



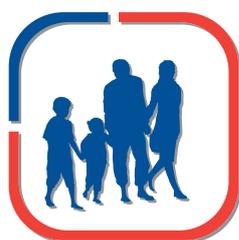
# DeafHearie

Services for Deaf & Hard of Hearing People



## Parenting and Early Childhood Development

A Factsheet for Parents of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children



## Parents Corner



# Parenting and Early Childhood Development

## Introduction

This factsheet aims to provide parents with information on the development of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and some guidance on what they can do to enhance their child's development. DeafHear believes that with early diagnosis and intervention, Deaf and Hard of Hearing children can progress at the same rate as their hearing peers if they do not have any additional developmental difficulties. If your child's hearing loss has been diagnosed late or has some additional difficulties that can affect learning, then it may be difficult for your child to make progress at the same pace as hearing peers with similar abilities.

It is important to remember that each child is different and every family is different. There is no absolute right or wrong way to parent a child with hearing loss: personality and temperament of both parent and child, and the wider environment, are factors that can influence your child's development. The most important thing for most parents to do is to get sufficient information to ensure that they can provide the best support possible to their child.

The factsheet **Communication and Your Child** outlines the importance of communication for a Deaf or Hard of Hearing child's development. It provides general ideas and guidance for supporting the development of your child's communication skills through everyday activities such as play, mealtimes and daily routines. Using research and experience, this 'Parenting and Early Childhood Development' factsheet focuses on providing more specific guidance on parent behaviours that are effective in supporting the development of children with hearing loss. Additional factsheets provide further parent information for children of specific ages.



## Remember! Deaf and Hard of Hearing children are children first!

The first thing to remember is that your Deaf or Hard of Hearing child has the same needs as other children... the need for love, nurture, play, opportunities to learn and so on. Your child's age, the level of your child's hearing loss and your child's temperament are all factors that may help determine how best you can support your child. If your child has other difficulties that affect learning, these issues must also be considered in terms of how best you can support your child and how you can expect your child to make progress.

As a parent you should naturally have hopes and expectations for your child's future. You (and the State) have the same duties and responsibilities to provide your Deaf or Hard of Hearing child with equal opportunities to grow and develop as other children. DeafHear believes that children who have been diagnosed early in life and have no other issues that affect their learning, should achieve the same level of skill as hearing children of similar ability in all areas of their development, including language and education.

For most parents, parenting is intuitive and instinctive... as nature and experience combine to enable the vast majority of parents to care for their children without any formal training or qualifications! However, for parents of children with hearing loss, especially hearing parents, parenting behaviours may need to be adapted if they are to be as effective as possible in supporting their child's development. It is therefore helpful for parents to have an understanding of what behaviours are most effective in supporting the development of their child with hearing loss (See 'A Good Start' section for some specific examples of parent behaviours that are effective in the development of communication and language in young children with hearing loss).

Children learn through a combination of using their own abilities combined with the support of others around them. For most children, learning in the early years occurs naturally and is mainly facilitated through their abilities to think, hear and see. This learning is supported and enhanced through the encouragement, guidance and safe environment provided by their parents. The same is true for children with hearing loss, though their parents may need to adapt their behaviour to maximise their child's development.



# A Good Start

## Early Communication with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Babies

Patricia Elizabeth Spencer's (2001) article 'A Good Start: Suggestions for Visual Conversations with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Babies and Toddlers' provides examples of parent behaviours that have been identified as effective in supporting the development of communication and language in young children with hearing loss. These parent behaviours were identified through studying families with young babies, including babies with full hearing and babies with hearing loss. The following extract focuses on behaviours that help babies see the communication and language that a parent is using:

- A) **Especially with a young baby, often move your hand or body so the baby can see your communication while still looking at a toy or activity.**  
'Whether the message is signed or spoken, it is helpful for the child to be able to see the face and the body of the person who is sending the message'
- B) **Move an object (such as a toy) in front of the baby and then move it up toward your own face — when the baby can see your face and the object, communicate about it.**  
'This is most effective when a mother moves an object that she and the baby have been playing with together'
- C) **Tap on an object, perhaps several times, before and after you communicate something about it.**  
'Pointing to or tapping directly on an object before saying or signing something about it shows the baby exactly what the mother's language means'
- D) **Tap on the baby to signal, "Look at me"**  
'Parents need to know, though, that babies don't start out understanding the tapping signal. They have to learn it means, "Look at me"'
- E) **Relax — wait for the baby to look up on her own.**  
'This may require a lot of patience, because some babies will not often look up. But, when a mother communicates in an interesting and responsive way during the times that a baby does decide to look up, it is like giving the baby a reward: It encourages looking up in the future' (Spencer, 2001)



# A Good Start

If a child is unable to hear, parents will need to adapt some of their parenting behaviours if they are to provide the best support possible to nurture their child's development.

The following scenarios illustrate different parenting behaviour that supports young children's development: the first involves a young hearing child and his mother, the second and third involve a young child with hearing loss and his mother.



## Scenario One

Sean is aged two, his hearing is normal and he is playing on the floor with a small red car. His mother Ann is sitting on a chair, and she is watching him. As Sean moves the car along the ground, Ann is saying 'Oh you clever boy, you are driving the car!' Sean continues to play with the car. Ann says 'Very good. You are a great driver!'

Sean looks up to his mother, she smiles broadly and says 'Good boy!' Ann waits for a few seconds, Sean looks to the car, points at it and says 'Ca!' Ann says 'Yes! The car! That's your lovely red car!'

**Now, let us analyse these interactions between mother and child to see how Ann is supporting her child's development:**

Sean is aged two, and he is playing on the floor with a small red car. His mother Ann is sitting on a chair, and she is watching him. Ann is attentive to her child: she is watching him and she is aware of what he is doing. This is a good start to supporting a child's development while he is playing!

As Sean moves the car along the ground, Ann is saying 'Oh you clever boy, you are driving the car!' Sean continues

to play with the car. Ann says 'Very good. You are a great driver!': By naming what Sean is doing, Ann is supporting the development of Sean's concentration skills and language. Also, by using a positive tone in her voice, she is nurturing Sean's self-esteem and confidence ('Oh you clever boy').

Sean looks up to his mother, Ann smiles broadly and says 'Good boy!' Ann waits for a few seconds, Sean looks to the car, points at it and says 'Ca!' Ann says 'Yes! The car! It's a lovely red car!': Ann provides more emotional support to her child through her smile, eye contact and positive tone of voice. Although Sean does not say 'car' perfectly, she does not correct him. She repeats his words and builds on them, and encourages him to continue to play with the car ('Yes! The car! It's a lovely red car!')

Through her behaviour in this typical situation, Ann is supporting her child's language, cognitive and emotional development.

# A Good Start

## Scenario 2

Tom is aged two, he has a severe hearing loss, he wears hearing aids and he is playing on the floor with a small red car. His mother Jean is sitting on a chair, and she is watching him. As Tom moves the car along the ground, Jean is saying 'Oh you clever boy, you are driving the car!' Tom stops playing with the car and looks at his mother blankly. Jean says 'Very good! You are a great driver!'

Tom drops the car on the floor and goes to look out the window. Jean picks up the car and holds it out for Tom to take it. Jean says 'Here is your car Tom' but he shows no more interest in it and stares out the window.

### Now, let us analyse these interactions between mother and child to see how Jean is supporting her child's development:

Tom is aged two, he has a severe hearing loss, he wears hearing aids and he is playing on the floor with a small red car. His mother Jean is sitting on a chair, and she is watching him: Jean is attentive to her child: she is watching him and she is aware of what he is doing. This is generally a good start to supporting a child's development while at play.

However, Jean is sitting on a chair, and Tom is playing on the floor. Seeing his mother's face is important for Tom to understand what his mother is saying to him, so while he is playing on the floor he will have to look upwards to communicate. This is more likely to interrupt his play and concentration. It would be easier for Tom to communicate with his mother if she was sitting on the floor at his eye level, and this would also make it easier for him to continue playing with his car.

As Tom moves the car along the ground, Jean is saying 'Oh you clever boy, you are driving the car!' Tom stops playing with the car and looks at his mother blankly. Jean says 'Very good! You are a great driver!': By naming what Tom is doing, Jean is trying to support the development of Tom's concentration skills and language. In fact Jean is anxious to support Tom's language skills because of his hearing loss, and she feels that she talks more to him than she did with her older hearing child.

However, Tom does not understand what his mother is saying to him while he is playing with the car. He is aware that she is talking to him as he can hear sounds through his hearing aids, and he stops playing to turn to look at her. He recognises the words 'boy' and 'car', but he does not understand the rest.

Tom drops the car on the floor and goes to look out the window. Jean picks up the car and holds it out for Tom to take it. Jean says 'Here is your car Tom' but he shows no more interest in it and stares out the window: Tom has seen a fleeting shadow at the window, and goes over to see what it was... perhaps a person walking by or a bird in the air. Whatever it was is gone! His mother is holding the car...but Tom is wondering what he saw out the window. Jean wants to encourage Tom to continue playing with his car, but his attention seems to have strayed.

Overall, Jean is trying just as hard, maybe harder, than Ann to support her son Tom's development – especially his language. However, in the scenario described, she has less success than Ann in supporting her child's language, cognitive and emotional development.



# A Good Start

## Scenario 3

Conor is aged two, he has a severe hearing loss, he wears hearing aids and he is playing on the floor with a small red car. His mother Sarah is sitting on the floor in front of him and she is watching him. As Conor moves the car along the ground, Sarah continues watching him. After a moment or two, Conor lifts up the car showing it to his mother, smiles and says 'Ca!' Sarah smiles back at him, points to the car and says 'Yes Conor, the car!'

Sarah waits as Conor looks again at the car, turning it in his hands. After a moment he looks at his mother and holds up the car again. He then points to the car with his other hand and says 'Ca!' Sarah smiles at him and says again 'Yes Conor, the car!' as she points at the car. Then Sarah points to Conor, smiles and says 'Conor is a clever boy!'

**Now, let us analyse these interactions between Sarah and her child to see how she is supporting her child's development:**

Conor is aged two, he has a severe hearing loss, he wears hearing aids and he is playing on the floor with a small red car. His mother Sarah is sitting on the floor in front of him and she is watching him: Sarah is attentive to her child: she is watching him and she is aware what he is doing. This is a good start to supporting a child's development while he is at play!

Sarah is also sitting on the floor, so Conor can easily make eye contact and see her face to support communication and emotional sharing. As Conor moves the car along the ground, Sarah continues watching him. After a moment or two, Conor lifts up the car showing it to his mother, smiles and says 'Ca!' Sarah smiles back at him, points to the car and says 'Yes Conor, the car!':

By waiting, Sarah is allowing Conor to concentrate on his play with the car. Sarah is aware that if she speaks to him he will look to her and stop what he is doing. Sarah is supporting the development of Conor's concentration skills.

When Conor looks to her and says 'Ca', she is ready as she is at his level and facing him. She smiles at him and responds 'Yes Conor, the car!' By doing so Sarah is supporting the development of Conor's self esteem and language. By using his name frequently she is encouraging him to respond to his name and to pay attention to what is being said to him.

Using and repeating familiar words at this young age is especially helpful in encouraging communication and language development in young children with hearing loss. Sarah is conscious not to use too many words that may confuse him and disturb his play time. Also, by pointing to the car, Sarah is making it easier for her son to understand what she is saying by making clear what she is talking about.

Sarah waits as Conor looks again at the car, turning it in his hands. After a moment he looks at his mother and holds up the car again. He then points to the car with his other hand and says 'Ca!' Sarah smiles at him and says again 'Yes Conor, the car!' as she points at the car. Then Sarah points to Conor, smiles and says 'Conor is a clever boy!'

Again Sarah supports her son's concentration skills by waiting and allowing him to continue playing with the car. After he points and says 'Ca!' again, she supports his language and emotional development by repeating 'Yes Conor, the car!' Sarah builds on this by pointing to Conor and saying 'Conor is a clever boy!'

Overall, Sarah has more success than Jean in supporting her son's development. In the scenario, her son is playing, and she is conscious that play should be enjoyable. She tries to avoid difficult language that may confuse him and spoil his playtime, but nonetheless she actively supports his emotional, cognitive and language development.



# A Good Start

## Scenarios Summary:

1. Parenting behaviours that support the development of young hearing children may need to be adapted to support the development of children with hearing loss.
2. It is difficult or impossible for some children with hearing loss to hear and understand speech when they are not looking at the speaker. Therefore it would be unhelpful to speak to those children when they are not looking at the speaker.
3. For a young child with hearing loss, using their name encourages them to attend to people who are communicating with them. If you want to get your child's attention, use their name and wait until they look to you before continuing!
4. For a young child with hearing loss, gestures and pointing can be especially useful to support communication.
5. All of the above guidelines apply to children who use speech, sign language or a combination of both.

For further information on parenting young children with hearing loss, see the Parents Corner Factsheets on Child Development, which provide more detailed guidance on specific stages of child development.



## References

Spencer, P.E. (2001, Gallaudet University) **A Good Start: Suggestions for Visual Conversations with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Babies and Toddlers**, (sourced on 31/07/2011 at: <http://www.gallaudet.edu/documents/clerc/visual-conversations.pdf> )

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