

Essential Links

Parent Links

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Raising a Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child

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The complexity of raising children who *can* hear, in meeting their social, psychological, and educational needs is a tough enough job for parents. When our babies are identified as deaf or hard of hearing, that job is made even more complex and, at times, overwhelming. Parents often experience a sense of loss, anger, guilt and confusion. As parents, we have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and understanding about our child. Often, we are unprepared for raising a deaf or hard-of-hearing child. Our child is often times the first person we have ever met who is deaf or hard of hearing.

All too often, parents are preached to, lobbied, and pushed into decisions based on the philosophies of others, rather than being allowed to arrive at their own conclusions. The best decisions that parents make for their children are the ones that are the most informed. We must not deny the inherent ability in ourselves to know our children even in the midst of confronting and learning about something we've never had to face before-hearing loss.

How does one sort through the information provided in books, articles, web sites, from professionals, family and friends, and from other sources to arrive at decisions that are right for your child and family? Here are some tips that may help.

There is no "one size fits all" !

Every child and family is different. Values, experiences, opinions, and resources vary from family to family. What works in one situation may not work in another. There are a number of ways to be successful raising a deaf or hard of hearing child. No one plan or formula will work for everyone. You must trust yourself to do what you believe is right for your child and family.

Meet other parents

All parents want what is best for their child. Meeting other parents and learning about their experiences can help you find out about opinions, options and resources. You want to parent effectively, and this can give you an opportunity to learn about "real life" strategies that work. Meeting other parents also can help you recognize that you are not the only one raising a child with hearing loss. For some parents acceptance of the hearing loss comes easily, while others may struggle with it for some time. For most, it is an ongoing process. Even before our children are born we have dreams and expectations for them. When we discover that they have a hearing loss, those dreams disappear and expectations may change. Fear often replaces the anticipation of all our child can accomplish, and many parents grieve over what they perceive can never be. In time, most parents come to realize that these dreams can still

be accomplished, regardless of the hearing loss. One of the best ways for parents to realize this is by contact with other parents who have gone through this.

Meet deaf and hard of hearing adults

Deaf and hard of hearing adults are young deaf and hard of hearing children grown up! They use a variety of communication modes. Seeing successful deaf and hard of hearing adults can increase an understanding of what it means to be deaf or hard of hearing and may help facilitate acceptance of the child's hearing loss. Deaf and hard of hearing persons, given appropriate language learning, educational, and social opportunities, can achieve the same rates of academic, social, and personal success as hearing individuals. Meeting successful deaf and hard of hearing adults may give you a vision of success for your child that might be difficult to dream otherwise. Deaf adults and hard of hearing adults – most of whom come from hearing families – can share their experiences with you and provide information and encouragement. As in all communities, there is diversity in the deaf and hard of hearing community, and parents benefit from meeting deaf and hard of hearing persons from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and opinions.

Visit a variety of educational programs

Often parents want to know what the **best** program is, or whether a particular program is better than another one.

The only way to make these kinds of judgments is by seeing for yourself what the program is like and understanding your child's unique needs. Ask lots of questions. This is new to you, and there is a lot to know.

Each child has a given set of strengths and weaknesses. Each child has individual needs based on their strengths and weaknesses. Educational, physical, social and emotional needs must be met in order for a child to grow. The program that meets an individual child's needs is the "**best program**".

Review each suggestion you receive carefully

Do you fully understand what is being recommended, or do you need further information? Do you know what the positives and the negatives are? Does it sound like something that will work for you and your family? Ask to see/read about the research that supports the recommendations you are given. Inquire as to the other options and who you can discuss that philosophy with.

No decision needs to be forever

Support what is working for your child and modify or eliminate what is not working. The goal should be optimum communication outcomes, not adhering to a particular ideology.

Finally . . .

Love and value your child for the wonder that s/he is. The days will not all be easy. The nights will not all be serene. You can learn the right questions to ask, determine with wisdom the answers, and make informed decisions that best accommodate your child.

It is so easy to look at all of the things we still need to do and forget to celebrate the joy that take place every day in the lives of our children and ourselves. Reaching the day when your infant makes eye contact with you, when your toddler wears the hearing aid for 30 minutes, imitates the sound you are making, being able to sign even a simple phrase to your child, when just one month ago those goals seemed

impossible, is a success. It is a common mistake to feel like you are never doing enough to help your child, and it is good to be reminded of how far you have actually come when you are going through a rough period. Raising a child with a hearing loss is an awesome responsibility but when a child is raised with a sense of knowledge, dignity and identity, we have done our jobs. Happy parenting!

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