

Tips from a parent to parents

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Our son Scott was diagnosed as profoundly deaf at eight months. We knew nothing about childhood deafness at that time. I remember the grief, the pain and especially the anxiety, “He can’t hear me”, “I don’t know how to teach him”, “How will our baby learn to talk?” “What is his future?”

Our son is now an adult and all of the above fears have been laid to rest. Good news! Our children can hear! They can learn to talk and we are one of the key factors in their learning to do so. I wish to share some of the key ingredients that I have learned over the years that will make a difference in our children. We do know how to teach our children! We can create the same listening, language and learning environment that helped us to talk as babies. Unfortunately, the diagnosis of hearing impairment in our children often disrupts natural interactions between parent and child. We perceive our children differently. We need to open those lines of communication again.

How can we create an environment where children can learn to listen and talk?

- Create a favourable listening environment with good acoustics. Without knowledge of a language a child cannot understand TV and radio. These sounds simply add noise making it more difficult for a child to hear. Sharing a book with your child encourages healthy interactions, an opportunity to input effective language and strengthen your child’s love of books. This can be critical in their learning to read, so important in their accessing knowledge in the future.
- Talk close to the Hearing Aid of the better ear or the Cochlear Implant microphone to make speech more audible.
- The closer to the hearing aids you are the quieter you should speak to prevent the stronger vowels in sentences from overpowering the softer consonants. Often weak sounds such as /f/, /sh/ and /s/ are not heard in running speech when speech is too loud.
- The Auditory-Verbal approach relies on appropriate amplification. This will mean many trips to Audiologists and hearing aid dealers. As you gain more information about your child’s hearing loss, the hearing aids can be adjusted accordingly.
- If an ear mold has feedback, turning the volume down is only a temporary and totally inadequate solution. Immediately arrange for a retake to ensure a tighter fit for the mold. I know one parent who had to return ten times.
- Remember the hearing aids go on first thing in the morning, before clothes and taken off last thing at night before your child goes to sleep.
- Children learn language best through enjoyable, natural, meaningful one-to-one interactions with someone special to them – YOU!

- Include your child in your daily activities; children love to act out your adult roles. There is a lot of language in cooking, cleaning, repairing, washing, shopping and walking activities.
- Numbers and colours are not the foundation of language! Although it may reinforce us, as parents, that our child knows numbers, it does not teach them how to communicate. Speak in a variety of verbs, nouns, adjectives, and pronouns. “Where’s your shoe? Oh! You have just one shoe! Where’s your other shoe? Is it under the chair? Help me! Help me! Find your shoe!” Give your child every opportunity to hear clearly. Use lots of repetition and speak in short phrases, NOT single words, which are hard to hear.
- Speak with expression showing a desire to communicate, using increased rhythm.
- Observe and listen to your child. When your child uses natural gestures to communicate with you, express for your child what he/she is trying to say. For example, when they push you away you might say, “Oh! Don’t touch it, Mummy will do it. I want to do it!” If they point to something say, “Oh! You want the ball? Here’s the ball, bounce the ball!”
- Create language opportunities to interact with your child. You might put the top of a jar on too tightly for them to open. Have fewer chairs than is necessary for the number of people present. Have necessary utensils missing.
- Precede activity with speech, give your child opportunities to listen, listen, listen – and then match what she/he has heard with meaningful action. “Do you want some milk? Where’s the milk? I’ll get you some milk. Brr – it’s cold!”
- Remember a hearing baby takes about a year of listening before they begin to use meaningful speech. Gradually, by listening to meaningful interactions repeatedly, your child will develop a foundation of language. She/he will begin to link known words to convey thoughts, actions, feelings and meanings.

Yes, you do have a very special child, but remember
 – YOU ARE SPECIAL TOO!
 YOU are the link to your child learning
 to listen and talk.