



Hearing Loss in Child? - There is Hope

Learning of severe to profound hearing loss in a child can be quite surprising news to many parents. The majority of children with hearing loss are born to parents with normal hearing. It is normal for parents to experience a broad range of emotions in the weeks and months following the initial diagnosis of hearing loss. David Luterman, Ph.D. has described a process of mourning “the lost normal child.” Some hearing parents will react to the news initially with intense feelings of shock, denial, anger, grief, guilt, sadness, fear, anxiety and confusion when they first learn about their child’s hearing loss. In summary, the mourning process moves through the stages of shock, recognition, denial, acknowledgement, and constructive action. Following diagnosis of hearing loss, one of the first constructive actions is obtaining appropriate hearing aids for their child. According to Dr. Luterman, “The key to successful integration of hearing loss into a family is the degree to which parents are able to integrate hearing loss into their lives. If hearing loss is seen as a tragedy and terrible loss, the family system will be continually assaulted by negative emotions. However, if it is treated as a teacher for everyone, and the positive aspects of hearing loss are seen and noted, then the family will flourish.”

Choosing an audiologist with expertise in working with hearing loss in a child is a crucial consideration for success in fitting infants and young children. A pediatric audiologist will have expertise in using appropriate pediatric testing equipment and methods. The unique needs of infants and children will be taken into consideration when selecting and fitting earmolds and hearing aids for tiny ears. A pediatric audiologist should have flexibility in scheduling to allow plenty of time in counseling and teaching parents how to optimize the use of hearing aids for their child. During the counseling process, the audiologist will seek to understand where the family is in the process of acceptance of the child’s hearing loss and individualize the early intervention plan accordingly. The audiologist should always be considerate of the amount of new information the family can handle during one session, and adapt their counseling style to the needs of the parents. Parents should be given clear and unbiased access to information about the options in amplification and communication styles available to children with hearing loss.

There Are More Resources Than Ever for Dealing with Hearing Loss in a Child

The encouraging news is that there has never been more hope for children with profound hearing loss. We live in an unprecedented time and there have never been more options in sophisticated hearing aid technologies to improve the hearing and quality of life for children with hearing loss than ever before. Superb advances in hearing aid technologies have been made in the past decade. Most children with hearing loss are fit with two hearing aids to give balanced hearing in both ears and to allow them to pinpoint the location of a sound or conversation. Wearing two hearing aids provides better sound clarity and word recognition in noisy listening environments.

Programmable digital hearing aids are available in high power models to allow the audiologist to give the child access to the wide range of sounds necessary to develop spoken language skills. Hearing aid programming software and real ear measurement equipment allow the hearing aids to be individually customized to optimize the hearing aid fitting for the child and to assure the speech signal is delivered at the most appropriate listening levels. The goal of digital hearing aids is to deliver soft sounds at an audible level, average

speech at a comfortable level, and loud speech at louder (but not uncomfortable) levels. Some children with profound hearing loss use various forms of visual language (sign language or cued speech) while they are developing their spoken language skills. Most children with hearing aids can significantly benefit from an FM system. The FM system helps to overcome some of the challenges of listening in background noise, at distances, and rooms with poor acoustics.

After a three to six month trial with hearing aids, some children do not demonstrate expected gains in speech and/or hearing development milestones. In recent years, the criteria for cochlear implants in children with profound hearing loss has expanded and now this option is available to a wider range of children. An evaluation by a cochlear implant center team (cochlear implant surgeon, audiologist, speech-language pathologist, developmental psychologist, and other team members) can determine if this option is potentially beneficial.

The following websites provide useful educational resources for parents dealing with hearing loss in a child:

Alexander Graham Bell Association

<http://nc.agbell.org/netcommunity/page.aspx?pid=348>

The Listening Room

http://www.hearingjourney.com/Listening_Room/preview.cfm?langid=1

Oral Deaf Education

<http://www.oraldeafed.org/>

John Tracy Clinic

<http://www.jtc.org/>

Hands and Voices

<http://www.handsandvoices.org/>

Audiology Online

<http://www.audiologyonline.com/>

Healthy Hearing

<http://www.healthyhearing.com/>

American Academy of Audiology

<http://www.audiology.org/Pages/default.aspx>

American Speech, Language, and Hearing Association

<http://www.asha.org/>