



HANDS & VOICES
Hands & Voices of Oregon January 2011

Executive Director's Letter

Dear Hands & Voices Family,
Happy New Year! I am always astounded by the new year and I usually dread January, but this year is different. There is a different sense of purpose to my life and I am eternally grateful. Hands & Voices is busy building relationships and working with families.



In every child's life there comes a time when they feel different, I think I felt different and awkward from ages 7-11! For our babes with hearing loss there also comes a time when they realize they are in fact different from their hearing peers. In talking with families around the country that occurrence seems to happen between ages 7-12. My oldest, 6-year old Ashlin had her first brush with this realization early in December. Ashlin attends a private school where there are typically hearing kids and kids with hearing loss. She has had swim lessons and takes gymnastics class but has never had any issues.

A few weeks ago she had a make up class to do for gymnastics so she was with kids she'd never met. She didn't want to put wig tape on her CI's that morning and as you can expect they kept coming off during class. She has experienced frustration with her CI's falling off before, but she had never experienced embarrassment.

Dad was with her when she stepped out of class and held her in his arms as she cried. Thankfully dad is good in these situations and as he held her he told her that she can do anything and that she should not hold herself back from doing anything she wanted to do because of 'ears' falling off or because she was deaf. Since no wig tape was on hand, they talked about some options regarding her 'ears' so she could complete class feeling good about herself, and thankfully, she did.

This incidence stopped me in my tracks. I knew to expect this at some point, and assumed it would happen when she mainstreamed. I didn't realize how unprepared I felt. I also realized that I had no control over when my girls may experience insecurity about their CI's or their hearing loss. As a mom who has been forging through the medical, insurance and educational system for the last 4 ½ years, I felt pretty darn helpless! Thankfully I have a husband I can talk to and a network of Hands & Voices parents I can talk to. And I do!

At the first Hands & Voices National Leadership Conference I attended two years ago I sat in on a session on grief. At that point my youngest was on par for receiving her implants and my oldest had been implanted two years, and I was going through some grief (again). I couldn't believe I was feeling what I was feeling. I thought that I had 'dealt' with all the feelings and felt rather stupid for grieving. After all, my girls were healthy. I felt I had nothing to complain about. I was relieved to learn from the session that we parents go through varying stages of grief throughout the many years of parenting our children, particularly during stages of their school

Family Event!!

Join us for a fun-filled afternoon of running, tumbling and swinging!

Sunday, January 9th;
1:30-3pm

Precision Elite Gymnastics
155007 SE For Mor Ct
Clackamas, OR 97015

Free to H&V families. Kids of all ages welcome! Please rsvp to Heidi at 503-473-1251. ASL Interpreter available upon request.

Statewide Parent Conference Call

Tuesday, January 18th;
8pm-9:30pm

dial: 888-380-9638 code:766409

"Is This a Deaf Thing"

All parents of deaf/hh children ask the question, "is my child doing this because he is deaf or because he's 5?" Learn practical applications for addressing this question.

All parents of deaf/hh children are welcome on the call. There will be time for you to ask questions or address anything that you need to talk about! This conference call is for YOU!

and life transitions. Grief will come and go over the years; it's a natural part of our process as the parents.

Like you, I am a parent first, I just sometimes forget that! So, as I plan out my year of attending conferences and building relationships with parents and professionals around the state, I have also 'scheduled' reminders to keep building the most important relationships; those with my husband and girls.

Our first statewide conference call is coming up on Tuesday, January 18th (see below for details). Parents always ask, "Is this a deaf thing or a_-old thing?" In response to this highly asked question, our first conference call will address this very topic. There will be time for parents to address any questions, comments or concerns after the training. These conference calls are for all parents regardless of your child's age and I highly recommend that you participate. As parents we learn so much from each other - it be worth your time!

On behalf of the H&V board and the Parent Guides, we wish you a very happy new year. May it be a year of successes for you and your child(ren)! We look forward to talking with you on the conference calls and seeing you at some H&V events!

Regards,
Helen Cotton Leiser
Executive Director

Socialization and the Deaf/HH Child

- As taken from H&V National website

Most deaf and hard-of-hearing children are born into hearing families and hearing communities. Since deafness and hearing loss affect a child's ability to communicate, and communication is necessary for socialization, you may worry that your child will have difficulties developing relationships with family members, making friends, and participating in social activities. These are legitimate concerns, since your child is likely to be the only one in the neighborhood and their school who is deaf/hard-of-hearing. (d/hh) However, parents do not have to be weighed down by these concerns. Educating yourself will be the first step to ease the fear, and will ultimately help you support the development of your child's self-esteem and social confidence.

What impact will this have on my child's social development?

- Will my child have friends?
- Will he/she be teased?
- Will he/she play sports?
- How will I ever leave my child in daycare?
- Will my child...?

These are some of the many questions that may run through parents' minds when their child is first identified with a hearing loss. For many parents, hearing loss until now was associated with "older" people, not babies. If parents have no knowledge of deafness/hearing loss, the news may be distressing and will undoubtedly be life-changing.

Feel free to invite any parent of a deaf/hh child!

Parent Group Meets

Parents mark your calendars for Saturday, February 12th 10am-11 for the Portland area parent group. All parents of deaf/hh children welcome!

Tucker Maxon School
2860 SE Holgate
Portland, OR 97202

Free childcare available, ASL Interpreter available. Meet upstairs from the gym.

Quick Links

www.handsandvoicesor.org

www.artzcenter.org

www.ndepnow.org

News

EHDI: The Early Hearing Detection & Intervention Act of 2010 (HR 1246,S3199) was signed into law on Thursday, December 22, 2010, by President Obama. The bill passed through the House and Senate earlier this month.

Hands & Voices and other members of the national Deaf/Hard of Hearing Alliance (DHHA) have been actively engaged in support of this bill, which reauthorizes the original legislation mandated almost ten years ago. H&V parent leaders provided testimony at senate committee hearings. EHDI 2010 ensures newborn hearing screening services (NHS), full diagnostic evaluations, and support to families with infants and toddlers identified as deaf or hard of hearing. This reauthorization emphasizes state funding for

Getting started: Where can I find the information I need?

Fortunately, parents can obtain helpful information from a wide variety of sources such as:

- Internet
- Health professionals (audiologist, pediatrician, etc.)
- Early intervention specialists (speech therapists, ASL instructors, early childhood educators, etc.)
- Primary and secondary educators of deaf and hard-of-hearing students
- Organizations that focus on deafness and/or hearing loss (Hands & Voices, State Association of the Deaf, AG Bell, State School for the Deaf, Self Help for Hard of Hearing (SHHH), Commission for the Deaf/HH etc.)
- List-serves that provide periodic information via e-mail
- Books and journals

Taking the next step: Finding people who have "walked the walk."

Sources of information you refer to initially for more technical purposes may also point you in the direction of resources such as other families who have children with hearing loss, deaf/hard-of-hearing role models, and programs and services specific to the needs of their family. When your family is ready, meeting other families with children who are deaf/hard of hearing and meeting deaf/hard of hearing adults can relieve some of your anxieties and can help you feel less alone in the experience. Paul Ogden writes,

"When you do feel ready, here are some people to seek out:

- Other parents of deaf or hard of hearing children-parents who will have experiences to recount and resources to tell you about, as well as warnings of what or whom to avoid.
- Deaf adults-people who can help you understand the realities of deafness and the way it shapes the perspectives of deaf people. "Meeting deaf adults will acquaint you with the world and culture of deaf people, and it will bring role models into your child's world-a factor whose importance, right from the start, cannot be overstated". (Ogden, P. 1996, *The Silent Garden: Raising Your Deaf Child*)

Facilitating positive social experiences:

follow-through services for babies who refer after NHS for further testing.

Guide By Your Side Services:

Guides are always available to you when you need them. In Oregon our Guide By Your Side program is partially funded through the Oregon State EHDI program, which allows Guides to legally contact families. Parents can also contact Guides when they want support. Guides are available for one-on-one consultation via home visit, phone or email to give parents support on such issues as communication choices, emotional support, educational support,

Parent-to-Parent Networking: Our coordinators can connect you to:

Regional events, access to other families, access to deaf/hh adults, social activities and educational workshops;

Connection to other resources: State and national resources; materials; recommended books, videos, websites, etc.; Advocacy for families: IFSP and IEP development, Special education Law information; Coordinators specifically for parents who are Spanish speaking, and for families who have kids with unilateral hearing loss.

There are no charges associated with the Hands & Voices Guide by your Side Services. Hands & Voices members, however, have priority in IEP development assistance, and reduced fees to Hands & Voices events. To become a Hands & Voices member, please see our Hands & Voices membership brochure or go to "join H&V" on the website.

The early years.

"As loving parents, we don't want to see our child get left out or miss an opportunity to make a friend. It's very tempting to jump in and 'smooth out' any communication challenges that pop up in front of us."

Early on, parents will play a crucial role in helping their child feel comfortable in social situations. Keep in mind though; a child may have a natural tendency to be outgoing or a natural tendency to be shy. In other words, being shy may not be a "deaf/hard of hearing" characteristic; the child may just be shy.

A first step in encouraging independence in social situations is leaving your child with a trusted care-giver. If a neighbor, friend, grandparent volunteer to watch your child, accept the offer. Children are very good at letting people know their wants and needs. If you have chosen to sign with your child, and you are concerned that the caregiver doesn't know any sign language, leave a simple sign language book. A parent can even make their own book with signs their child uses. If there are certain techniques your family uses to get your child's attention, let the caregiver know. If you are comfortable leaving your child, your child will be comfortable.

Although babies and young children socially interact most frequently with family members, children in daycare settings and playgroups will also have significant social relationships with other adults and children. Parents faced with finding a child care or preschool setting for their deaf or hard-of-hearing child may wonder if communication difficulties will affect the quality of care and the relationships their child will develop with their teachers and peers. Caregivers do not necessarily need to have previous experience with a deaf or hard-of-hearing child in order to provide a nurturing and positive environment, but it is important to find a child care setting that is open to and enthusiastic about welcoming your child with hearing loss. When deciding on a child care setting, there are some important questions to consider that will have a direct impact on your child's social interactions. These are:

- If my child uses amplification (hearing aids, cochlear implant, fm-system), is the caregiver comfortable with and willing to learn about the technology? Will they be committed to helping ensure that my child is using the amplification consistently according to my directions?
- If my child uses sign language (either exclusively or in combination with other communication methods), is the caregiver willing to learn sign language and, if applicable, teach it to other children in the child care setting?
- What are the acoustics like in the setting? Are the floors carpeted? How many children are in one space at a time?
- Does the caregiver recognize the need to both accommodate my child's special needs as well as foster an environment where my child is included and accepted by the other children?

According to Solit and Bednarczyk (1999), there are three important social environment that facilitates acceptance of children who are deaf and hard of hearing by children who can hear; 2) to support and encourage friendships between children with and without

hearing losses; and 3) to provide opportunities for children using different languages and communication modes and from different cultures to learn from each other.

Other social situations that offer good exposure could be story-time at the library, music class at the local recreation center, the nursery at church or the gym.

"What are those things in your ears?"

It's an inevitable question and it is one your young child will be asked frequently by curious peers. Children should feel comfortable discussing hearing loss with friends and peers. In the early years the parent will be the model. When other children or adults ask about your child's hearing aids, their hearing loss, why they use sign language etc, answer the questions. If a parent feels uncomfortable discussing hearing loss, the child will feel like it is a bad thing. If your child learns to answer the questions, it will help develop their own sense of self.

2-year-old Sally and her mother Liz were in the grocery store putting apples in a bag, when a little boy passing by with his father asked Liz, "What are those things in her ears?" The boy's father looked embarrassed and whispered "sorry" to Liz. Liz smiled at the boy and replied, "Those are Sally's hearing aids." "Oh, said the boy, what do they do?" Liz replied, "Well, it is a little bit like the glasses I'm wearing glasses to help me see more clearly. Sally's hearing aids help her to hear better."

Running interference: Knowing when to step in, and when to step back.

As your child grows older, initiate play dates with hearing and deaf/hard of hearing children. Your deaf/hard of hearing child will enjoy play dates just as your hearing children will. Allow the children to interact on their own; the temptation may be to make the interaction better, but often parents ruin the fun. Use this time to observe. If you see room for improvement in social skills, role play with your child later during playtime. Anticipate new situations and play it out beforehand.

Sometimes it is necessary to involve yourself in a situation, but think before you do. Will this help right now or can it wait?

Sammy, a seven year old boy with a severe-profound hearing loss was playing in the sprinkler with his good friend seven year old Jessie who is hearing. Jessie is learning sign language and always makes sure Sammy is watching her before she talks/signs. Because they were playing in the water, Sammy was not wearing his hearing aids. He wasn't looking at Jessie, and she kept calling/signing his name waiting for him to turn around. Sammy's mom was watching. Realizing Jessie was becoming frustrated, Sammy's mom explained that without his hearing aids Sammy can not hear anything so Jessie would need to tap him -calling his name would not work. She also explained to Sammy that he would need to be aware that he didn't have his hearing aids on. They played in the water the rest of the summer; Jessie knew how to get Sammy's attention and Sammy knew to be aware of what was happening around him..

Mom chose to intervene because Jessie always made such an effort to communicate effectively with Sammy. Had she waited until later Jessie

would have been frustrated and the learning opportunity would have been gone.

5-year-old Daniel arrived with his mother excited to start kindergarten. He didn't know anyone attending the school, but he told his mother he wasn't afraid. Mom was worrying about Daniel making friends in his mainstream classroom because of his first language was sign language and his speech was a bit difficult to understand. As Daniel entered the classroom, a boy came up to him and said "Hi, I'm Alex. What's your name?" There was a pause, and Alex and Daniel just looked at each other. Daniel's mom wanted to jump in and facilitate the interaction, but just as she was about to, Daniel said and signed, "Hi! I'm Daniel. Do you want to go over and play with the dinosaurs?" Alex nodded and they headed over to play.

Sometimes it's hard to wait and see what will happen. As loving parents, we don't want to see our child get left out or miss an opportunity to make a friend. It's very tempting to jump in and "smooth out" any communication challenges that pop up in front of us. Perhaps it's not so surprising, but left to their own devices, children will usually find a way to communicate with each other. It is better in the long run if a child's interactions with peers are his or her own rather than via a parent.

Maintaining and strengthening social ties

Don't let summer be a down time for your child. Initiate a summer-play group with your child's friends/peers from school. If possible set up group swim lessons, soccer lessons, gymnastics classes, music classes, etc. for your child and deaf/hard of hearing peers. If children continue to see each other during the three month summer break, when school starts in the fall, they will not have to restart the bonding process again. This time also gives parents a chance to visit and network. If you have set up group lessons with an interpreter, spread the word to other families with deaf/hard of hearing children. This will be a way to broaden your families' network of deaf/hard of hearing individuals.

A group of parents from a deaf/hard of hearing preschool set-up a summer playgroup schedule before school let out. The families rotated houses. Whoever hosted was responsible for snack and an activity. The other parents stayed, but they were able to visit. The host was in charge of the kids, and unless he/she needed help the other parents were off duty. The children looked forward to play- group as did the parents. The children strengthened their friendships, were exposed to different adults, and the parents had a great opportunity to strengthen their friendships. When school started in the fall, the teacher commented there was a noticeable difference in the children. The children didn't need any adjustment period; they were ready to start back again as if there had been no break. The parents continued to meet weekly for coffee.

Getting technical: Writing social objectives into the IEP

Once your child enters school the social piece will need to be addressed. The ability to communicate effectively with other peers whether the peers

are hearing, deaf or hard of hearing will need to be addressed in your child's IEP, as will effective communication with adults your child will meet at school. The school placement you have chosen will influence the direction of the IEP. Children in a center based program or a school for the deaf will have more opportunity to interact with peers and adults using the same mode of communication. This is not to say this issue does not need to be addressed. Regardless of their preferred communication mode, deaf or hard-of-hearing children attending a mainstream program may not have the opportunities to interact with other deaf/hard-of-hearing peers or adults. Some deaf/hard-of-hearing adults, who in general felt positive about their experience in mainstreamed education, have said that they would have benefited from more opportunities to interact with other deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals. Within the IEP different goals can be addressed as to how to facilitate interactions. Some examples are:

- Becoming an on-line(e-pen) pal with another student who's deaf or hard of hearing.
- Networking mainstreamed students to center-based or state deaf residence schools for opportunities to gather socially.
- Connecting to a state role model program, if available.
- Many teachers believe that discussing information with friends and other peers enhance learning. Brenda Schick, a researcher and professor from the University of Colorado explains, "It seems reasonable that a child's IEP should reflect the goals that schools have for all children regarding social cognition and learning the language of discussion and debate."

Children learn better when they are able to work with friends and interact with friends in the classroom. Group projects will be better completed when children work with real friends rather than with non-friend peers. Schick says, "With peers, children can argue, negotiate, and figure it all out. Some researchers have speculated that these life skills come more from peer interactions than through interactions with adults. And those language skills are absolutely essential."

Facilitating social competence: Challenges and ideas

Hearing children pick up a lot of information indirectly. This is called passive or inferential learning. Because deaf/hh children do not overhear conversations occurring around them, they will miss information that other children just seem to know. This can cause a feeling of isolation at school. In the cafeteria or on the playground children will discuss what they will do when they're finished with lunch, the most popular new video game, the new rules for kick ball for Tuesday, etc. Kids move fast and change topics quickly. How can a deaf/hh child keep up.? Do they have a good friend or two who keeps them caught up?

Tommy, a hard of hearing child, attending a mainstreamed program at his neighborhood school was very happy entering in to first grade. He had attended kindergarten at the same school, and children he had been friends with were placed in his class. After a couple weeks of school, he told his mom, his friends were still his friends but not after lunch or at recess. She

found this puzzling so she observed off and on for a week. She realized her son was missing the other children's plans. When they decided to change an activity, her son missed the change or the new rule. The kids just expected you to follow along if you wanted to play. The mother addressed this with the teacher and set-up a plan. They pulled three of his friends and asked if they would make sure Tommy knew when the activity was changing and when the rules were changing. They also addressed with Tommy how things are on a playground--fast. The kids tried hard, and there were ups and downs, but as they progressed into higher grades the kids continued to relay information to Tommy and eventually Tommy was helping to change the rules. Mom asked every year that certain kids move on to the next class with her son. He had developed some meaningful friendships and she knew the importance of this.

As your child grows and desires more independence, the best way to help them become comfortable and happy in social situations is to do things that are mostly behind the scenes, but which facilitate communication and increase your child's ability to obtain information. There are many activities where relatively simple accommodations could make all the difference in terms of allowing your child to participate more fully in the experience.

Some examples are:

Find out which movie theaters in your community offer closed captioning or open captioning. If your child would like to see a movie with friends that is not being offered there, help your child request the film.

Encourage family and friends to turn on the closed captioning on their television sets when you go over to visit.

If your child has an fm-system, be sure that it is used on field trips - if someone is leading the class on a tour, ask the tour guide to wear it.

If your child uses sign language, arrange for an interpreter for activities such as theater performances, swim and other types of lessons, and storytelling or poetry readings. This is sometimes easier if a group of parents approaches the event or community center and makes the request. And if you do have an interpreter coming for an activity, be sure and spread the word so other families can participate.

Similarly, if your child uses sign language and would like an interpreter, arrange for one to be at important family gatherings, such as weddings, funerals, and family reunions. Although this may be an additional expense, it could help your child feel more a part of the experience and more connected to the family.

Technology is available that can facilitate communication and which is often very popular among young people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing. Consider the options, and when appropriate, provide your child with some of these helpful tools (e-mail, pagers/text-messaging, TTY).

In conclusion.

Deafness/hearing loss affects communication, and communication is crucial for developing social relationships. However, you can be sure that your deaf or hard-of-hearing child will find ways to express themselves and reach out to others and friendships will form. Perhaps these friendships may be different in some ways from those you had as a child, or from those that your hearing children have, but if your child is happy, confident, and has enriching relationships, that is what is important.

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Top 10 Strategies for Parents When Teaching Your Child Language

1. Draw Attention to Sites/Sounds:

When a sound occurs, point to your ear, smile, and "I hear that!". Then go over to the sound and talk about it!

2. The Yardstick:

Your child who wears hearing aids or cochlear implants hear best when you are within three feet or a yardstick from their ears. It is also helpful to get down to the microphone's level. When I really need to get my child's attention I bend down, get eye contact and talk to them.

3. Radio Commentator/Using Descriptive Language:

Parents are like a radio commentator. Parents should make short, interesting comments about what their child is doing. It is important to match the words with what the child is doing, thinking and feeling.

4. Capitalize on Suprasegmentals:

Vocal clues (loud/quiet, fast/slow) are important in language. There are five suprasegmentals: pitch, duration, intensity, timing and stress. Parents need to remember that profoundly deaf children can hear them, and they provide meaning. Children learning ASL learn language through visual suprasegmentals.

5. 1,2,3 does my child understand?

I have received many calls over the years from parents who's child has been implanted or aided. They often think that once aided/implanted their child will begin to understand everything. But we need to teach them the meaning to language. The 1, 2, 3 strategy: first say, "get your shoes" without any clues. 2. Say, "Get your shoes" then look at the shoes... wait for your child to respond. 3. Say, "Get your shoes" then look and point to the shoes.

6. Background Noise:

For children with a hearing loss it can be difficult to pay attention or hear mom calling them when the radio is on and the dishwasher is humming. Try controlling background noise in the home and classroom.

7. Repetition:

Children love repetition and it's the best way for them to learn. When teaching them a new word try repeating it 10 times (in a fun way, of course!). Talk about the same things you do every day. When you go up the stairs say the same thing (or turn it into a song!) Staging repetitive routines may feel overwhelming to you, but for your child their world will become more predictable and they will develop language!

8. Vocalizing on Command:

Parents who want to accelerate their child's language growth will gradually begin delaying giving children what they want until they have vocalized/signed. This teaches children that using language is powerful. Don't force your child to use the word, just give them an opportunity to use it. We don't want them getting too upset!

9. Follow Your Child's Lead:

Language adults use with children needs to match what the child is thinking. Children will learn best when they get to 'talk' about what they are interested in. Follow your child's lead until their language has advanced enough for them to follow adults.

Remember, language is everywhere!

10. Read 10 Books a Day!

Books offer so much to your child, and to you. Even if your child is older and can read independently, continue to read aloud to them everyday. Conversations develop and your child will usually participate in the book reading.

In A Perfect World: What's Missing in the Mainstream?

by Leeanne Seaver

I'll always be grateful for the wisdom gained from a fifth grade class I never attended. Fifth grade was the year our son Dane was fully and effectively mainstreamed, along with several other kids from the center based program for deaf/hard of hearing students. It was a struggle getting there, but we were thrilled that his school had finally made a genuine commitment to providing him with access to the same curriculum that his hearing peers were taught. That year was our "Camelot" because Dane benefitted from a co-teaching model that actually worked the way co-teaching should work. His general ed teacher paired with a certified teacher of the deaf (both highly qualified master teachers) and they jointly delivered instruction in a manner that made neither the "real" teacher nor the "assistant" in the room. They dropped their defenses, egos and presumptions and committed to one another that they would function as true partners owning each student. They planned their curricula together, embedding it with visuals and language enrichment that benefitted all the students. They did not match the kids with hearing loss to the teacher of the deaf or the hearing kids to the general educator; they were equally yoked to each student. It was a stellar year in terms of progress. Dane made up for a nine month language delay and genuinely earned excellent grades. He left elementary school with some very important skills that served him well in the real world of junior high. I could go on and on about the many fine merits of co-teaching, but that's fodder for a future column. Back to the point-how much there is to learn when the learning environment is right.

Social Education

What really surprised my husband and I was what else Dane learned from being in that fully accessible, meaningfully inclusive, well-taught environment. One day about two weeks into the semester, he came home looking smug. When we asked him about his school day, he informed us with an air of superiority that a hearing boy had gotten into trouble-and did we know that hearing kids actually made mistakes, too?! It was hard to know how to respond. When had he divided the world into hearing kids and deaf kids? How in the world had our son missed that hearing kids got into trouble? Was it from the isolation of being in a deaf ed resource classroom (except for music, gym and art) since he was in first grade? Was it that when he was mainstreamed into those "specials" he had limited access to all the different kinds of communication that were going on in the room? It strains the brain to think of it. Apparently, many non-academic details like punitive and other social messages had been dismissed as unimportant at school; little effort (if any) had been previously made to convey such things. Lack of exposure to communication of this kind had created a seriously flawed perception of the world for Dane. We quickly overreacted with LOTS of stories of miserably bad hearing children-feeling like the "Parents Grimm" and knowing that this wasn't the answer. More intentional and effective communication was, and that included a larger role for us as parents relative to his social and emotional needs. Not just "don't forget to write Aunt Charlene a thank you note" good manners, but purposeful use of every possible socially teachable moment that life could afford.

Passive Learning

Much of what we know about social behavior (whether appropriate or inappropriate) is learned "passively" by simply seeing and hearing what happens (and what people think about what's happening) all around us. If a child can't hear well enough or at all, s/he will be missing some very important cues. For example, I knew from a very early age that no nice girl wears tight white jeans to church because my mother and her friend Dorothy were snipping about "that Haney girl" on the drive home one Sunday and I overheard the whole thing

from the backseat of the car. Wow, that was news to me since the dads and older brothers barely restrained their approval. Trivial? Hardly. I submit that for every moral truth worth carving on tablets of stone there are innumerable small social pebbles dropped by others that mark the way through the mysterious forest of societal norms. We'd better teach our d/hh kids to recognize them or they will get lost. Knowing the unwritten rules about who thinks what is acceptable in variable settings under which circumstances could have an impact on future employment, relationships, and if you really think about it, maybe even world peace.

Teachable Moments

While you are waiting for the perfect "teachable moment," go ahead and make up a few. My brother-in-law Greg never missed a chance to tell his boys (and mine) about poor, hapless "Hooby Dooby" who was forever running into the street, or standing up in the grocery cart, not sharing toys or sassing his mother. Terrible, painful consequences always resulted. Feel free to invite Hooby Dooby to your own home; he'll make a helpful nuisance of himself. Greg's approach works until about age four, then it's probably time to make examples of annoying neighbor kids, classmates or extended family members (who must remain nameless). Embellish as you see fit, but point out that all kids (hearing or not) get the answers wrong on occasion; they sometimes don't do their homework or their chores. They forget to feed the dog. They leave the potty seat up. They call names, they get grounded, and they repeat offenses.

What's more, hearing kids can hear but they often don't listen. Some actually ignore teachers on purpose. My friend Sara's daughter Maddie was surprised when she learned that hearing kids can't hear everything either-like in the noisy cafeteria or what's going on in the next room, or that her teacher COULD recognize that it was Maddie coming down the hallway in her dress shoes because of the way she "clomped" them.

Life Lessons

What's missing from the mainstream for too many of our d/hh kids is an authentic social experience...the kind where they're learning all kinds of things they need to know that have nothing to do with noun/verb agreement or the periodic chart of the elements. The d/hh kid enjoying the rarified social air of a choice school or state school for the deaf has just as much potential to struggle with adjustments to the "hearing world" elsewhere, so none of us can let our guard down here. Wherever they are educated, our kids have a right to get all communication-the good, the bad and the ugly. How we as parents and teachers are going to make that happen should be part of every IEP discussion of "special considerations" for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. What's the plan for group discussions? How does this work during recess? On the school bus? How are we preparing our kids for sarcasm, body language, idioms, double-entendre, and subtext? Who is going to help this kid process all the "inferential learning" and specialized vocabulary that comes via the unrequited crush, peer-imposed nicknames and the girl-fight? This stuff may not show up on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, but it's definitely on the most important standardized test of them all: Life. ~

The Beauty of Holland

Years ago I was sent the following and I find it so relevant as a parent of two deaf children. I am sure many of you have read this. I like rereading this every so often - it brings me to a place that is very deep and very personal. When the struggles of life and parenthood get me down, it is a great reminder of how wonderful my girls are and how much I have received because of their hearing loss.

When you are going to have a baby, its like planning a fabulous vacation - to Italy. You buy a bunch of guidebooks and make your wonderful plans. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The flight attendant comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland." "Holland", you say? "What do you mean Holland? I signed up for Italy! I am suppose to be in Italy. All my life I dreamed of going to Italy!"

But there has been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay. The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place. It's just a different place.

*So you must go out and buy new guidebooks. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you never would have met. It's just a different place. It's slower-paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills. Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts. But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy, and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life you will say, "Yes, that's where I was suppose to go. That's what I had planned."
And the pain of that will never go away because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss.
But if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things about Holland.*

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