



Early Warning Signs of Hearing Loss

Children learn to communicate by imitating the sounds they hear. If they have a hearing loss that is undetected and untreated, they can miss much of the speech and language around them. This results in delayed speech/language development, social problems and academic difficulties.

The National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders reports that about 2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children in the United States are born with a detectable level of hearing loss in one or both ears. However, not all types of hearing loss are identified at birth. For example, this statistic does not include those children who develop hearing loss later. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report almost 15% of children ages 6-19 years of age have a hearing loss.

Mild hearing loss can be easy to miss and the process is often gradual and painless. Children with mild hearing loss do hear sound but it is muffled, and they miss the important sounds needed to develop speech. As a result, they often have more difficulties than adults who develop a mild hearing loss because the child doesn't have a large vocabulary or experience to draw on. All levels of hearing loss impact the child as well as those they come in to contact with. While it is called "mild" hearing loss, the impact on communication is anything but mild. This includes hearing loss in just one ear.

Fortunately, there are very few hearing losses that cannot be helped with modern technology. The most effective treatment is achieved through early intervention. Early diagnosis, early fitting of hearing aids, and an early start on special education programs can give the child the best chance of learning to listen and developing their speech and language.

Infant/Toddler Hearing Checklist

Parents are often the first people to sense that their child has a hearing problem. It is important to recognize the signs of hearing loss in infants and toddlers as early as possible. The most critical period for speech and language development is from birth to four years of age.

All infants and toddlers can be given a thorough hearing evaluation. Observe your child's development from infancy on. The following are age appropriate behaviors for infants and toddlers. If you suspect a problem, do not delay in getting your child's hearing tested. It's never too early to ask.

Does your baby:

Birth to 4 months:

1. Awaken or stir at loud sounds?
2. Startle at loud noises?
3. Calm at the sound of a familiar voice?
4. Respond to your voice (smiles or coos)?

4 to 9 months:

1. Turn eyes toward source of familiar sounds?
2. Smile when spoken to?
3. Notice rattles and other sound-making toys?
4. Cry differently for different needs?
5. Make babbling sounds?
6. Seem to understand simple word/hand motions such as "bye-bye" with a wave?

9 to 15 months:

1. Babble a lot of different sounds?
2. Respond to his/her name?
3. Respond to changes in your tone of voice?
4. Say "mama," "dada"?
5. Understand simple requests?
6. Repeat some sounds you make?
7. Use his/her voice to attract attention?

15-24 months:

1. Point to familiar objects when they are named?
2. Listen to stories, songs and rhymes?
3. Follow simple commands?
4. Use several different words?
5. Point to body parts when asked?
6. Name common objects?
7. Put two or more words together?

What do I do if I suspect my child has a hearing loss?

If you think that your child may have a hearing loss, the first thing to do is make an appointment for a thorough ear examination and hearing test. You can have the test performed by an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) specialist (otolaryngologist); or an audiologist (hearing expert) experienced in evaluating infants and toddlers. If your child has a hearing problem, the longer it goes undiagnosed and unaddressed, the more likely it is that his speech and language development will be delayed.

What do I do if my child has a hearing loss?

If you are like most parents, after learning of your child's hearing loss you will have mixed feelings and many questions.

You may ask:

- "At what age should I teach my child language?"
- "Would my child benefit from a hearing aid, a cochlear implant, or other assistive device?"
- "How do I communicate with my child now?"
- "Where do I go for answers?"

There are programs and services to help you and your child. These interventions might include:

- Meeting with a professional (or team) who is trained to work with children who have hearing loss, and their families.
- Fitting a baby with a hearing device, such as a hearing aid.
- Joining family support groups.
- Other services available to children with hearing loss and their families.

Your Choice

There are many interventions to consider. Which one (or ones) you choose will guide how your family and child communicate, and will enable you to help your child grow and develop to be his or her best. The decision-making process belongs to each individual family. West Virginia Birth to Three does not favor any one intervention strategy. Our goal is to provide you balanced information on all

interventions so that you and your family can make the decision that is right for you and your child.

Additional Resources for Families

West Virginia Birth to Three (WV BTT):

<http://www.wvdhhr.org/birth23/Default.asp>

WV Telephone: (304) 558-5388

Fax: (304) 558-2183

Toll Free in WV: (800) 642-9704/8522 BTT

<http://www.wvdhhr.org/birth23/contact.asp>

WV BTT Resources Vision and Hearing Impairment:

<http://www.wvdhhr.org/birth23/resources.asp>

My Baby's Hearing: <https://www.babyhearing.org/>