

Language & Learning

Getting Started With Early Intervention

Your Infant/Family Specialist

If you live in a state that provides services for children age 0 to 3 years through public education, a professional will be assigned to come to your home and support your family in working with your baby. Ideally, this professional has knowledge about hearing loss and its effect on communication development.

All children learn from their environment. Babies absorb language, thinking skills, and social skills as they experience the world with their caretakers and others. Most children acquire skills, especially language, effortlessly, because others are fluent in the language and use it all the time. Often, children with normal hearing, but other special needs, are not able to acquire language easily and need teachers who use special methods. Children who are deaf or hard of hearing can usually acquire language in the same way as hearing children, but they need a teacher and parent/family members who can help them access the language environment.

Helping children with hearing loss is often different than helping other children needing special education. Your infant/family specialist needs special training to give you and your baby access to language. To help your baby, there are areas that your infant/family specialist knows about. Infant/family specialists know about hearing aids, cochlear implants and audiograms. They can help parents turn their home into a good listening environment. Infant/family specialists can recognize the cues our children give us about their best way of communicating and different ways for parents and children to communicate.

Infant/family specialists understand the emotions of parents who are trying to make difficult decisions about their children's communication. For example, infant/family specialists can help parents meet deaf or hard of hearing adults, and involve these individuals in our children's development. Infant/family specialists understand how hearing loss can influence the development of intelligible speech in children who are deaf and hard of hearing, and those advisors who are assigned to children who sign will be skilled in visual (sign) communication and can help the whole family learn. They can keep track of our children's language progress and help us to understand what is happening.

The following examples of the work of an infant/family specialist describe some of the ways she or he will help you and your family at home:

- Work with you to identify priority needs for the child and family. He or she will also work with you to evaluate the child's strengths and current developmental skills. This information will be used to write an Individual Family Services Plan. This document is like a road map. It will guide you and the infant/family specialist as you go about learning and growing with the baby.
- Work closely with your family to address priority goals you have set for yourselves and your baby. He or she will work with you to evaluate the progress you are making and to set new goals
- Support you in communicating with your baby and encourage your baby's development through natural daily routines. Infant/family specialists provide support and resources as families work to cope with and understand the diagnosis of hearing loss.
- Assist you in identifying sources of support, if this would be of help to you.

- Recognize your expertise as your baby's parent and strive to develop a comfortable and effective partnership with you.
- Become a resource to you as you search for answers and how best to help your baby to learn
- Help you and your family choose the best methods of communicating with your baby, provide support in evaluating how your child is responding and in making decisions about communication approaches. Not all children with hearing loss learn in the same way.
- Watch as you interact naturally with your baby, pointing out the many positive things you already do to support your baby's learning and suggesting additional techniques to encourage the baby's listening, babbling, watching and learning.
- Work closely with your family to address priority goals you have set for yourselves and your baby, evaluate the progress you are making and set new goals along the way.