

chapter 7:

a full life for your child

RECOGNISING THE POSSIBILITIES

After you've had some time to think about the news of your child's hearing loss and what steps you want to take next, it might be a good time to step back and have a look at how things are going.

People often wonder what their child's hearing loss will mean for them when they grow up and whether they will have the same opportunities and experiences as other children. Will they play sport? Will they go to a mainstream school? What about listening to music and hearing everyday sounds?

Children with a hearing loss are able to experience most of the same things in life as those who have normal hearing. They might experience some things, such as music, differently but this does not mean they can't be music lovers, or even music-makers. Your child will play sports, join groups, dance, paint, cook, swim and experience all the emotional ups and downs that are part of growing up. Hold on to your hopes and dreams for your child. Children with a hearing loss have every opportunity to grow into strong, creative, successful individuals and you will find that most if not all your dreams for your child are achievable.

It's so important to remember that many, many things come together to make your child unique, and their hearing loss is just one of them. Each phase in your child's life will bring different challenges to deal with. Mostly these will be related to the everyday issues of growing up – a fight with their best friend, their first love, a poor result on a test, a bad haircut. No doubt some challenges will relate to their hearing loss, but certainly not all of them.

Unfortunately, there is no guide to life that tells you how to approach every problem or concern. The best

thing to do is take each life step as it comes your way and deal with it in the moment. You have supports around you to help you work out what to do, and you will draw on your own wisdom as a parent to tackle the big issues.

MAKING FRIENDS

Some families wonder whether their child's hearing loss will affect their ability to make friends and have all the social experiences that other children do. This may be particularly relevant when children start childcare or school.

Here are some ideas you might find useful:

- Provide opportunities for your child to get out and experience life. One of the challenges of growing up is working out how to be an independent person with confidence. Life experience is one of the best ways to do this, and it's important for this to start from a young age.
- Keep mixing with your extended family and friends just as you would with any child.
- If you are attending a support group for parents, suggest that children come along to some events – both those who have a hearing loss, and their siblings who have normal hearing. This allows children to see that there are others who have a hearing loss and gives them the chance to hang out in a friendly, supportive environment.
- Attend the playgroup at your early intervention service. Playgroups offer a good opportunity for children to meet others in small groups and allow you to gain support from other parents.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR CHILD'S FUTURE...

- What are your hopes and dreams for your child's future?
- What can you do now to help those dreams become a reality?
- What are your main concerns about your child's future?
- How can you build your understanding about these concerns and respond to them in a positive way? Would you like some help with this?
- What are the opportunities you see for your child that give you a sense of hope and optimism?
- Where do you think these opportunities could lead your child in the future?

GOING TO CHILDCARE AND SCHOOL

Many parents find the experience of their child starting childcare, kindergarten or school for the first time a bit daunting. It can be hard enough for any parent to work out which centre or school might be best for their child. When a child has a hearing loss, making sure that the centre or school can cater for their specific needs can be an added challenge.

Parents often ask whether their child will need to go to a special school. Most children who have a hearing loss attend a mainstream school. Some children need extra help in the classroom, and some participate in classes tailored specifically to the needs of children who have a hearing loss. The learning needs of some children who have disabilities in addition to a hearing loss may be best supported in special education units or special schools.

The most important thing is that your child has the opportunity to participate in a learning environment that is a good match for their needs and gives them the best chance to reach their full potential in the development of their communication skills, academic abilities, and social development.

Given the range of options available, it's a good idea to think carefully about what will suit your child best. Consider visiting each of the schools or centres in your area to make sure you've selected the best one for your child and family. Other parents of children with a hearing loss may be a valuable source of information during this process, but also remember that every child's needs are different and it's important to listen to their information and advice based on what you know about your own child's needs and your preferences.

Remember, you can always change your mind in the future if you find that the place you selected is not meeting your expectations or the needs of your child.

BUILDING YOUR CHILD'S CONFIDENCE

Most hearing people have little or no experience of hearing loss, but the way other people (parents, family members, friends, professionals and people we meet) respond to your child will affect their sense of identity and self esteem – how they feel about themselves.

The positive and loving feelings you have for your child are always there, but at times of stress they can slip beneath the surface. While it is much easier to focus on the difficulties and things that are going wrong, it is more useful to think about the successes and build on positive steps they are making.

Parents, carers and close family have an important role in helping the child with hearing loss develop a healthy, positive view of themselves from an early age. This in turn acts as a buffer and helps them cope better when they come across life's difficulties, develop their potential to achieve at school and other activities, and eventually grow into fulfilled, healthy, responsible adults.

You can build up your child's sense of self-worth by:

- Rewarding your child with smiles, cuddles, positive attention, touching, winking and kissing whenever they make even small steps towards behaviours you want to see more of, even if they haven't got it quite right! But do show them you have noticed.
- Showing them that you love and approve of them as much as possible.
- Thinking about what is great and unique about their personality and telling them that you value these special qualities.

References

Aussie Deaf Kids, n.d., 'Building Blocks: a parent to parent guide for families whose baby has been diagnosed with a hearing loss', viewed December 2007, http://www.aussiedeafkids.com/pdf/building_blocks_boy.pdf.

National Deaf Children's Society, n.d. 'My child is unique', viewed January 2008, http://www.ndcs.org.uk/family_support/how_ndcs_can_help/parenting/developing_parenting_skills/my_child_is_unique.html

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOLING...

- Do you want your child to go to a regular childcare centre, kindergarten or school or one that specifically caters to their hearing loss? Do you want the option of both?
- What are your hopes and expectations for your child's learning? How can you let their teachers and support staff know about these?
- Do the teachers and other staff members have knowledge about issues related to hearing loss? If they need training, who can provide this?
- Does the childcare centre, kindergarten or school have access to staff relevant to your child's specific needs who will assist in your child's development and participation in the education program – for example, Advisory Visiting Teachers, teacher aids, staff fluent in Auslan, Auslan interpreters.