



Beyond the Test Booth: Communication Options

Having a child with a hearing loss adds a whole new dimension to parenthood that you may never have planned on, but with commitment and support, your child will be able to reach his or her highest potential.

“When I first found out about my daughter’s hearing loss, I was lost. All I could think was I would never hear my daughter call me Mommy. We started right away with intensive auditory/verbal therapy, and I quickly learned that, even with her hearing loss, she would learn to talk. Now, my daughter is 9 years old and in fourth grade. There is no greater joy than to ask her to take off her iPod to answer the phone.”

— *Melissa, mother*

## Communication and Your Child

**T**here are a variety of methods of communication that are used with children with hearing loss. You have options.

### Auditory-verbal Approach

An approach relying on maximizing the use of residual hearing, using hearing aids or cochlear implants, in order to learn to understand speech and to learn to talk. Children are fit at the earliest possible age with amplification and obtain intensive auditory speech and language training.

### American Sign Language

A complex visual-spatial language that employs signs made with the hands and other movements, including facial expressions and postures of the body. It is a linguistically complete language. Children may learn American Sign Language (ASL) as a first language and English as a second language and/or may learn sign language simultaneously with spoken English. Spoken English and ASL, however, are not typically used at the same time, as they are distinct languages.

### Cued Speech

Cued speech is a sound-based system for visually representing spoken language, used by individuals who rely heavily upon speechreading. Cued speech uses a combination of hand shapes and spatial positioning (the cues) to resolve the confusion of sounds and words that look similar when spoken.

***“It is never too early to test a baby’s hearing”***

### Total Communication

A method typically referring to using a variety of methods which may include sign language, speech-reading, spoken language, and cued speech. In some Total Communication programs, teachers and children speak and sign at the same time. Using this approach, ASL is not the sign language used. Rather, a signed version of spoken English is used. In other Total Communication programs, communication at different times during the day is either done using ASL or spoken language.

When parents choose an auditory/verbal approach, extensive speech and language input is necessary. Learning to talk is a process that requires much time and effort. Exactly when the child will start to talk depends upon the child, the degree of hearing loss, the family’s support system, the child’s age when the hearing loss was identified and amplification provided, the benefit received from the amplification, and other factors. Parent involvement is also critical to the process.

The Children’s Communication Program at the Center for Hearing and Communication utilizes the auditory/verbal approach. The goals of this program are to:

- ▶ teach a child with hearing loss to use aided residual hearing to learn spoken language
- ▶ develop intelligible speech production
- ▶ be mainstreamed into a regular classroom setting starting in preschool
- ▶ be academically on par with hearing peers

Auditory-verbal programs should be staffed by highly trained professionals including speech-language pathologists, audiologists, educational psychologists, and teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing. This team networks with the child, family, and school staff toward the goals of spoken language development, academic competency, and emotional well being.

## The Auditory-verbal Approach with the Young Infant: Pointers for Parents

Although it may feel counterintuitive to talk to someone who you think may not hear you, in fact, the opposite is true for you and your child. Parental involvement is key to developing listening and spoken language for babies and young children with and without hearing loss. While appropriate therapy is very important, learning needs to happen all day, everyday. You are the constant in your child's life and it is essential that you learn how to make the most of your interactions with your child to facilitate development of listening, speech and spoken language. The best way to accomplish this is to be actively involved in your child's therapy sessions and to learn from the therapist(s). You will then be in the position to carry over the specific targets into everyday situations.

Everyday activities are listening and language-learning opportunities waiting to happen. The mundane chores of washing dishes, setting the table, doing the laundry or going to the grocery store can be adventures in listening and language development for your child. If you involve your child in the process, you open the doors to many wonderful language learning opportunities.

When engaging in activities or doing projects with your child remember, it is the process, not the product that is important. Your child's project may not look like a masterpiece, but remember the process is an opportunity to learn new words or concepts and practice listening and speech skills, all while having fun! Children learn best when they are excited and involved.

No one knows or cares more about your child than you do. During the formative years, you are in the best position to advocate for equipment and essential services for your child. Through your involvement in the comprehensive services offered at CHC, you will increase your awareness of your rights and the rights of your child and be empowered to advocate for the appropriate support and services available within your community.

Remember, communication is not just a science, it is an "A R T."

Follow these simple guidelines;

### **A** Auditory stimulation is key:

Present auditory stimulation first to give your baby a chance to hear something before bringing the sound into his or her line of sight. Give your baby the chance to demonstrate that that he or she understands familiar requests or words by listening alone, without the use of facial or gestural cues. If your baby does not respond after trying this a couple of times, then provide your baby with visual cues and assistance if necessary. Finally, present the words again with listening alone so that your baby can pair the auditory stimulus with its meaning.



Sing songs and use rhymes with your child. Choose a few favorites and do them routinely. Put simple actions with the songs to provide visual reinforcement such as "Itsy bitsy spider". Use classic rhymes and sing songs like "Wheels on the Bus" with your child. Pair simple actions while singing the songs because they are reinforcing and help to check your child's understanding of the words. Choose a few favorite ones and use them routinely.

### **R** Repetition:

Children learn from repeated and varied exposure to the speech directed to them. Remember to say words and phrases over and over in different contexts so that your baby has practice hearing and identifying familiar sounds. Talk through everyday routines such as feeding, dressing, and diapering. Use short, rhythmic phrases, pausing to permit your child to have a chance to respond. For example, "Let's wash your hands. We have to wash, wash, wash your hands. Look we washed your hands."

### **T** Talk, Talk, Talk:

Talking about what you are doing with your child or what you think your child is thinking provides the necessary exposure for developing understanding and use of spoken language. The number of words a child hears ultimately affects the words they produce. Talk about everything, e.g. familiar faces, names of family members, body parts, clothing, animal sounds. Always remembering to pause allows your child a chance to respond. Children's first words are typically words that permit them to make something happen within their environment. To elicit your child's first words, model power words like open, up and go away as well as action words (jumping, eating, sleeping, etc.).

## Remember:

There are many different ways of communicating. Every child is different. There is no one “right” way for all children. Regardless of which method you choose for your child, there are some important factors to remember:

- ▶ It is never too early to test a baby’s hearing.
- ▶ No baby is too young to be fit with hearing aids.
- ▶ Communication therapy can begin as soon as the hearing loss is diagnosed.
- ▶ Regardless of the mode of communication, parental and family support is key for a child to succeed.
- ▶ Involving siblings is beneficial as a sibling can act as a “mini-model” of speech and language.
- ▶ Find hope and guidance in parent support groups
- ▶ Provide your child with the social and language role models of typically hearing peers
- ▶ Learn about the value of assistive listening devices
- ▶ Include all family members in learning to communicate effectively with your child.



### *And finally . . . Some Words of Wisdom*

*Helping your child who has a hearing loss to learn to use spoken language can initially seem like a long and arduous process.*

*However, with patience, understanding and the right support, your child can learn to talk. Remember to look at your child as a child first, paying attention to all of his or her needs — not just the hearing loss. Finally, take care of yourself so that you can take care of your child.*



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## **The Center for Hearing and Communication provides:**

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- FM Evaluation & Dispensing
- Central Auditory Processing Evaluation
- Six state-of-the-art Audiological Test Suites
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### **Otology**

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### **Assistive Technology**

- Hearing Aid Dispensary
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### **Communication**

#### **Communication Evaluation & Therapy**

- Speechreading
- Auditory Training
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- Auditory-verbal speech therapy program for children
- Cochlear Implant Support
- Communication Evaluation
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- Support Group

### **Mental Health & Social Work**

- Individual, Family & Couples Psychotherapy
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### **Career Development**

- Competitive Job Placement
- On-site Communication/Technology Assessment
- Vocational Counseling
- Psychological/Vocational Counseling