



Ways to Communicate with a Child with Hearing Loss

Many families make choices about language for their young children. Think of the many families who speak English and another language, too. When they have a new baby, they make choices about what language their child will learn to speak. Baby's brains learn whatever they hear. So the family can choose to speak their native language, speak only English around the child or speak both so the child will learn both languages at the same time. Like little sponges, infants soak up all of the language that is around them. After about a year, they begin to say words.

Language is caught, not taught.

Our ears can pick up sounds and language from far away. Think about hearing as though you were in the middle of a bubble. Any sound or talking that goes on in the bubble is something that you can hear, or catch. People with normal hearing can catch talking at home in the same room and sometimes from another room in the house if it is quiet. Children learn, or catch, whatever language surrounds them. A child with hearing loss will have a smaller listening bubble than a child with normal hearing. It may be only a few inches from their ears or a number of feet away. Hearing aids will help most children have bigger listening bubbles so it is easier to catch language. Everyone's listening bubble is much smaller if there is background noise. Most of the language that children learn is from overhearing other people talking. Background noise makes language learning much harder for children with hearing loss.

What do 'communication options' or 'communication choices' mean?

There are different ways you can communicate with your child so that they can catch as much language as possible. They are choices because YOU, the child's family, are the ones who will make the decision about how to communicate with your child. Whatever you choose is a commitment. A child will only learn the language that is around them – you need to communicate whenever you are with the child. If you don't, the child will learn words more slowly, creating a language and learning delay. It is not a permanent choice though. The communication choice needs to be one that the family can comfortably do all the time. It also needs to let the baby learn language at the same rate as other children. It may take some time to figure out what communication choice is right for your child and family.

So what are the communication choices?

It can help to think of the choices in a range from auditory (listening) only all the way to visual (sign language) only. Most children that wear hearing aids and can hear a lot of speech will learn language through their ears. But not all. Some may need to have a little visual boost like facial expressions, gestures or signs to really understand. Some children may have little hearing, and that would make spoken language learning very slow and difficult. To learn language at the same rate as other children, they may need to use visual language. But not all. Some may have enough hearing that could boost their understanding. Families also have their own ideas and preferences for how to communicate with their child. No one communication choice is the best for all children and families.

- **AUDITORY VERBAL.** Listening and Spoken language is generally how babies without hearing loss learn language.
- **AUDITORY ORAL.** Language can be spoken and heard. It can also be visual. When we watch someone talking we are getting some clues about what they are saying, even if it is noisy and we can't hear them well. This is called lipreading or speechreading. But not all speech sounds can be seen on the face so speechreading doesn't allow a child to fully catch language. Listening, talking, speechreading, using facial expressions and gestures is considered an auditory oral communication approach.
- **CUED SPEECH.** It is also possible to make spoken language into a visual form through Cued Speech, which provides hand shapes for the speech sound combinations.

- **SIMULTANEOUS COMMUNICATION.** This is a fancy way of saying that people will sign words or concepts at the same time as they are talking. It may also be called SimCom, Manually Coded English (MCE), or total communication.
- **AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE.** ASL is a true language. It has a sign for every language concept. Because it is a different language than English, the order of the concepts is not the same as English word order, so you can't talk and use ASL at the same time.

This is too much! What do I do?

You don't need to learn about communication options alone. It helps many parents to talk with other parents who have already been through making the decision about communication options for their child. There are also deaf and hard of hearing professionals available through your school district that can help you learn about your choices. Your child's audiologist can also help you start learning more.

Resources/Links

- Communication Options Chart, North Carolina's Beginnings Program - http://www.ncbegin.org/communication_options/comm_options_chart.shtml
- Opening Doors: Technology and Communication Options for Children with Hearing Loss. US Department of Education http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/products/opening_doors/opening_doors.pdf
- Choices in deafness revisited, Centers for Disease Control, Early Hearing Detection & Intervention - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/ehdi/documents/8-23-05ChoicesinDeafness-Revisited.pdf>
- Decision Making, American Society for Deaf Children - http://www.deafchildren.org/resources/12_ASDC%20-%20Article%20-%20Decision%20Making.pdf
- So Your Child Has a Hearing Loss: Next Steps for Parents, Alexander Graham Bell Association - <http://agbell.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=414>
- Communication Modes, American Society for Deaf Children - http://www.deafchildren.org/resources/13_ASDC%20-%20Article%20-%20Communication%20Modes.pdf
- Communication Building Blocks –



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