

COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR CHILD CAN BEGIN NOW

Parents of young children are experts at communicating with their children long before those children learn to talk or to understand what their parents are saying to them. All of us have seen parents making funny faces for their babies. When a father makes a silly face for his baby, at first the baby might look surprised. But then the baby will break into a wide smile, or giggle and wiggle arms or legs. In the same way, communication also happens when a mother rocks her baby after a feeding, holds the baby close and gazes into her little one's eyes. Communication can include:

- Touch (such as rocking and holding your child)
- Vision (facial expressions, eye contact)
- Gestures, and
- Sound

Extending your arms to your child shows that you are about to pick him or her up. Other ways of communicating include smiling, laughing, hugging and letting your child keep you in sight. Your physical and visual contact with your child tells him or her that you are there and everything is safe.

Regardless of the degree of hearing loss continue to talk to your child. Your child might be very interested in looking at faces and will begin to understand that your face and mouth are sending important messages. Make sure that you often talk to your child when he or she is able to see your face.

SOME THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CHILD:

- Set your child close to you so that he or she can see your face.
- Try to minimize background noises so that your child can use the hearing he or she has to the best of his or her ability.
- Use good lighting. Be sure that the room is not too dark or the lights too bright. And don't sit or stand in front of a bright light such as a window. If you are in front of a bright light, your face will be in a shadow and your child will not be able to see your mouth.
- Make eye contact often.
- Imitate the movements and sounds your child makes, then wait for him or her to repeat them.
- Work on communicating with your child during activities that you both enjoy.

- Take time to communicate with your child many times throughout the day.
- Make some quiet time for both you and your child. If your child becomes restless, he or she may be overwhelmed by all of the communication.
- And most importantly, enjoy the time you and your child spend together.

These are some things you can do now while you are exploring and beginning to build communication and language for your child. Please, talk with your team of professionals for more communication ideas.

Remember, communication and language are important in the interaction between parent and child. The development of language and other skills begins with communication. This early groundwork of language is critical for learning to read and write, as well as developing social skills. The gift of language will open doors for you and your child and will help your child build communication skills that will last a lifetime.

FAMILIES AS DECISION MAKERS

Experience shows that there is no one best intervention choice for all children. Just because a method of communication works well for one child and his or her family does not mean it will be the best choice for every other child and family. Finding the best choice for your child often is a complex process. Some children start and continue with just one educational program or a set of communication strategies. Other children might change programs to have the best opportunity to develop language and communication skills. You understand your own child the best. Therefore, with the guidance of professionals and others, you should make your own decisions about language and communication choices.

It is important to begin language development immediately no matter what mode you choose.

COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE OPTIONS

As a parent, it is never too early to begin thinking about how you can help your child build a solid language foundation. This is even more important for a child with hearing loss because children with hearing loss are more likely to have language delays. When a child's hearing loss is identified soon after birth, families and professionals can make sure the child gets intervention services at a very early age. This will help the child build communication and language skills using his or her best abilities.

The difference between language and communication

Communication: Communication is about sharing ideas, facts, thoughts, and other important information. Language can be used to share this information either by speaking or signing.

Language: Languages are used to help people communicate. Languages are made up of words and rules (grammar) that tell how these words are used. Words can be spoken, signed or written and thus languages can be spoken, signed or written. Spoken languages are made up of spoken words and grammar that are unique to each spoken language. Examples of spoken languages include English, Spanish and French. Signed languages are made up of signed words and grammar that are unique to each language. Examples of signed languages include American Sign Language, British Sign Language and Italian Sign Language.

Building languages with communication strategies: Imagine language as the foundation of a house. A family can build communication strategies (the building blocks or bricks) onto the language foundation. Here is an introduction to some possible languages and communication strategies that you can use to build the languages. There are more communication strategies, but these are the most common.

American Sign Language (ASL)

Signs: Signs in ASL are created using handshapes, facial expressions, body posture and movement. Some examples are:

- *Handshape* - a spread-out hand, as in a "high-five" or a pointing handshape
- *Fist movement* – how you move your hands in space, such as from left to right or in a circling or a bouncing motion,
- *Facial expression* – raised eyebrows when asking a question and smiling when signing about something that is fun to do.

Visual Attention: People with hearing can hear voices even when they cannot see who is talking. People who communicate in ASL need to look at the person who is signing to them. It is important to make sure your child is looking and paying attention when you are signing.

Eye contact: Eye contact is very important when you are signing in ASL. If you have eye contact with your child, then you can be sure that you are paying attention to each other.

Fingerspelling: Fingerspelling began as a part of ASL. Fingerspelling spells words by forming each letter using the hands and fingers. Very young children do not need to know how a word is spelled to understand fingerspelling. Instead they learn fingerspelled words by the shape and movement of the hand.

Spoken English

Spoken words: Spoken words are formed using the vocal cords (voice) and mouth and are made of speech sounds such as vowel and consonant sounds.

Auditory training and listening: Auditory training teaches a child or an adult to rely on listening to communicate. It takes advantage of a person's residual hearing. That is the amount of hearing that a person with a hearing loss still has, even if it is very minimal. Many children who are deaf have some residual hearing.

Speech: Speech uses the mouth, lips, tongue, and vocal cords to produce sounds for communication. Speech and auditory training (or listening) are often used together. Different speech sounds can make a difference in the meaning between two words. For example, the only difference between the two words "big" and "pig" is in the first speech sound ("bŭ" rather than "pŭ").

Speech reading: In speech reading (also known as "lip reading") a person who is deaf or hard of hearing watches a speaker's mouth and facial expressions to understand what is being said. Speech reading is also used along with other building blocks, such as listening, to communicate.

English Coding Systems

Note: English coding systems use visual methods to express the spoken English language. Coding systems are not a language of their own. Instead of using speech and hearing, coding uses signs borrowed from ASL to represent the English language. English grammar and word order are used.

Manually Coded English (MCE): Manually Coded English, or MCE, is made up of signs (hand shapes and hand motions) that represent English words. You might have heard of Morse code. Morse code is a system of dots and dashes that can be tapped out to form English words and phrases. MCE is a code for the English language. Many of the signs in MCE are borrowed from

ASL. However, the grammar, word order, and sentence structure used in MCE are those of the English language. MCE does not use the grammar, word order, and sentence structure of ASL.

Finger spelling: Finger spelling began as part of ASL. Finger spelling is the spelling of words by forming each letter using the hands and fingers. It is used with English coding systems, as well as in ASL.

Other communication tools: The remaining three building blocks can be used for communication and language. These three building blocks are cued speech, simultaneous communication, and natural gestures.

Cued Speech: Cued speech, or cueing, can help people who are deaf or hard of hearing understand speech. Cued speech is not a language or a representation of a language. Instead, it is a system of hand signals used by the speaker to help the listener tell the difference between certain speech sounds. Some speech sounds are hard to tell apart using speech reading alone. (One example is the difference between the sound of “b” and the sound of “p”). Cued speech consists of eight hand shapes representing consonant sounds. These are placed at four locations near the mouth to represent vowel sounds. Cued speech must be used in combination with speech reading.

Conceptually Accurate Signed English (CASE): Conceptually Accurate Signed English, or CASE, is sometimes used by people who are deaf or hard of hearing to communicate with one another. Sometimes it is called PSE, or Pidgin Sign English. CASE is a mix of English and ASL. CASE is not a language. It is a form of communication that varies depending on the experience and preferences of the people using it.

Simultaneous Communication: Simultaneous communication is a technique that can be used with MCE. The person signing speaks and signs at the same time. The person listening and watching uses speech reading, hearing, and MCE or CASE to understand what is being said.

Natural gestures: Natural gestures are body movements and facial expressions that you often use to help others understand your message. For instance, if you want to hold a child, you can simply stretch your arms towards the child. Or, when you put your index finger over your mouth and nose you are telling someone to be quiet. These are examples of natural gestures.

The critical period for language development

It is extremely important to remember that children have a “critical period” for learning language. This is true no matter which communication strategies and communication tools you choose to help your child learn language. Children learn language best during early childhood. It is more difficult to learn a language later in life. This is true for sign languages, like ASL, and for spoken languages, like English.

