

Sound Advice:

A parent's guide to
communicating
with your deaf child



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The Ear Foundation

This booklet has been written for families of young children who use hearing technologies, such as hearing aids, cochlear implants or bone anchored hearing systems.

As parents, you have chosen hearing technology for your child because you want them to enjoy the many sounds around them, but most of all, because you want them to learn to talk.

Hearing technologies mean that children can hear talking better than ever before. But children won't start talking just because they now have some hearing.

In this booklet you will find out:

- ▶ How you can help your child to listen and talk by considering the way you talk and what you talk about
- ▶ How to match words to your child's thoughts by watching, waiting and responding
- ▶ How to create opportunities for your child to listen and talk using everyday routines
- ▶ Using structured material to help your child can also be a good idea. Your audiologist will know much more

How can I help my child to talk?

Parents and family members are always the child's first and best language teachers. That's because they spend more time with the child than anyone else, and children need to hear lots of talk, over and over again in order to understand and talk themselves.

It is easy to feel guilty that you haven't spent enough time playing with special toys or other activities. But as important as they are, try not to worry - communication is most effective if it becomes part of your daily routine.

Try to be patient and realistic. Some hearing babies learn to talk quicker than others and children wearing hearing technology will be just the same!

If you are concerned though, do talk to your local professionals.

My child can now hear so won't they learn how to listen and talk like hearing children do?

Today's hearing technologies give children the access to sound that they need for listening and talking, and some children can do well without any special planning. Children who use hearing technology need to learn to pick out voices from all the other sounds around them – and this is not easy in the noisy world that we live in!

All hearing technologies use microphones to pick up sounds, so children will learn to listen better when those talking to them are close by, and when the environment is quiet.

You can do this by cutting down on background noise, by turning the TV off unless you are watching it, and by switching off other noisy devices when you're not using them.

Simple things you can do



Children who use hearing technologies hear better the closer you are to the microphone – **so get close.**



Facial expressions make you much more interesting to listen to – **so smile!**



Interesting voices are so much better to listen to – **so use a singsong voice!**



Use lots of gestures to get your message across. **Some parents find using signs to support spoken language helpful.**

Communication from an early age

Young children want to communicate with those around them from a really early age – that’s because they have lots to think about and lots to tell us.

And children start to communicate with those around them from the minute they are born. As they grow – the things they want to tell us about become more sophisticated, and the ways in which they communicate become more sophisticated too. So babies express themselves using cries, noises and non-verbal behaviours, and older children use words, phrases and sentences.

Children communicate for lots of different reasons. Some examples might be:

TO REQUEST – Mine, Give me, I want it/ I want some more

TO REJECT – No! Go away! I don’t want it/ I don’t like it

TO GET ATTENTION – Look, Mummy! Daddy!

TO GET INFORMATION – What’s that?

TO MAKE A COMMENT – That’s dirty! Hot!

TO ASK FOR HELP – Open

TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS – I’m sad



Asking for help: Lift it up!

Joshua is 2. His parents have fitted a stair gate, and Mum finds herself having to open it many times each day when Joshua wants to go up to his bedroom – which drives her crazy!

Joshua’s Mum realised that this stair gate routine was a great “opportunity” for communication.

Joshua asked Mum for help to open the stair gate by leading her to it and pointing.

Mum puts words onto Joshua’s thoughts – saying “lift it up” every time this happened. Over a few weeks, Joshua started to make sounds to ask for help, and these sounds became more like words as time went on.



Matching thoughts with words

Children learn words quickly when the words they hear match their thoughts!

Asking for more – Sophie is one year old and she loves to play “Row, row, row your boat” with her Granny. She lets Granny know that she wants to play by grabbing Granny’s hands and swaying back and forth to start the game.

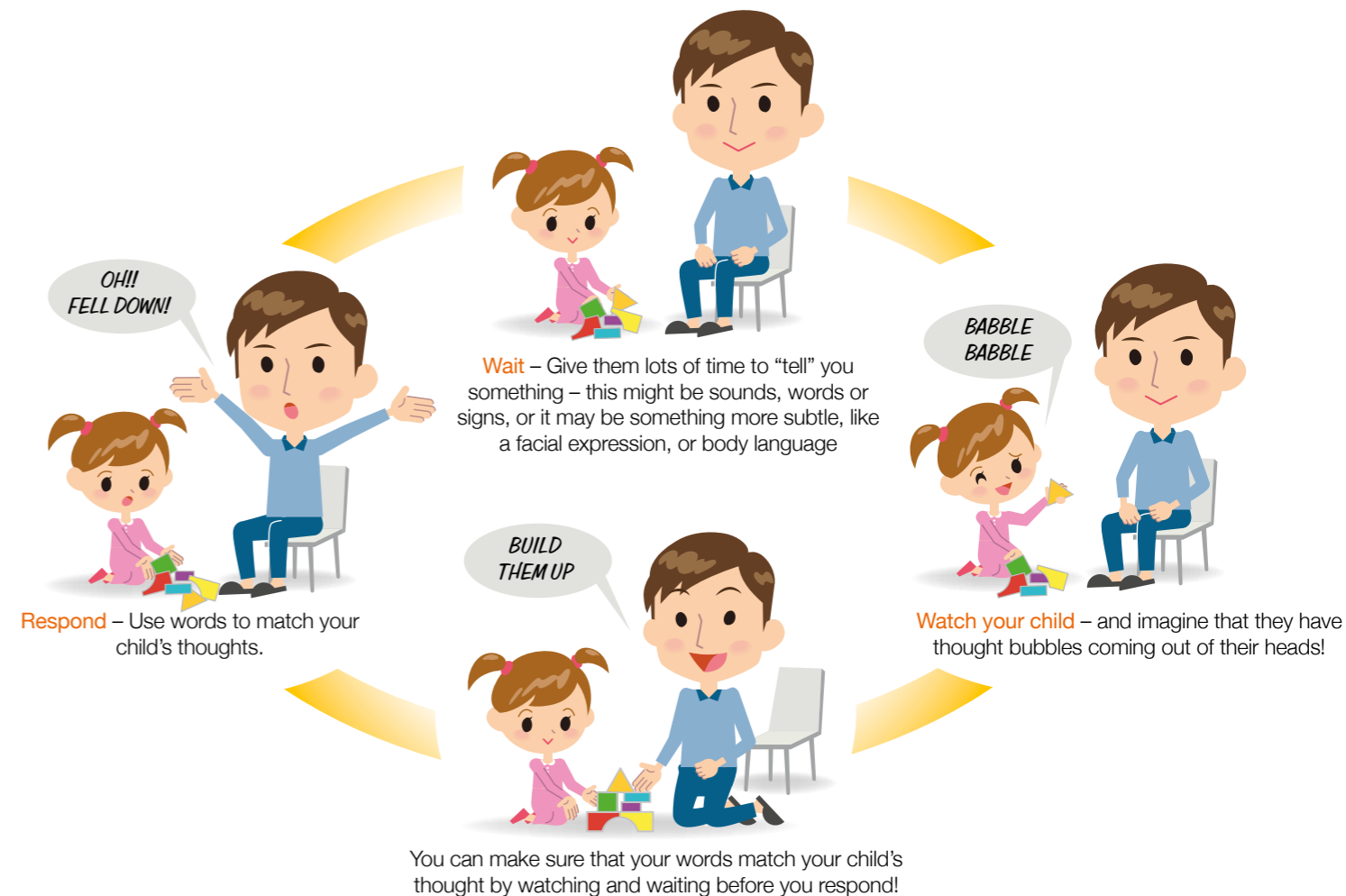
Expressing feelings – Max is 9 months old, he gets sad and worried when Mum leaves the room, so he shouts really loud and cries for her until she comes back.

Making a comment – Harry is in love with fire engines – and every time he sees one he points to it and gets so excited he practically falls out of his pushchair!

You can make sure that your words match your child’s thought by watching and waiting before you respond!

Get Information; Gone?

Thomas has a favourite toy, which is always kept in his toy box. Mum moves it to a different place, so Thomas can’t find it. He looks puzzled and gestures “gone”.



Using everyday routines for developing, listening and talking

Children with hearing technologies will learn to communicate, listen and talk if they have . . .

. . . the opportunities to listen to lots of talk every day from those around them

. . . the opportunities to communicate for themselves.

This may sound difficult and you may be concerned that you don't have the skills or experience.

However, doing the things that you and your child enjoy, and using the things you have to do every day, whether you like them or not, are the best ways to encourage communication – here's how!

Parents spend a huge amount of time with their children.

Think about how much of that time is spent doing the ordinary things like eating or changing nappies and the number of things you find yourself saying over and over again!



Repetition

Repetition is vital for language learning. Think of how many times a baby has to hear the word “mummy” before he or she says it for the first time.

Routines

Routines have the same sequence to them, and are highly predictable. This means that routines are the best way of using the same words over and over again – which is just what your child needs to learn those words.

Keep talking

The other great thing about using routines is that you will never run out of things to talk about and the talk will go alongside the things you are doing.

You may get bored, but your child won't – and you don't need any special equipment!

Requesting: Bike please! My turn!

Jack loves to play outside at nursery and he loves to play on one particular tricycle. He expressed this desire by standing close to the door, and then pushing past all the other children to race to the tricycle.

His nursery teachers realised that this tricycle was Jack's motivator for communication. They put words to his thoughts by putting a photo of the bike by the door. Jack quickly learnt to point to the pictures and say “bike please” to get what he wanted so desperately!

Making a comment: Urgh! Dirty!

Jenny likes to eat jam sandwiches, but hates getting her hands dirty! She holds out her hands to Mum to show how messy she is!

Mum puts sounds and words to Jenny's thoughts – “Urgh!” “Dirty!”

● Create opportunities

You can help your child to make the most of their hearing all day long by giving them lots of opportunities to communicate.

Children want to communicate with those around them.

Sometimes though, children find it difficult to express their thoughts – maybe they haven't got the words to say yet, or they haven't been given the opportunities to express themselves.

Parents and family members can create opportunities for children to communicate and give them the words they need to say by matching thoughts with words.

You can create opportunities for communication by:

Waiting

The best communication happens when you take it in turns to listen and talk. Your child needs to know that you are waiting for them to take their turn in the communication before you respond – so wait with expectation for them to communicate with you in some way.

Motivating

All children will have lots of things that really motivate them to communicate. It may be a favourite toy or activity. Try and work out what's really motivating your child and give them the words they need to say.

You can use these motivators to create opportunities for children to:

Request

Reject

Get attention

Get information

Make a comment

Ask for help.



Getting attention: Daddy! Mummy!

Sarah is 2. She has always been able to get her mum and dad's attention by tapping them, in the same way as they have done with her.

Now she has her cochlear implants, she is beginning to understand that she can use her voice to get people's attention.

Mum and Dad show Sarah how to use her voice to get attention by putting words to her thoughts and waiting for her to use her voice before they give her the attention she craves.

Toys and games

Although all children are different there are some toys and games that create opportunities for children to communicate better than others – but do remember, it's NOT the toy that makes the play special, it's having an adult who is interested in playing that makes all the difference.

Your child has probably got favourite toys and games that they find more interesting than others.

But, be a little careful with toys that they play with happily for ages without needing or even wanting anyone else to join in, especially if they are silent during the activity – these sorts of toys aren't so good for communication!

Books

Books are great for creating communication opportunities. Books are actually a type of routine – the pictures are always in the same order and the stories are simple with lots of repetition.



Rhymes and Action Songs

Songs are wonderful for encouraging children to join in and use their voices, and it really doesn't matter if you haven't got a brilliant singing voice, just as long as you look as if you are enjoying yourself! If you can't remember any children's songs, take a look on the Internet – there are lots on You Tube!

Co-operative Games

There are lots of games and activities where children need an adult's help to make them fun and these often create great communication opportunities. Think about things like:

Bubbles

Balloons

Party blowers

Hiding games

Rough and tumble, tickle games.



Helping

Children love to do the same things that you do! You can create opportunities for communication when your child helps out doing things like baking a cake, cleaning the car or tidying things away. Although it might take longer, you will be giving your child real everyday experiences they can talk about.

These are just a few ideas to help you. You will find out plenty more by talking to your teachers and therapists, and from other parents, who will be able to tell you what worked for them and their child.





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