address parents' ongoing concerns. Online there is access to many childhood hearing loss programs as well as family blogs and parent organization sites that can connect families to others with similar experiences and provide a sense of shared direction.

Confer with specialists

Pediatricians will check a child for other health needs sometimes associated with deafness and explore possible causes for the child's hearing loss. Further tests and appointments might be needed. Parents can ask for a genetic consult but the reason for a hearing loss is not always identified. A mild hearing loss or hearing loss on only one side will require different services than hearing loss in both ears. Working together with professionals, families can start to explore what their child needs. Parents can ask each specialist to involve the family in discussions and to share information with other service providers. Persons with hearing loss are superb sources of insight, too. Specialists make recommendations but parents are the ones to decide what they believe will be best for their child.

Build language

From the very first expression at birth, a baby begins communicating with parents. A child with a hearing loss benefits from specific support to learn language as early as possible. Parents often wish for their child to use the language their family is using and can discuss with service providers how to begin encouraging communication. With early identification of hearing loss and use of improved listening



devices (hearing aids and/or cochlear implants), many children with significant hearing loss develop listening and speaking skills. Sign language, cues or a combination of speech and sign are other approaches that might be preferred by a family. Decisions can be changed as needs and information are explored but constant, clear communication helps a baby build language through family interactions.

Consider devices

Follow-up testing will be done to monitor hearing and recognize any changing needs. An audiologist will work closely with parents to identify, obtain and monitor the device(s) a child might use. Parents can contact their hearing professionals regularly to share observations and decide on next steps. When families wish the child to develop strong auditory skills, hearing aids are usually tried for several months or more. If the benefit from hearing aids is minimal, a cochlear implant (CI) might be suggested. In most countries CI surgery may be done after a child has used hearing aids with limited benefit and is one year or older. Use of a hearing aid or implant is often supplemented by sessions with a speech or a language specialist who helps parents encourage a child's language and listening.

Enroll in education

Early education services for children with hearing loss are offered in many countries. A professional can make a referral but parents can also contact their doctor or local school to obtain services. Programs can vary greatly in what they do and how they work with families. Parents can explore what types of services are available to find what fits their family's preferences. Early educators or interventionists do assessments and coach parents in encouraging their child's development. Teachers help identify goals, describe strategies and offer ideas for family activities. Educators might also connect families with other parents who have



child with hearing loss. These first teachers partner with parents to nurture a child's learning, communication and school readiness.

Become an advocate

At identification of hearing loss, families are often unsure what to do and uncertain about their child's future. As parents begin learning, they gradually become experts on their children and start working closely with others. Early identification, technological advances, educational research and achievements of deaf and hard of hearing persons have contributed to high expectations for children with hearing loss. Awareness of the potential for a child's future without limits can give parents the strength to keep looking for answers, searching for services, asking for support and obtaining what their child needs to succeed. Over time, parents can develop skills to become advocates for their child and create a team of family, friends, educators and specialists who join their efforts.

Enjoy Interactions

The joys of connecting and playing with parents help children develop early brain skills and form effective relationships. Looking, touching, moving, feeling, thinking, sharing, responding and communicating are the start of language. Families can engage in the typical hugs, actions, songs, games, stories, turn-taking and interactions done with any child. The identification of hearing loss takes families in directions they did not expect, but enjoying interactions is part of realizing that hearing loss is only one aspect of a child. Just as children vary in reaching developmental milestones, the steps families take will be individualized as they choose how to begin. Parents can cherish their child's communication as they identify excellent resources and experienced persons to interact with across the world.