Accepting Your Child's Hearing Loss

Before you knew for sure that your son or daughter had a hearing loss you probably felt very insecure.

The idea of your child's hearing loss may have left you feeling shocked and numb, or sad and worried about the future. It may be hard for you to accept what the doctors are saying. You may be thinking "Why us?" because you never expected something like this to happen. This is a perfectly understandable reaction.

It takes time to understand and accept the fact that your child has a hearing loss. As soon as you are able to do this, you can begin to focus on how to cope with it. And when you're ready, you can gather more information that will help you deal with the practical side of things.

How you cope depends upon the kind of person you are. Certainly the best way to handle it is by being open, and by letting other people help you. As time passes, and circumstances change, new situations will arise. And when they do, the easiest way to cope is by taking things one step at a time.

If you need advice don't hesitate to ask your child's audiologists, teachers, hearing care professionals or other parents of children with hearing loss. They know a lot about your situation.

Remember that you are not alone. Hearing loss is more common than you think. In the US approximately 30 million people have hearing loss. And about one million of them are children below age eighteen.

Why Hearing is so Important

Children use their hearing ability to develop their language skills in order to communicate. But a hearing loss can make communication difficult.

Developing language

We start to develop language from the moment we are born. At first, babies only make crying, sneezing, yawning, and coughing sounds. Even though they haven't yet learned to talk, they are constantly listening. A newborn baby can soon recognize its mother's voice.

If a child has a hearing loss the basic development of language will often be delayed. However, children with mild to severe hearing loss can develop understandable speech with the right intervention and amplification.

Research has shown that many children with a profound hearing loss can also learn to speak if they are diagnosed relatively early. They often are, because the signs of hearing loss are more obvious than within the milder categories of hearing loss.

So the earlier the hearing loss is detected and the earlier it is treated, the better the prognosis for language development. With today's technology, children can be fitted with hearing instruments within the first few weeks or months after birth.

First, they need to be fitted with the right kind of hearing instruments. Then they can start special speech and language therapy right away.

If the hearing loss is so profound that even very powerful hearing instruments don't help, your child can still learn to communicate using specific communication techniques. Whether you choose a specific communication technique or a spoken language, the message is clear: the earlier your child starts, the better.

DEALING WITH FEELINGS

"Hearing is the only thing your child can't do today, that you thought he could do yesterday."

Most people do not know much about hearing loss and what it means for their child and family. As the professional who delivered this news talked to you further, you may not have heard much of what he or she was saying. In your mind, questions may have started to churn:

"Can it be corrected?"
"What caused it?"
"Will it get better?"
"Will it get worse?"
"Can he learn to talk?"
"Can she go to regular school?"
"If we have more children, will they have a hearing loss, too?"
"Can he get married?"
"Will she be able to get a job?"

The answers to some of these questions may not be what you want to hear. You want the best for your child, but now you may not know what to do.

"There is not a day that goes by that I am not reminded that my child has a hearing loss – but there is also not a day that goes by that I am not thankful for all the joy she gives me by little things she does that so many other parents get to take for granted."

In the days and weeks following the confirmation of your child's hearing loss, you may feel as if you are on a roller coaster. Your feelings may swing from despair to hope, from sadness to anger, from feeling incompetent to feeling confident. As you carry out your daily routines – finishing a chore or arriving at a destination – you may realize that your mind was somewhere else, thinking about your child and what you should do. You may also find within yourself unexpected sources of strength to do what has to be done in spite of your feelings. Working through your feelings takes time. You are likely to continue to have feelings about your child's hearing loss, but many of these feelings will change over time.

"One of my first questions was 'Will he be able to talk?' – My husband's was 'Will he be able to participate in sports?'"

Family members may also be experiencing these same feelings of confusion and helplessness. Each person will react differently to the news that your child has a hearing loss. For some there is a feeling of loss, and for others, denial. Keep in mind that most families need time to adapt to the changes that the diagnosis of hearing loss will present and that each will react in a different way. Recognizing and sharing feelings is usually the best way to deal with them, and support is available from many sources, including family, friends, and professionals.

"Our audiologist became like one of our family. She cried and laughed with us and made sure we knew there were no limitations for our baby."

The professionals who evaluate your child's hearing will have recommendations for you. As you follow these recommendations, you will meet people who can help answer your questions and explain the decisions you must make.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A PARENT

Just as you have rights as the parent of a child with special needs, there are many ways you can help make sure your child's rights are respected and protected. These suggestions may be helpful:

- **Learn As Much As You Can About Your Rights And The Rights Of Your Child**
  The more you know about your rights under federal law, the better you can make sure your child's school is honoring them. If you have any questions about your rights as a parent, ask your Family Resources Coordinator, school or educational agency.

- **Become a Partner with Your Child's Preschool, School, or Education Agency**
  Because you know your child better than anyone, you are a key member of a team whose job it is to help your child get the best education possible. Your input is an important resource to the educators and other professionals who work with your child.

- **Understand the Program in Your Child's IFSP or IEP**
  Ask questions until you are sure you understand. Don't sign the IFSP or IEP until you are sure you understand all of it.

- **Keep Track of Your Child's Progress**
  If your child is not progressing as well as you think he should, talk with his teacher or providers. You have the right to ask for a review of your child's educational program at any time.

- **Keep Records**
  Each year, keep a notebook to write down questions or comments about your child's progress or educational program. Take notes whenever you meet with staff, talk on the phone, or send notes to teachers or other staff. Write down dates, times, what happened, and the names of the people involved. These notes can be a helpful reminder for you and for your child's educators.

It is important to make sure that the professionals who work with your child understand your concerns. Often, problems can be easily resolved once your concerns are made known.