



JOHN
TRACY
CENTER

Ideas & Advice
for Parents of Children with Hearing Loss

Create Caring Connections for Your Child and You



Connecting through Concerns

Parents who are gathering information and learning about hearing loss are getting their questions answered. Families who find educational and medical providers to work with them and their child become part of a team. Together they collaborate to identify services and strategies to help the child with hearing loss. Parents may receive ongoing support from one or more persons on their team. That person's role and expertise will vary depending on the parents' preferences and priorities. Share your concerns with the providers you have and ask not only for services for your child but for support for you, too. Seek out early interventionists, language specialists, Deaf adults, hearing loss experts, parent peers, teachers and others who have information and insight to share. As you develop relationships with others who provide answers and assurance, you will be building a support network that will strengthen you in your many roles. Regular contact with persons experienced with children with hearing loss can reduce parent stress and increase family confidence.

Parenting is challenging but meaningful interactions create opportunities to share feelings—not only worries and fears, but joys and triumphs, too. Everyone needs emotional support. Some parents find it helpful to seek

out other parents in similar situations. A parent might wish to find other parents to share common emotions and experiences. Some parents look for families who also have a child with a hearing loss to exchange ideas and discuss concerns. Parents also report how helpful it is to be with another parent whose situation is similar to theirs because there is no need to explain how they are feeling or what they are doing. If you are with someone else who has a child with an implant for example, you do not have to answer questions about it. Other parents might find it useful to join a group of parents with children with hearing loss to share resources or simply socialize. They'll understand your special needs and perhaps share with you some of the ways they cope. Knowing even one other adult in your situation may help you feel less alone, give you opportunities to share your thoughts and provide you with other forms of support. Connecting with other parents as part of a regular routine can decrease parent isolation and increase family support.

Whatever a parent's situation, there needs to be time for the adults to care for themselves. Whether you are coping with a new diagnosis, single parenting, handling most care giving responsibilities, separated from other family members, juggling more than one job, or involved in any special circumstances, it is still important to find ways to nurture yourself. Parenting is hectic and you need time for yourself. Everyone deserves "time off" and it is fine to schedule parent-only activities. It can be a relaxing walk alone, trading babysitting services with another parent or getting together with friends for fun. Requests can be made of family or friends to take care of a child for a night, a weekend or a time each month when a parent can rest or get away. Parents might ask if there are respite services available in their area or training for babysitters to care for children with different communication needs. Building a support system into a regular routine can assist parents in taking care of

themselves and their child.

Connecting through Communication

As adults go about doing chores, children participate at different levels depending on their age. Whether they are simply watching or actively helping, children can learn from all that goes on around them. Parents can ask siblings, babysitters, staff and other family members to contribute to a child's daily communication throughout the day. A daily routine that includes others interacting with your child can reduce the pressure to do it all yourself and create more opportunities for children to learn language. Getting ready for the day can be a hectic time if you are rushing to leave your home. Still there are things that must be done like dressing, washing or getting organized. There is much that can be said as tasks are done such as:

"Here's your hat. Let me put on your head. On it goes."
"Let's pour the juice into the bottle and fill it to the top."
"We're packing the bag and putting in three toys."

Hearing aids and cochlear implants need to be checked daily and then put on easily. You can communicate about everything and do it everywhere. Whether you walk, bike, or travel by bus or car you can chat about what you see and hear:

"The water is running. We are rinsing the sink before we go."
"The microwave is beeping. Let's get the food out of the microwave!"
"The bus is coming down the street. Honk, do you hear it?"

Meal time, bath time, and bed time can be other opportunities for talking to your little one. You can talk about sizes, colors, shapes, concepts, emotions, and actions. You can describe what you are doing and why:

"I am making food and stirring it. Grandma will eat with us."
"Here are your fingers. One, two, three, four, five! They are scrubbed."
"Into bed you go. You are so very tired now. Close your eyes and sleep."

Communication is not limited to talking about what you are doing now or will do next. There will be times you want to reflect on what has happened or plan for the future. Looking at pictures can be helpful to review the past and anticipate upcoming events.

- Discuss photos of family and familiar places and people.
- Use photo albums to recall happy times and special memories.
- Create "experience books" to document your child's activities.

There may be certain periods when a parent and a child are usually together. Perhaps there is a daily time for child hair-brushing, feeding the family pet or waiting for the babysitter when there can be a one-on-one conversation. During that time you might:

- Read books, look at pictures or re-tell stories.
- Do finger plays, create simple games or sing songs.
- Talk about people and activities your child enjoys.

Chatting with a child can occur anywhere and anytime. Many people in a child's life can engage in conversations and enhance his learning. Parents can enlist others in bringing words, ideas and interactions into their child's world. Regular routines can include much language and then completing daily tasks becomes part of caring for you and your child.

Connecting through Communities

When your child is regularly cared for by others, it becomes an opportunity for varied interactions. If someone is coming to your home, talk about who they are and what they will do. If you travel to another setting, talk about where you are going, who you will see and what your child will do. It is natural for children to become upset at goodbye times but knowing when you are leaving helps children learn about schedules. Talk to him about his feelings. Preparing for transitions in your regular routine is part of caring for your child and yourself.

Share your child's language goals with his daycare, school staff and frequent caregivers. Explain what you do to help him learn and understand. Discuss how to give your child the most information throughout the day by ongoing explanations, frequent pictures, or one-to-one conversation. Outline what methods you are using for encouraging language and listening. If your child is wearing a listening device, help caregivers learn when to check it, how to put it on and why to encourage your child's regular use. Coordinating with a child's caregivers regularly helps busy parents care for their child and themselves.

Parents have much to do everyday. Remembering to recognize the changes you see in your child can increase your hope and decrease your concerns. Regularly share those successes of your child with others, and then these ongoing mini-celebrations can become part of your routine for taking care of yourself and your child.

Parenting is such a busy job in any circumstance! You may leave your child with others daily or be with him all day. You may have frequent hearing appointments or only annual ones. You may have multiple or limited resources. Your child may be a sleepy infant or an active preschooler. Whatever their situation is, parents of young children with hearing loss have concerns. Families may make different choices for communication, technology and education. They will still have in common the challenge of balancing all there is to do! Try to include professionals, family, friends, and the community in providing support. Take time to develop language filled routines with your child. Provide caregivers with ideas for communication. Meaningful interactions will nurture connections for both you and your child.