An Overview of Pediatric Hearing Loss

Kelli Murphy, B.S.

My child has hearing loss: How will he/she learn to communicate?

As a parent, you want to be able to communicate with your child and also give your child the opportunity to communicate with others. Choosing a communication mode for your child with hearing loss can often turn into a confusing and frustrating journey. It has been shown that early communication is related to the development of positive self-esteem and to language-learning abilities. There are many different ways to communicate, and every communication choice requires a big commitment from the family. When choosing a communication mode for your child, keep in mind that no one mode has been proven to be best for all deaf and hard of hearing children. Parents and caregivers should consider the following questions when choosing a communication mode:

- Will the communication mode allow all of your family to communicate with the child?
- Is this communication mode in the best interests of the child? Keep in mind that you want the communication mode to allow them to interact with family and friends, express their emotions and succeed in school.

Here is a list of common communication modes (Sound Beginnings, 2001):

- **American Sign Language (ASL)—** American Sign Language is a language that uses signs made with your hands and other movements, including facial expressions and postures of the body. ASL is a manual system of communication used by members of Deaf culture and does not use any speech.
- **Auditory-Oral**—The main goal of this communication mode is spoken language. It is an instructional method used to teach children with significant hearing loss to use hearing, speech reading, sign and spoken language to communicate orally.
- **Auditory-Verbal**—The main goal of this communication system is also spoken language. It differs from the Auditory-Oral method in that it does not allow children to use speech reading or sign to communicate. Instead, it teaches children to use their hearing only.
- **Total Communication**—This includes the use of any or all modes of communication (speech, sign language, speech reading, finger spelling, etc.)
- **Bilingual Approach**—Use of two languages: American Sign Language and spoken English.

Who can give me more information related to hearing loss and communication?

- An **audiologist** can help by:
    - Testing your child's hearing, recommending amplification (hearing aids, cochlear implant, FM systems), discussing your child's responses to sound, providing information about early intervention programs, and working with you and early intervention specialists.

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- An **Early Intervention Specialist** can help by:
    - Telling you about the supports and services available to you, discussing your observations and concerns about your child, answering your questions about the effects of your child's hearing loss on communication and learning, and helping make a plan for your child's educational needs.
- A **Pediatrician** can help by:
    - Providing information about medical and/or surgical treatment for certain types of hearing loss, referring you to an audiologist who can provide amplification for your child, and treating middle ear infections.
- **Parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing** can help by:
    - Sharing their experiences, giving you advice, listening to you and answering your questions when possible, providing you with names of people who they have found to be helpful, and arranging play dates for your children.

Resources:

Boys Town National Research Hospital
http://www.boystownhospital.org/hearing/index.asp
http://www.babyhearing.org/

National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management
http://www.infanthearing.org/

National Information Center on Deafness
www.gallaudet.edu

National Institute on Deafness and Communication Disorders
http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/

Sound Beginnings: A Kansas Resource Guide for Families with Infants and Toddlers Who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing