



Successful Strategies for Starting School Services

Parents of young child with hearing loss have a significant role in the start of school services. Many families wish to be active in their child's early education but are unsure how to start. Programs and the rights of children and their families vary from country to country and even within countries. Parents can ask for a referral or initiate contact with community educators to begin learning about school possibilities. Wherever they live, families can become involved in locating and designing learning. Effective advocacy involves determining their child's needs, exploring education programs and initiating services. Then parents can collaborate with programs to nurture their child's potential.



Starting strategies for parents include:

Determining the Child's Individual Needs

1. Identify preferences for child's communication and listening device(s).
2. Join groups to meet parents, share information and locate resources.
3. Collect copies of child's evaluations and recent recommendations.
4. Document services received and effectiveness of techniques tried.
5. Develop ongoing relationships with positive, pro-active professionals.

Exploring Hearing Loss Programs

1. Research educational approaches where the family lives.
2. Visit programs for children in special and typical settings.
3. Observe group size, peer contact and staff-child interactions.
4. Ask about teaching strategies, parent involvement and student outcomes.
5. Inquire about providers' pediatric experience and training in hearing loss.

Meeting to Develop Early Services

1. Present child's past progress, current strengths and future goals.
2. Request equipment and/or accommodations for participation.
3. Invite individual supportive of the family to accompany parent to meetings.
4. Plan follow-up to discuss more questions and review progress.
5. Continue learning about child's hearing loss and communication.

When parents increase their understanding of educational approaches, they can participate with more confidence in their child's schooling. In the U.S.A., the education of children with hearing loss, including eligibility and written plans, are protected by laws. Parent perspectives are part of the process for evaluating a child and making educational decisions. Materials about the U.S. special education process are available from many sources including school districts, disability offices and parent organizations and the Internet. Even when information is specific to a certain country, strategies, facts and suggestions may assist parents living elsewhere to develop plans for their child.

As parents see what helps their child make progress, they can explore how to attain specific supports needed. Obtaining quality education can sometimes be a challenging experience for families. Establishing a strong combination of services and support can take much time, effort and ongoing modification. Parents around the world have discovered that positive advocacy is effective and empowering. The results of educational collaboration can be new opportunities for an individual child and maybe for other children too. The involvement of parents in starting school services can make a dramatic difference in a child's learning and build a foundation for future achievement.