

How Hearing Loss Affects Communication

How does hearing loss affect the ability to communicate?

Hearing loss can affect a child's development of speech and language skills. When a child has difficulty hearing, the areas of the brain related to communication may not fully develop. This makes learning to talk very difficult. However, with early intervention and the help of their caregivers, children with hearing loss can learn to become effective communicators.

Many children with hearing loss are identified through a screening at birth. Other children are not identified until speech and language skills do not develop at a normal rate.

What can cause a hearing loss?

Hearing loss can be caused by a variety of factors, including:

- genetics (Hearing loss is a feature of many known syndromes.)
- drugs or alcohol during pregnancy
- ototoxic drugs
- prenatal illness
- prematurity
- trauma
- illness



What are the factors that influence the development of speech and language for a child with a hearing loss?

There is variation in the rate of speech and language development among all typically developing children. However, several factors related to the hearing loss can also affect the rate of communication development. These include the following:

- type and degree of hearing loss
- age at identification of the hearing loss
- frequency of the loss (if it is a fluctuating conductive loss)
- type of treatment that is received

What are some of the speech and language challenges for children with hearing loss?

Children with hearing loss may have difficulty with the following aspects of communication:

- understanding the speech of others
- communicating in noisy places
- expressing themselves
- using correct grammar
- developing vocabulary skills
- developing speech that is not hard to understand

- listening and learning in a classroom
- learning to read
- interacting with peers or making friends due to troubles with understanding games, rules, and directions
- maintaining attention and controlling behavior.

What is the treatment for speech and language impairment for hearing loss?

Without intervention, children with hearing loss will not develop speech and language skills in the same way as their hearing peers. A child with hearing loss should have a speech and language evaluation as soon as the hearing loss is diagnosed. Speech therapy may be needed. Therapy helps the child and family learn strategies to help develop the brain centers needed for communication.

The speech-language pathologist may incorporate many listening games at first. Improved listening skills are important for progress towards speech and language development. Intensive practice of auditory, speech, and language skills learned during therapy helps the child make progress. In the same way, daily practice at home between speech therapy sessions has a significant effect on progress and the ultimate outcome.

What can parents do to help?

- If the child has hearing aids, make sure he or she always wears them.
- Participate in therapy with the child. Parents are the child's best support and teachers.
- Let the speech-language pathologist guide the family in ways to use language strategies at home.
- Use the speech and language stimulation techniques with the child during routines every day. Interact with books daily to help build the child's vocabulary and language.

Practice speech and language skills at home frequently every day.

Talk to the speech-language pathologist when there are questions.

Websites on hearing loss:

- Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center – Hearing Loss: <http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/health/info/speech/diagnose/hearing-loss.htm>
- Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: <http://www.agbell.org/>
- My Baby's Hearing: <http://www.babyhearing.org/>

For more information, please contact the Division of Speech Pathology at (513) 636-4341 or visit our website at www.cincinnatichildrens.org/speech.