

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW NOW?

QUESTIONS ABOUT COMMUNICATION

How do I communicate with my child and how will my child communicate?

Most infants and toddlers, whether they have a hearing loss or not, use their eyes, their faces, their voices, their hands, and sometimes their whole bodies to give “communication signals”. Look for these signals from your child and respond to them as communication – as your child’s way of telling you that he or she is hungry, needs a diaper change, is tired of being in the same position or maybe wants a hug and some attention. Respond using words and actions, and try to make your own communication as interesting as possible through facial expression, voice inflection, gestures and body language. You and your baby will soon begin to understand each other and communication will grow. **Topic Card #7** has more information on early communication.

How do I get my child’s attention?

You can try several approaches: use a normal tone of voice and call your child’s name, tap your child gently on the shoulder and wait for a response or move so that you can be seen. Try to be in close proximity to your child and at eye or ear level. Children respond to things that are rewarding or meaningful; have a reason for getting your child’s attention – to give a favorite toy, a bottle, a smile or a hug.

What communication options exist for my child?

Remember that communication of any kind is important and that voice, gesture, and facial expression are all forms of early communication. Communication grows when you and your baby enjoy interacting with each other. Communication options for children who are deaf and hard of hearing include Auditory/Oral or Auditory-Verbal, American Sign Language, Cued Speech, and Simultaneous Communication (signed English and speech). These communications options are often combined in ways that best match the individual needs of children and families. The terms and definitions section of this guide gives a description of each of these options.

Where can I learn more about communication choices or options?

Your deaf education parent advisor is an excellent resource. Your parent advisor can help you locate people and books that will provide more information. Talking with parents of older children who are deaf or hard of hearing, with adults who are deaf or hard of hearing, and visiting schools that serve children who are deaf or hard of hearing are also good resources. **Topic Card #8** is another resource.

If we choose a sign language option for our child, where can we learn sign language?

You may be able to include sign language instruction in your Individual Family Service Plan through ECI. Sign language classes are offered through deaf education school programs, churches, and community colleges. There are video tapes, DVDs, and books available. The opportunity to communicate on a regular basis with individuals who use sign language is one of the best ways to learn.

How will my child learn to talk if he or she can’t hear?

There is no one answer to this question. There are too many variables in hearing loss. In addition, some

people think that talking is very important and others think that being able to communicate clearly through any method is most important. In general, babies learn to talk through listening and beginning to imitate what they hear and by learning that using voice and words can get their needs met. Advances in auditory technology help many children who are deaf or hard of hearing learn to talk through the same way. For some children, learning sign language provides a first language and spoken language comes later. To encourage spoken language, put the hearing aids or cochlear implant on your child whenever he or she is awake. Make your voice interesting, talk about things that have meaning for your child and always reinforce your child's attempts to communicate with voice or words. **Topic Card #6** has more information on the relationship of hearing and child development.

QUESTIONS ABOUT HEARING

What does my child's hearing loss mean?

There are many kinds of hearing loss so hearing loss may mean different things for different children. Hearing loss can be a temporary sound conduction problem caused by a blockage in the outer or middle ear (i.e. middle ear fluid) or permanent sensory damage caused by a specific, or sometimes unknown, reason. A hearing loss may even be a combination of permanent and additional temporary components. How your child's hearing loss will affect his or her language development depends on many factors. If the hearing loss can be corrected (i.e. middle ear fluid), prompt medical treatment is the most important factor. If the hearing loss is permanent, the sooner the loss can be identified and intervention started, the better the opportunity for your child's language development. In all instances, the active involvement of parents and other caregivers in early intervention plays a critical role in development. **Topic Card #2** has more information on types and causes of hearing loss and **Topic Card #11** has more information on middle ear problems.

Will my child's hearing get better?

Improvement depends on the cause of the hearing loss. If the loss is due to a medical problem, such as middle ear fluid, it can improve and may fluctuate with the re-occurrence of the problem. If the loss is due to sensory (inner ear or cochlear) or nerve damage, it will not improve. The observed auditory response of children with Auditory Neuropathy / Auditory Dys-synchrony may vary over time. The exact mechanism is not well understood at this time.

How do I know what kind of hearing aids to get for my child?

The audiologist is the professional who recommends the type of hearing aid that will be best for your child. Hearing aids worn behind the ear are most commonly recommended for children. The technology of hearing aids will vary. Your audiologist can explain the different kinds of hearing aid circuitry such as digital, programmable and adaptive, and can recommend the aids that are best for your child's type of hearing loss. **Topic Card #3** has more information on hearing aids.

My child seems to hear without his or her hearing aids... why does the audiologist recommend wearing hearing aids?

If your child has a mild, moderate or severe hearing loss, there are sounds that he or she can hear. With some levels of hearing loss, your child may hear or be aware when people are talking. With milder loss, your child may even understand some spoken words without hearing aids. Because of the sounds that

he or she does hear, your child may turn when you call his or her name and may perhaps learn some words. This can make it very tempting to believe that hearing aids are not necessary. However, when the hearing system works as it should, a person can hear very soft sounds that vary in frequency (pitch) from extremely low frequency to extremely high frequency. If the audiologist has recommended hearing aids, it is because there are some important sounds your child is unable to hear without hearing aids. For a child who is learning language through hearing, the ability to hear all these sounds at soft levels is important for brain development and for learning complex language and developing clear speech. Young children also learn from language and conversation going on around them and any amount of hearing loss will cut down on these opportunities. Listening and learning during the infant, toddler, and preschool years are your child's best possible preparation for school and later academic learning.

What is a cochlear implant and where do I get more information?

A cochlear implant is a surgically implanted electronic device that stimulates nerve endings in the inner ear (cochlea) to receive and process sound. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provides certain guidelines for cochlear implant candidates. Your audiologist or parent advisor can provide you with additional information on cochlear implants. **Topic Card #5** has more information on cochlear implants.

How do I check my child's hearing aids to be sure they are working?

Your audiologist will show you how to care for and check your child's hearing aids. Your deaf education parent advisor will also help you learn to take care of the hearing aids. The use of a listening stethoscope and battery tester can be very helpful to ensure a hearing aid is working properly. There are many other accessories available to help keep your child's hearing aids working well such as dehumidifiers and wax-cleaning tools. Your audiologist will discuss which ones would be appropriate and help you locate such items. **Topic Card #4** has more information on tips for infant hearing aid use.

How do I check my child's cochlear implant to be sure it's working?

No one except the user of the cochlear implant can tell by listening through the device if it's working. Children even at a very young age can be taught a simple listening activity called the Ling 6 sound test that can help you know if the implant is working. In addition, each type of cochlear implant has a troubleshooting process that is useful in helping you know if the implant is working or if there may be a problem. Your audiologist, cochlear implant center, or parent advisor can help you learn these skills.

My child keeps taking the hearing aids/cochlear implant off. How can I keep them on my child?

Children will become curious or want to remove hearing aids or implants because they can, because it's a good game, or because it gets such a good response from caregivers. Covering up the hearing aid or implant with a hair band or hat and finding ways to distract your child with favorite toys may work. Teach your child the hearing aid or implant must be left on, just as you teach him or her not to touch breakables. Try not to let it become a "power struggle" between you and your child. As your child gets older, help him or her learn that if there is a problem with the hearing aids or implant or they need to be taken off for any reason, your child should come to you and let you remove or check the device. To prevent loss, the best strategy is to attach the hearing aids or implant to the child's clothing by use of a string and clip. There are several types of anchoring devices that your audiologist or parent advisor can tell you about.



My child's hearing aids are always buzzing/squealing. What causes this?

The squealing noise is called feedback. It can be caused by an earmold that isn't in the ear correctly, by an earmold that is too small, by a crack in the tube that goes between the earmold and the hearing aid, or by an actual malfunction of the hearing aid.

How do I make the feedback stop?

Try pushing on or reinserting the earmold. If this does not take care of the problem, contact your audiologist to determine what the actual cause is and what needs to be done. Your parent advisor can also help you learn some basic troubleshooting procedures to determine the reason for the feedback. Don't turn down the volume on the hearing aids lower than the recommended setting as a solution. This may stop the feedback, but your child will not be able to hear.

How long do hearing aid batteries last and where can I purchase them?

Hearing aid batteries last approximately one to two weeks depending on the type of hearing aid and how long your child wears it each day. Batteries can be purchased at local drug stores, your audiology or hearing aid clinic, and grocery stores. The best prices may be found in large, one-stop-shopping stores.

How long do cochlear implant batteries last and where can I purchase them?

Battery life for cochlear implants varies among manufacturers, users, MAPs (individual implant processor program), and battery type. Batteries can last from four hours to four days. There are rechargeable as well as disposable batteries available for the different implants. Batteries can be purchased from the implant company or from your cochlear implant audiologist.

Where can I send old, outgrown, unused and broken hearing aid(s)?

There are many nonprofit organizations that accept old hearing aids. The aids are re-conditioned and sold at a discounted fee to people needing financial assistance. You can also donate them to your local audiology or hearing aid dispensing clinic, which may provide a similar service.

QUESTIONS ABOUT SERVICES

What are early intervention services?

Early intervention services are developmental services designed to meet the needs of an infant or toddler with a disability. The term most commonly refers to federally mandated, state provided services for children, ages birth to three years. Children who have a disability, including hearing loss, may be eligible for a wide array of early intervention services. In Texas, the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services Early Childhood Intervention (DARS-ECI) is the state agency that coordinates early intervention services and the services are often called ECI services. DARS-ECI works collaboratively with the Texas Education Agency, local education agencies [LEA(school district)], and the Texas School for the Deaf to provide services specifically designed to assist families with infants and toddlers who are deaf or hard of hearing. **Topic Card #10** provides additional information on early intervention.

What is a Parent Advisor?

A parent advisor is a certified teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing employed by a local education agency [LEA(school district)], Regional Day School Program for the Deaf, or Texas School for the Deaf. Parent



advisors have experience in providing deaf education early intervention services to families of infants and toddlers who are deaf or hard of hearing. Parent advisors work in partnership with local ECI programs. See **Topic Card #10** for additional information.

What is an IFSP? Who writes it?

An IFSP is an Individual Family Service Plan that outlines all the services a child and his or her family will receive through Early Childhood Intervention. The plan is developed by a team which includes your family and professionals. For children who have a hearing loss, a teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing (parent advisor) is included in the IFSP team. The IFSP states the outcomes that you want for your child's development and includes the services and strategies that you and your professionals think will help your child achieve these outcomes.

Is there any financial assistance to help pay for my child's hearing aid(s)?

Your audiologist or the business office of your audiology clinic can discuss payment options with you. You should also check with your insurance company to see if they provide coverage for all or part of your expenses. Early Childhood Intervention, Easter Seals, local churches and other community organizations may also provide help with the expenses. The Program for Amplification for Children of Texas (PACT) is a state funded program through the Texas Department of State Health Services that provides hearing aids and related services to families who meet financial guidelines. There are PACT providers throughout the state. See the State Resources section of this guide for contact information.

Can hearing aids be insured?

Hearing aids are expensive. You can purchase loss and damage insurance on your child's hearing aid(s). This is sometimes offered through the hearing aid manufacturer or can be purchased separately. Your audiologist can give you the names of companies that specialize in hearing aid insurance or check with your own insurance company. If you get your hearing aids through PACT, you may still want to purchase insurance so that you can replace the aids if they are lost.

Is there any financial assistance to help pay for or insure my child's cochlear implant?

Medicaid and many U.S. healthcare providers cover some of the cost of the implant, the surgical procedure, and associated care. Each cochlear implant manufacturer provides warranty programs. Discuss the specifics of each program with the implant company or your audiologist. Insurance can also be purchased for the devices, sometimes through homeowner's insurance, sometimes through the manufacturer or through an insurance company that sells specialized cochlear implant insurance. Your implant center can give you information about your options. The repair and/or replacement of external implant components may be covered under the warranty or the insurance program. Some private insurance companies will pay for batteries and replacement parts. Check your individual policy for information.

Are there any support groups for parents with infants who are deaf or hard of hearing?

Your parent advisor or ECI service coordinator can help you locate a support group in your area. There are also state and national resources and organizations that provide information and support. See the Resources section of this guide for more details.



How can I meet adults who are deaf or hard of hearing?

Your parent advisor can put you in contact with individuals or groups of individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. Local deaf education programs, community agencies, organizations and churches which provide services for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing are other good resources. See Resources section of this guide. **Topic Card #9** provides more information on Deaf Culture.

What resources and organizations provide additional information on hearing loss and deafness, and how do I contact them?

There are national, state and local resources and organizations. See the Resources section of this guide for national and state resources. Your deaf education early intervention parent advisor and your ECI service coordinator can assist you in finding local resources.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

After early intervention, then what?

Services for deaf or hard of hearing children and/or other special education services are available through your location education agency [LEA(school district)], local Regional Day School Program for the Deaf (RDSPD), and Texas School for the Deaf from age 3 through age 21. Transition to these services is coordinated by your local ECI program and your LEA prior to age 3. Eligibility for services is determined through a full individual evaluation provided by the LEA. Recommended services are outlined on an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Parents are always part of this IEP team (in Texas this process is referred to as Admission, Referral, and Dismissal or ARD). Since IEPs are written to meet individual needs, services will be different for each child. Your parent advisor is also a good source of information on school services in your area for children who are deaf/hard of hearing. See State Resources section of this guide for additional educational information resources.

Where will my child attend school?

The answer to this question is different for each child. The goal is to match the needs of your child with a school setting (placement) in which he or she can learn, communicate fully, and develop friendships. From birth to age 3, most early intervention services are provided in your home or other natural settings. The IFSP team may at times recommend settings to meet very specific needs (e.g. communication needs) or you may choose to participate in your own community-based activities, such as a local parent's day out or toddler program in your neighborhood. From age 3 to 21 your child may be eligible for services for deaf or hard of hearing children or other special education services through your school district. (See After early intervention services, then what?) Your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) will determine the most appropriate school placement to match your child's learning needs or you may choose that your child not receive special education services.

If I have more children, could they have a hearing loss or be deaf too?

The chances of having another child with a hearing loss will depend on the cause of your child's hearing loss. Some hearing losses are genetic and others are not. Your physician is the best source of information and/or referral for genetic counseling.



Can my child watch TV and movies? How?

Your child can listen to TV using his or her hearing aid, cochlear implant or some other type of assistive listening devices. With some levels of hearing loss, hearing the TV will be difficult. Another option is closed-caption TV in which all the dialogue is printed at the bottom of the TV screen. All newer TVs have built in closed-caption; caption devices can be purchased for older TVs. Most movie theaters have listening devices to loan during a movie. Occasionally, a movie theater will offer a captioned film.

How can people who are deaf wake up to go to work? Talk on the phone?

There are a variety of alerting devices such as flashing signal alarm clocks, signaling lights, vibrating pillows, vibrating alarms under the mattress, etc. There are also a lot of options for telephone communication. Depending on the level of hearing loss and/or personal preference, a person may use a telephone amplifier, a TDD (which provides a text version of the conversation when the second party also has a TDD) or Relay Texas which provides a third party operator to relay information between the person who is deaf and a person who is hearing. Technology such as the videophone, video relay, computers, and wireless devices have added an additional array of communication options.

Will my child have friends?

Yes, of course. Your neighborhood may provide many opportunities for your child to play with other children whether they have a hearing loss or not. Children communicate with each other in many ways. You can join a parent support group that encourages activities with children.

How will my child learn to drive?

Statistics prove that people who are deaf are among the safest drivers on the road. Special accommodation, such as an interpreter, may be needed for the driving test.

What legal rights does my child have and what are my rights as a parent of a child with a disability?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are two laws that provide for children and adults who have disabilities. Your ECI program, and later your school district, will provide you with a copy of your rights as a parent under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). You may also obtain information through the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services Early Childhood Intervention (DARS-ECI) and the Texas Education Agency. See state resources section of this guide.