

# Listening and Spoken Language Knowledge Center

For children and adults with hearing loss, their families and the professionals who support them

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## Choosing a Communication Approach

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### Selecting a Communication Approach

While some parents know that they want their children to learn to listen and talk, others will select one of the visual (sign) options. Because the various communication choices differ significantly and often lead to different outcomes, it's essential that parents be fully informed about each of the outcomes so they can choose what is the right fit for their family.

Learn all that you can about the various communication outcomes through this website, books, journals and membership in organizations that support children with hearing loss. This research will help give you a better understanding of the approaches and their expected outcome. It is also important to talk with professionals, other parents of children with hearing loss and adults who have grown up with hearing loss. These perspectives will give you some insight into how these communications approaches work and what their expected outcomes may be. Also, keep in mind that not all communities and schools support all communication methods.

**It cannot be understated that any decision for your child's future is for you to make as a family.** You will have many decisions to make, and you as the parent/guardian of your child know what is best for them.

### Questions to Ask of Your Family

When choosing a communication method for your child, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What are my long-term goals for my child? For my family?
2. Is a given outcome a good match for my child? For our family?
3. What communication outcomes are supported in my community? Near my community? In my state?
4. Does my child appear to have any additional learning or movement issues that need to be considered as we explore various communication outcomes?
5. What kind of school experience do I want for my child? How important is it that my child be educated in the mainstream (regular, often public, school classrooms with same-age children who may not have hearing loss)?

## Questions to Ask Professionals

When seeking professional support, know that professionals in both the fields of medicine and education specialize in hearing and deafness. Their expertise and perspectives may vary, which can create confusion for parents trying to make the choice that is right for their child. Some professionals are willing to be interviewed by phone or email prior to an appointment when parents are considering using their services. Consider the following questions when choosing a professional to work with:

1. Do you have a particular communication or educational philosophy in regard to children with hearing loss?
2. What experience do you have working with children with a similar background and degree of hearing loss as my child?
3. Which communication options have been used with the children with whom you work?

## Whom to Meet With

If you have never had experience with someone with hearing loss, it can be hard to imagine what the differences are between the various communications outcomes. The best way to get a feel for any of the approaches is by meeting and talking with other families on the journey of learning, and with people who live with each outcome. Your early intervention service provider should be able to connect you with families exactly in your position. If they are unable to connect you, contact any of the organizations that represent the different outcomes, and they will be able to connect you with people you can talk with.

## Additional Considerations

Often when a child has an issue like hearing loss, it can be difficult for parents who want to make everything better as quickly as possible. They often feel frustration when results are not seen right away. But it is important to remain patient. Success does not happen overnight. Stay in contact with the various professionals you will be working with to check on goals and make sure your child and your family are satisfied with the progress.

The task of selecting the most appropriate communication outcome for a child can be complicated by the following factors:

- Young Children – Parents may find it difficult to select one option over another because they feel that they do not yet know their child well enough to make a decision. While it is not advisable to “just try” option after option, in some cases parents find that the option they initially selected is not the most suitable to their child and family.
- Older Children – Parents often worry they have missed the critical window of language development. Professionals state that the critical period occurs between birth and age 3, and evidence indicates that the most rapid period of growth in the auditory system of the brain occurs between birth and age 6 months. While the younger years are an important period, the brain continues to learn language and refine existing language skills at a rapid pace until a child is 10-12 years old. Selection of a communication option for children over age 3 should be given the same degree of attention as for a younger child.

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