

## Family responsibility

Raising a child who is deaf or hard of hearing: It's a family affair

**W**hen you discover your child has a hearing loss, your life changes forever. As your child's first and lifelong teacher, you will need to learn about hearing, communication, language development, how hearing loss impacts your family, and your child's unique needs.

Though this journey may be initially overwhelming, there are resources available to help you make decisions to ensure your child's success. It's important to remember you are not alone.

All families face challenges along their journeys. Families with children who are deaf or hard of hearing face challenges different from those of their extended family and friends.

Communication decisions are key for the child and the entire family. Unlike their typically hearing peers, children with hearing loss have limited access to incidental learning, which means they learn very little by "overhearing" what others are saying and accidentally learning language. For this reason, it's imperative everyone in the family understands how hearing loss impacts a child's access to communication.

Patience, a willingness to learn, and determination will serve you and your child well. Remember, your child is an important member of your family and community. Make sure they know it by including them and ensuring they have access to all communication.

### Model self-advocacy skills

You quickly learn your child needs help navigating life. This is no different for children with hearing loss, who need support to access communication. Once you understand what your child needs, it's important to share that information with other people in your family's circle and beyond. Teaching others about hearing loss and your child's needs is the first step to teaching your child how to self-advocate, a necessary life skill.

When you encounter someone who is new to your child's life explain hearing loss in simple terms and encourage the person to:

- Get your child's attention before speaking
- Face your child to provide access to facial cues
- Speak at a natural volume, don't shout; speaking loudly can cause distortion
- Don't over-enunciate
- Check for understanding

Though it may not seem possible when you have a very young child, it won't be long before your child will be able to explain his or her own needs to those around them. Modeling good advocacy skills and self-confidence early and often will pay off later on.