

Language & Learning

Decisions... Decisions

Early Decisions

As soon as your baby has been diagnosed with a hearing loss, the decision making process begins. A child who is deaf or hard of hearing needs access to communication and the world. Professional educators, audiologists, doctors, other parents and individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing will have ideas and opinions to share with you. You may be confused, because many of these ideas and opinions will seem to contradict each other. Actually, almost everyone whose life is touched by hearing loss wants the same thing: access to communication and daily life-for everyone.

You want your baby to grow up in touch with the environment. To help the child who can use residual hearing to keep in touch, you and your audiologist will be deciding on appropriate amplification. Will you look at hearing aids? If you do, what kind of hearing aid will help your child the most?

If your baby is severely or profoundly deaf, will you explore the appropriateness of a cochlear implant? If you do, what information do you need to have before making such a choice? Who can give you information about how cochlear implants work differently with different individuals?

Helping a profoundly deaf baby to keep in touch with the environment may mean changing sound into light or touch. Today, you can choose from many devices that flash or vibrate when the telephone rings, when the alarm goes off in the morning, or when someone knocks at the door. Many Deaf individuals already use computers to stay in touch with their community. As your baby grows up, computers will continue to develop, bringing the whole world within reach.

You want your baby to communicate with as many people as possible. Although some professionals say that we live in a "hearing world", actually, we live in a "communicating world." Today, more than ever, our world is made up of different languages, and is full of bridges between those languages. Interpreters, e-mail, relay telephone operators and TTY telephones are just a few examples of bridges. Real communication of real ideas can happen no matter what language a baby learns first, if the language is clear, meaningful, and used by many people in the environment.

You want your family to be involved in all aspects of your baby's development. The changes that happen in family life when a baby who is deaf or hard of hearing is born can be unexpected, but they can also be challenging and exciting.