

Language & Learning

Getting Started With Early Intervention

The Home Visit

A specialist, such as an infant/family specialist, will come to your home or an other natural environment, such as daycare, to work with you, your infant and your family members. Visits are conducted in the home or other places where your child spends a big part of his or her time because these are the most natural places for your baby.

The goal of the infant/family specialist or other professional is to work with you to help your baby grow and learn. Most infant/family specialist visits take place at home. Home is a “natural environment”, a setting where babies without disabilities are likely to spend most of their time. A natural environment can, however, be any place where a baby can play, communicate, and learn in the same way as other children. When a baby is deaf or hard of hearing, an environment may need to be changed to make it more “natural.” Babies who use signed language will learn best when adults and children around them, especially family members, know how to sign. Babies who can use hearing aids or cochlear implants to understand language will need a quiet environment while they are learning to listen; they will also need someone to listen to the aids, check the batteries and put the earmolds in properly or check the cochlear implant. People at home and in the neighborhood need to learn to get a baby’s attention, notice what the baby is looking at, and get down to the baby’s eye level.

There are other natural environments, of course. Parents take their babies many places. A “home” visit might happen at the grocery store, or the zoo, in the playground or the gym. An infant/parent specialist and a parent can go to the same places, and see how the baby learns in these environments.

Many small children go to playgroups or daycare. How natural this setting is for your baby depends on how well the people there can communicate. Are there other adults or children who are deaf or hard of hearing? Can the staff learn to take care of hearing aids? Hearing children learn language from their peers, but if only the deaf child uses sign language, then the environment is no longer “natural.” Sometimes, as babies become toddlers, a very natural environment can be a small group of other deaf or hard of hearing children who can play together, and receive the kind of help with language development that trained infant/family specialists can provide. A toddler playtime by itself is not enough stimulation for your child, but it can add some very special enrichment to the home visits and trips you take with your infant/family specialist, your family, and your baby.

An infant/family specialist will provide helpful coaching, so that you feel confident using new strategies or adapting familiar ones to encourage your baby’s development in normal, everyday events. You will begin to use everyday routines to foster your child’s communication development. These natural routines will become a powerful tool in helping your baby grow.