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Hope! Dream! Achieve

Families' Role in Early Intervention



Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center

Family members are a baby's greatest resource. They know the baby best and spend the most time with the baby. The baby gets food, shelter, love, and communication from family members. It is this last part, communication that sets deaf and hard of hearing babies apart from other babies.

Some people believe that children learn to read and write in kindergarten or first grade. That isn't true. Literacy skills begin developing at birth, when parents share stories, sing songs, or talk to each other and to the baby. Before the baby can read or write, the baby must develop language skills and ideas about the world.

The family has a very important responsibility to make sure that the baby learns words and ideas about the world early on. If the baby has a hearing loss, the family may need support to help the baby learn language. How that support is given must fit the baby's and the family's needs. So, the family is a vital part of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) development process.

How do you help your baby during the IFSP process?

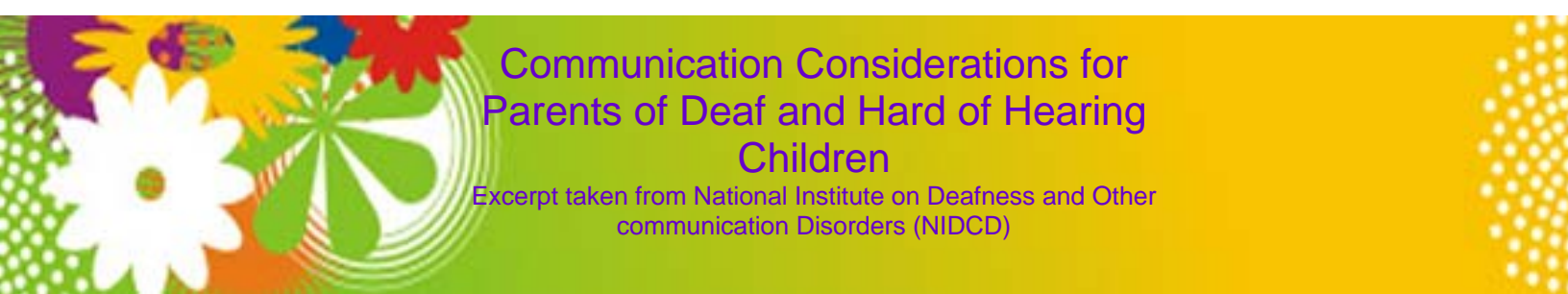
- Be the parent. You know your child better than anyone else. Your gut feelings and personal observations are important. Be the parent, and also learn from other IFSP team members' experience and knowledge.
- You don't need to learn all the technical terms. The IFSP team can explain those to you. You can use your own words when you describe what is happening with your baby.
- If you don't agree with other team members, say something. Ask to talk about it some more. If you accept something that you don't agree with, that will not be helpful when you and the rest of the team discuss what services your family needs.
- Make sure the IFSP meets your baby and your family's needs.

**Parent Links
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“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experiences of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired and success achieved.” Helen Keller



Communication Considerations for Parents of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children

Excerpt taken from National Institute on Deafness and Other
communication Disorders (NIDCD)

For hundreds of years, people have debated the best ways to communicate and educate deaf and hard-of-hearing children. Here are a few things that scientific and health professionals, educators, and experienced parents usually agree on:

Why Should a Newborn's Hearing be screened?

- The earlier that deafness or hearing loss is identified, the better the chances a child will acquire language, whether spoken or signed. A hearing screening can be an important indicator of deafness or hearing loss in a child. For this reason, all infants should be screened while still in the hospital or within the first month of life. But children who do not pass their screening need to go for a follow-up examination. The follow-up examination includes precise audiological testing that confirms the extent and type of hearing loss. It also allows parents, health professionals, and teachers to determine the best intervention strategy for the child. The term intervention refers to the different steps that families can take to overcome communication barriers caused by a hearing loss. When intervention is introduced early, the child can take advantage of the unique window of opportunity during the first few years of life when a person acquires language, whether spoken or signed.

Each Child is Unique

- Each child is unique. It is important to understand a child's hearing levels. It is also important to understand how each family member and caregiver will communicate with the child. Get to know the services that are provided in your community for children in preschool and elementary school.

Explore your options; work with professionals

- Exploring the options and, if possible, working with professionals in teams can be beneficial. Your child may visit a pediatrician, an otolaryngologist (ear, nose, and throat doctor), an audiologist (hearing specialist), and a speech-language pathologist (specialist in speech and language disorders). Some otolaryngologists and audiologists are specially trained to work with infants and children. They are referred to as pediatric otolaryngologists and pediatric audiologists. Ask each professional to inform other professionals who work with your child about your child's visits. Coordinated care can be a big help to you and your child. Many parents find it useful to include educational and social service professionals on the team.

Interact with your child often

- Parents should interact often with a deaf or hard-of-hearing infant. All of the caregivers in your child's life should interact with him or her as much as possible. You can do this by holding, facing, smiling at, and responding to your infant from the very beginning. Children need love, encouragement, and care from their families and caregivers.

Work with your child's teachers

- Teachers who are experienced in working with deaf and hard-of-hearing children can help parents understand how to improve long-term outcomes for a child. Talk to your child's teachers. Get to know the educational system your child will be entering and the services it provides for children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.
- Organizations and federal agencies can provide helpful information to families of deaf or hard-of-hearing children. Consult the resources below, and see what information they can provide. Several offer differing perspectives on the best way to develop the skills and talents of your deaf or hard-of-hearing child. Many of these Web sites are updated frequently, so you may want to bookmark them on your Web browser



Parent Mentors

Parent mentors are parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. From hearing aids, cochlear implants, sign language and speech, we have been there. Have questions? Give us a call.

Exceptional Parents Unlimited

Darla Schwehr
Vicky Olea
4440 N. First Street
Fresno, CA 93726
559-229-2000 x 208
dschwehr@exceptionalparents.org

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