



## First Words for Parents Learning About Hearing Loss



This is a short list of beginning words for parents of children newly diagnosed with hearing loss. It is meant to be simple not comprehensive. Many other terms are discussed in publications, explained on the Internet or defined in depth in dictionaries. Use can vary from country to country and even within the communities in one country. To understand these new words and begin to use this unfamiliar vocabulary parents will need to keep asking about the meaning and correct use of terms.

Parents want their children to be seen for what they can do, who they are and what wonderful people they will become. Children are not defined by their hearing. Families wish to obtain for their young children with hearing loss what is needed for success. Parents can begin assisting their children by learning about the words used in reports, meetings and appointments. Understanding terms helps parents to ask better questions and make informed decisions.

**Acoustic Highlighting:** building awareness of specific speech sounds or words using varied techniques that include emphasizing, whispering, elongating or pausing to make what is said clearer or easier to hear.

**Amplification:** increased loudness of sound, or hearing devices that change sound levels

**Articulation:** production of speech sounds

**ASL:** American Sign Language, a complete visual language used by many Deaf North Americans with its own grammar and sentence order separate from English. Meanings are conveyed by hand shapes, finger, hand and body movements as well as facial expressions. Each country's sign language is different and there is no universal sign language.

**Assistive Listening Devices (ALD):** equipment that amplifies speech or sends it through a mic so background noise is decreased and/or a speaker's voice sounds closer to the listener

**Audiogram:** a graph showing responses to sound in a formal hearing test that can depict an individual's type and amount of hearing loss

**Audiologist:** a specialist in hearing and balance who does evaluations, diagnosis and selection and managing of listening devices

**Audition:** sense of hearing or act of listening

**Auditory Brainstem Implant (ABI):** surgically implanted device providing a sensation of sound that is suggested for some

individuals not candidates for a cochlear implant

**Air-Conduction Testing:** hearing evaluation using head phones or insert earphones

**Auditory Closure:** completing a heard message after a pause, e.g. finishing a typical sentence, continuing the chorus of a song or adding a phrase in a familiar story

**Auditory Feedback Loop:** multi-step technique of listening, processing, and if needed, correcting one's own speech

**Auditory Neuropathy (dys-synchrony):** hearing disorders characterized by the inability of the auditory nerve to transmit sound clearly to the brain

**Auditory Nerve:** the VIII cranial nerve which carries sound from the cochlea to the brain

**Auditory Sandwich:** strategy that first provides a sound, word or phrase through listening only, then if needed adds a visual or additional cue, followed again by audition alone

**Background Noise:** sounds that interfere with the main speech signal, making it difficult to hear and process what is being said, e.g. TV, air conditioners, running water, crowd clamor

**Behavioral Observation Audiometry (BOA):** hearing test that documents observable responses to sound such as facial expressions, eyebrow furrowing and eye movements

**Bilingualism:** fluent in two languages

**Bilateral Hearing Loss:** occurring in both ears.

**Binaural Hearing:** hearing with both ears

**Bone Conduction Hearing Aid (BAHA):** an amplification

device that bypasses the outer and middle ear, attached by a headband or surgically inserted into the bone behind the ear

**Bone Conduction Testing:** measuring hearing through a small vibrator on the skull which stimulates the inner ear (cochlea)

**LSLS Cert. AVT:** Listening and Spoken Language Specialists include Certified Auditory Verbal Therapists and Educators, professionals trained in coaching parents to help their children use hearing to develop spoken language.

**Cochlea:** inner ear that contains the sense organ for hearing

**Cochlear Implant (CI):** a device implanted in the inner ear that provides electrical stimulation to the auditory nerve which the brain perceives as hearing

**Combined Approaches:** using more than one language or method to encourage communication development

**Comprehension:** understanding and making sense of what is told, pictured or written

**Conditioned Play Audiometry (CPA):** behavioral hearing testing where children are taught to perform an action when they hear a sound, e.g. putting an object in a container, a piece in puzzle, a peg in a hole

**Conductive Hearing Loss:** occurs in the outer or middle ear, is often temporary and may be medically or surgically correctable

**Consonants:** speech sounds produced by controlling the flow of air from lips, tongue, teeth or palate; in English, all the letters except /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/

**Cued Speech:** system of eight hand shapes and four hand positions used to make speech visible in any spoken language

**Decibel:** a unit of sound loudness (see Intensity)

**Detection:** awareness of sound

**DIP:** patterns or rhythm in spoken languages expressed in duration (long and short), intensity (loud and quiet), and pitch (high and low)

**Discrimination:** ability to distinguish between sounds

Ear

**Outer ear:** the auricle or pinna (the part of the ear on the outside of the head) and the ear canal

**Middle ear:** the eardrum and air filled space containing three small bones (the ossicles) that transfer sound vibrations to the inner ear

**Inner ear:** the cochlea (organ of hearing) and semi-circular canals (the balance organs)

**Eardrum:** tympanic membrane which separates the outer ear from the middle ear

**DM System (digital modulation):** (see Remote Microphone)

**Earmold:** small part of a listening device inserted in the outer ear that helps keep the device in place and/or transmits sounds

**Expressive Language:** conveying one's feelings, ideas, and experiences using a formal communication system during interactions with others

**Feedback:** whistling sound caused by amplification when an object is too close to the microphone of the hearing aid or when the earmold is not inserted fully, does not fit or is damaged

**FM System:** (see Remote Microphone)

**Frequency:** the pitch or tone of sounds, measured in Hertz (Hz); most speech sounds fall within the range of 250 (low pitch) to 4000 (high pitch) Hz

**Gain:** measurement of sound increased by a listening device

**Hearing Age/ Listening Age:** extent of time usually measured in months or years that a young child has consistently used and benefitted from a listening device

**Hearing Aid:** an electronic device that amplifies sound  
Hertz: (see Frequency)

**Incidental Learning:** knowledge gained from informal experiences such as observing what is happening or obtaining information from what is discussed nearby

**Identification:** showing recognition by naming or pointing to an object, person, picture or sound

**Intensity (Loudness):** a measurement of sound in decibels (dB) used to categorize hearing loss as mild, moderate, severe or profound in degree

**Jargoning:** typical pre-language developmental stage where a child imitates the rhythm, inflection, intensity and quality of his family's language

**Language:** sharing ideas, experiences and emotions by a formal communication system of speech, signs or writing

**Learning-to-Listen-Sounds:** meaningful sounds associated with objects or activities, e.g. beep beep for a car horn, meow for a cat, sssshhhhh for sleeping

**Listening and Spoken Language (LSL):** a communication approach for children with hearing loss to develop spoken language from listening (previously called "auditory verbal")

**Ling Six Sound Test:** an informal listening check using a set of speech sounds ranging from low to high frequency. The six sounds in English are: /a/, /i/, /u/, /m/, /s/, and "sh".

**Localization:** ability to notice the direction of a sound

**Mixed Hearing Loss:** combination of sensorineural and conductive loss

**Motherese:** speaking to babies in a sing-song voice, done by parents worldwide in their languages

**Otoacoustic Emissions (OAE):** a test that measures the responses of the outer hair cells in the cochlea

**Otolaryngologist:** a medical doctor specializing in the ear, nose and throat (ENT)

**Otologist/Neurotologist:** a medical doctor specializing in the ear

**Phonemes:** speech sounds formed by manipulating the flow of air in the mouth or through the nose

**Pragmatics:** using appropriate social and verbal communication behaviors

**Prelinguistic Communication:** vocalizations and gestures used before a baby develops language

**Real Ear Measurement (Probe Microphone Measurement):** a small microphone in the ear canal that provides information to program hearing aids and verify amplification levels

**Receptive Language:** understanding the feelings, ideas and experiences conveyed through the formal communication of others

**Remote Microphone:** wireless systems to improve listening, can make voice of person speaking, or sounds of media playing seem closer and louder. DM, FM, personal and soundfield systems

are used in varied settings.

**Residual Hearing:** the measurable amount of remaining hearing that a person with a hearing loss has without use of a listening device

**Semantics:** meanings of words

**Sign Language:** a complete visual language with its own grammar and syntax that conveys meaning through a system of hand shapes, positions and motions, facial expressions and body movements. Countries have their own sign languages and dialects.

**Sign Systems:** communication methods that often include parts of a formal sign language; Manually Coded English (MCE) and Pidgin Signed English use a mix of ASL signs and English grammar; Baby Sign includes signs for beginning words

**Sound Field Testing:** using loudspeakers to present signals for testing with or without listening devices

**Sensorineural Hearing loss:** a permanent hearing loss resulting from problems in the cochlea and/or auditory nerve

**Speech:** articulation of words, expressing thoughts and feelings through spoken language

**Speech Banana:** area of an audiogram showing where the sounds of spoken language occur at an average conversation level

**Speech-Language Pathologist:** a health care professional who provides therapy for speech, language or communication concerns

**Threshold:** the softest sound an individual can hear

**Total Communication (TC):** using multiple methods to communicate but primarily defined as the use of speech and signs together

**Tympanometry:** a test that measures the condition of the middle ear, the mobility of the eardrum, movement of the middle ear bones and middle ear pressure

**Unilateral Hearing Loss:** hearing loss only in one ear

**Vestibular System:** balance organ located next to the cochlea

**Visual Reinforcement Audiometry (VRA):** behavioral hearing testing where objects, video or pictures, light up or move when an individual responds to a sound

**Vocal Play:** technique for supporting early development of speech and spoken language in a natural way that includes having fun with inflection and tone, singing, varying rhythmic syllables, DIP (duration, intensity, pitch) and learning-to listen-sounds.

**Vowels:** speech sounds produced by breath from an open mouth, In English these include: a/, e/, i/, o/, u

Words commonly used in English in the USA when a child is identified include “hearing loss,” “deaf,” “hard of hearing,” “Deaf,” and “hearing impaired”. There is not one standard definition for each. When Deaf is capitalized it indicates the cultural group sharing values and language (ASL) of the Deaf community. Medical professionals may use terms for the causes or amount of hearing loss. Education or intervention staff may use words connected to eligibility for services. Individuals might be described with the same term but have very different ways of hearing and communicating in addition to varied personal preferences for what words feel acceptable.

Parents can ask other families, persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and professionals working with their family what words are appropriate and respectful. Individuals might sometimes be described as a person using a hearing aid, cochlear implant or listening device. Words are powerful and need to be chosen carefully but labels provide limited information. Children can be best described by the wonderful skills they are learning and the beautiful personal names given to them by their families. As parents become their children’s advocates they will find the words!