

Navigating the Communication Maze

For hundreds of years, people have debated the best ways to provide communication skills and education for deaf and hard-of-hearing children. Parent Links will not attempt to resolve this issue.

Here are a few things that scientific and health professionals, educators, and experienced parents usually agree on:

- The earlier deafness or hearing loss is identified, the better chances a child has to acquire language, whether spoken or signed. In 1993, NIDCD released a Consensus Statement on identifying deafness in children. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, American Society for Deaf Children, and the National Association of the Deaf all have information on this topic.
- Each child is unique. It is important to understand the full nature and extent of a child's hearing loss or deafness. It is also important to understand how each family member and caregiver will communicate with the child. Get to know the services that are provided in your community for children in preschool and elementary school.
- Optimizing residual hearing may be advantageous. Children may benefit from hearing aids or cochlear implants. This is a decision that you should discuss with your child's health care providers.
- Exploring the options and, if possible, working with professionals in teams can be beneficial. Your child may visit a pediatrician, an otolaryngologist, an audiologist, and/or a speech-language pathologist. Ask each to keep the others informed about your child's visits. Coordinated care can be a big help to you and your child.
- It is important to interact often with your deaf or hard-of-hearing infant by holding, facing, smiling, and responding to your infant from the very beginning. All of the caregivers in the child's life should keep interacting with him or her. Children need love, encouragement, and care from their families.

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