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Benefits of Sign Language with a Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child

Views and opinions in this article are presented as information only. Parent Links *Hope! Dream! Achieve* remains neutral and supportive of ALL choices.



For nine long months you have waited for the arrival of this precious baby. In those first moments as a new parent you are filled with love, relief, fear, and visions of your child's future. Then a routine hearing screening changes that vision with only a few words...

"Your baby has a hearing loss.."

The identification of hearing loss may be frightening for any new family. Suddenly, there are many different things to think about and the clock is already ticking.

Method of Communication

This decision must be made early as the first few years of life are significantly crucial to a child's language development.

During this critical period, the primary goal for your deaf or hard of hearing child is language input. American Sign Language often meets this goal much earlier than spoken language and offers cognitive, social/emotional and speech/language benefits for deaf children.

Sign Language Cognitive Benefits for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Babies and Children

- Sign language jumpstarts brain development Sign language enhances brain development by establishing connections between auditory and visual input.

Cont....

- Sign language increases memory
The visual input provided by sign language stimulates intellectual development and increases a child's ability to retain information longer. This ability benefits a deaf child's academic development by increasing language and vocabulary skills.
- Utilizing sign language enhances reading, writing and math development.

The visual-spatial aspect of sign language supplements the spatial skills needed for various mathematical concepts. Similarly, the fingerspelling alphabet is another aspect of sign language that correlates directly to phonetic skills that are necessary for reading and writing. Both aspects of sign language provide skills that are vital to the academic success of a deaf child.

Sign Language for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Babies - Social/Emotional Benefits

- Signing reduces frustration for the child
A deaf or hard of hearing child that can easily communicate a basic need such as wanting a favorite toy or needing a drink will be much happier.
- Signing reinforces vocabulary and broadens your child's social circle
- Signing boosts confidence because communication is easier and more natural
- Sign language gives children an easy and natural way to express themselves. When this expression is reinforced through social interaction, confidence begins to emerge.

Cont...

Spoken Language Benefits through Signing

- Signing stimulates social connections by reinforcing verbal communication. Studies have shown that sign language strengthens connections in the brain that are used for speech development.
- Language is the building blocks of social development. Languages enable your deaf child to interact with the world and begin to make social connections.
- Sign language accelerates the acquisition of speech by stimulating areas of the brain that are associated with speech and language. Most babies (deaf or hearing) develop the gross motor skills needed for signing before they develop the fine motor skills associated with verbal speech.
- Signing with your deaf baby builds excellent expressive and receptive language skills.
- Signing provides language stimulation and conceptual information that enhances vocabulary development in deaf children. Many children with hearing loss experience difficulty with expressive language and verbal ability.

(Excerpt found at www.childrenshospital.org "Cochlear Implant Program Facts")

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Cochlear Implant Education Center, Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, Gallaudet University, Washington DC

As sign language use is taken under consideration for use with implanted children, it is necessary to acknowledge there are various categories of sign use for students with implants, and that the role of sign language for a child may change at various stages post-implantation. Some children may start out using sign language as a foundation to early language development, with sign use diminishing as spoken language skills emerge. Some children may continue to utilize a combination of sign and spoken language. Some students may focus on spoken language with some sign language as a support. Some students may be sign language communicators with spoken language developed as a support to sign use. Where a child falls on the auditory-visual continuum is unique to the characteristics of each child, and planning for each child must be done on an individual basis.

(Excerpt found at www.healthyhearing.com "Children with Cochlear Implants: Where Does Sign Language Fit In?") 4



Hearing Aids: What Happens if They Get Wet?

Hearing aids are an electronic device. What can happen if it gets wet? Can a wet hearing aid electrocute a person? This is a good question. A hearing aid contains many complex and delicate electronic parts inside its tiny, protective casing. Ideally, people should try to keep the hearing aid dry to maintain its proper working condition. Water can damage the hearing aid, but there is no danger to the wearer. Why?

The battery inside a hearing aid contains a very small, harmless amount of power similar in size and voltage to a watch battery. There is no more danger of electrocution from a wet hearing aid than there is from a wet wristwatch.

The real danger from water is damage to the components inside the hearing aid. Water is corrosive and can destroy the internal circuitry. Picture your bathtub or sink. A leaky faucet will leave marks on the enamel or chrome and can ruin the metallic finish in and around the drain.

Hearing aids should not be worn while swimming, showering, or walking in the pouring rain. It is perfectly safe to wear them while you are washing dishes, fishing, boating, and bathing a child or any other activity that involves indirect contact with water. If you get a few drops of water on the outer shell of the hearing aid, don't panic. Gently wipe them off with a soft cloth.

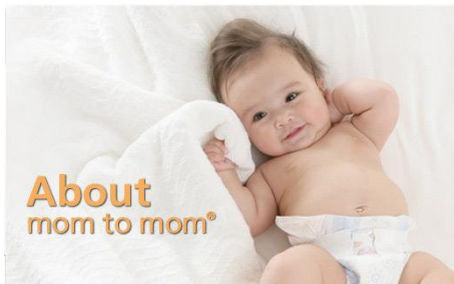
If you accidentally drop your hearing aid into a sink of water, you have a bigger problem. The hearing instrument specialist should be called immediately or wrap the device in a towel and bring it to your nearest hearing center. Acting quickly increases the likelihood that it can be salvaged. (Excerpt from www.hearingloss.sonus.com, "Hearing Aids: What Happens if They Get Wet?")

*Dear Parents....
You only have to do today...Today.*



Trying to live in the future is probably the biggest depressor of all time, especially for those of us who are "Professional Worriers." Don't let yourself be dragged into those thoughts of "what If." That doesn't mean not to plan ahead, but do it in a controlled, positive setting with some good resources. Then you feel better, not worse.

*Excerpt from book *If you've ever wanted to crawl into a closet with an OREO...* by Martha Kate Downey*



When a parent finds out that their child is deaf or hard of hearing, they often do not know what to do next. Of course the professionals direct them toward the early start programs, preschools, speech therapy, medical intervention and all of that is very important. But a professional cannot share in the parents experience as another parent can. Meeting another mom who also has a child can be very exciting. Another parent could able to answer the questions and relay their own personal experiences.

The benefits of meeting other parents include:

- mutual support through contact with other parents of a deaf or hard of hearing child with similar condition
- sharing information which helps in caring for their child
- building confidence
- offers an opportunity to help other parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing

"Parents who frequently met with other parents of deaf and hard of hearing children reported less isolation, stronger emotional bonds with their child and greater acceptance for the child. Parents also emphasized the benefits of giving mutual practical help in coping with everyday challenges."(Manfred Hintermair, 2000)

Offering support to parents is what Parent Links is all about. Each mentor is a parent of a deaf or hard of hearing child.

- Through email, phone and mail we are here to help answer the questions that parents may have about raising a child who is deaf or hard of hearing.
- Help parents find local connections.

Parent Mentoring in Spanish and English... Just give us a call.

Parent Mentors

Exceptional Parents Unlimited

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Presents

Play Day at the Park

For Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and their Siblings

Date: June 2nd

Time: 2 pm 4 pm

Place: **Oso De Oro Lake Park**
5550 N. Forkner, Fresno, CA
(The Art Pavillion)

***Drawing for two
Free Entrances
into Story Land
Rides Included!!***

- Come and play
- Meet other families
- Learn about Parent Links and DHHSC
- Learn Sign Language

For more information please call Darla at 559-229-2000 x
www.myparentlinks.com

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