



Baby's First Hearing Aid!



Parents are eager for a baby's responses to sound with a new hearing aid. When a baby wears hearing aids for the first time families are often unsure what to expect. A baby's responses can vary from startling, smiling or not seeming to react. Learning to listen takes time. There is much that parents can do to guide a baby's comfort with hearing aids, awareness of sound and development of listening skills.

Your baby needs adjustment time for many new experiences. New shoes can feel uncomfortable. New foods can taste strange. Even when that newness is a fun toy, it can take time for a child to know what to expect. Hearing aids are an unfamiliar sensation for a baby. With his first hearing aid a baby might be hearing new sounds, feeling the hearing aid on his ear and sensing an ear mold filling his ear canal. Parents can help a baby adjust to amplification by initially putting hearing aids on in a quiet place while enjoying a familiar activity together. To keep the baby comfortable as he hears new sounds, families can turn off the TV or background music to create a quieter environment. Keeping a baby occupied with a toy for short

periods while talking to him in a natural voice can make early listening an enjoyable experience. Gradually the hours per day that a baby is wearing aids can be increased until he is using them during all waking hours.

Babies may react differently to hearing aids depending on their developmental stage. Infants have very soft ears because the cartilage has not developed and hearing aids may flop over the top of the ear. As babies begin to explore they might remove their hearing aids and even chew on them. A small hat made of thin knit (there are some made especially for hearing aids) or a head band might keep hearing aids in place. Parents can experiment with other solutions as needed such as eye glass bands, fashion tape, a circular tube that hugs the ear or short lengths of dental floss tied to the aid and pinned to the back of the baby's shirt. Sometimes a child realizes that adults react quickly when he takes off an aid and he may enjoy the attention for removing them often. By approaching hearing aids in a calm, positive and low-key manner, parents convey that hearing aids are just another item to wear daily.

Understanding a baby's audiogram will help parents be aware of the possible sounds he may hear. The audiologist can demonstrate and explain what sounds are likely for the baby to hear with his aids. Parents can ask many questions. Can he hear most voices? What environmental sounds might he notice? What levels of sound are helpful and appropriate? As the baby's responses increase, families can identify objects and activities to emphasize listening fun. Parents can request ongoing audiology appointments to check aids, discuss concerns, conduct assessments and

measure change. Frequent communication with the audiologists and other service providers can result in helpful partnerships with families so hearing aid use is monitored and effects are evaluated regularly.

If an audiologist explains a baby can hear loud sounds with his hearing aids, families may see him responding soon after receiving amplification. Parents can observe children's faces and eyes for indications they heard a sound. When a baby is 1 or 2 months old his eyes may widen or he might furrow his eyebrows. Around 7 months of age a baby may look for a sound by turning his head. Responses might not always be immediate or clear. Some sounds may even make a baby irritable. Listening can be a new and very different experience.

It takes more time for a child to learn to listen and respond to softer sounds. By talking and pointing out sounds to your baby, you are guiding him in discovering sounds and their meaning. Even when his hearing levels indicate a child can hear softer sounds, his responses might be inconsistent at first. Over time a baby will look more quickly when he is aware of the sound and what it might signify. Thinking about sound in a meaningful way is a process. Your baby learns to recognize sounds and then begins to look for other sounds that he hears. As he develops listening skills his awareness of softer sounds increases.

Awareness of sound and speech can be encouraged throughout the day. Language is learned from many months of listening and watching before a baby uses a word! A baby will benefit from adults communicating constantly during feeding time, playtime and dressing as well as during all family daily activities. For some families it might be too hectic for the child to wear hearing aids during certain care routines such as learning to feed himself! Families can think about how to include wearing the aid as much as possible during typical everyday tasks so the entire day involves listening and language.

Talking with your baby often, singing together, reading books, encouraging interactions with other

family members, doing vocal play and imitating sounds are all part of building listening skills to create a foundation for spoken language. Helping a baby explore ways to make sounds with objects and experiment with creating speech sounds can contribute to his auditory learning. Hearing aids make sounds louder but they cannot make sounds clearer or more easily understood. After several months of hearing aid use a baby's awareness of sound and speech will be assessed by the family and service providers. A speech therapist or audiologist can provide information about clarity of speech sounds and parents can share observations about a baby's vocalizations and responses to sounds. Together they can identify what are the next skills for the baby to learn and how to encourage those behaviors.

A hearing aid is often a new experience for all of those who know the baby. Explaining the purpose of the hearing aid to extended family, day care or school staff and even small children can involve them in helping to keep hearing aids on, caring for hearing aids and noticing a baby's responses. Sometimes parents make a short how-to-guide for putting on and checking aids to decrease any anxiety about using this technology. Families might also create a small picture book about a baby's new hearing aids for siblings and caregivers to discuss and enjoy. Sometimes parents consult with older siblings about the color of the molds or the casings! The hearing aid can become a device the whole family supports.

Hearing aids are one approach and only one part of a plan for a child with hearing loss. Different technology might be suggested when a child's responses to sound and speech become more reliable. Parents can explore listening devices, communication approaches and educational strategies with service providers, other parents and individuals with hearing loss. As parents' knowledge increases and a baby's needs change, the resources, services and supports may change too. A baby's first hearing aid is a beginning! It is the start of support for your child and learning for your family!