



We Improve Communication for Life

## HELPING CHILDREN WITH MILD OR FLUCTUATING HEARING LOSS TO LISTEN AND LEARN

Children with hearing difficulties that may or may not change from day to day are at significant educational risk. "One quarter to one third of kindergarten and grade one children in a typical classroom (do) not hear normally on any given day" (Classroom management of children with minimal hearing loss, Carol Flexor). Parents, teachers, and other hearing and educational personnel must work together with the child and teach them to understand their hearing loss and to advocate for their listening needs. It is important to remember that all parents, teachers and children are individual and may find some strategies more helpful than others.

### Children with mild or fluctuating hearing loss may have difficulties:

- Hearing or understanding speech in a noisy room or at a distance ('selective hearing')
- Paying attention and may be easily distracted
- Following spoken instructions and conversation
  - Inappropriate behaviors because of frustration
  - Spelling, reading and/or phonemic awareness skills
  - Keeping up with classroom work
  - Speech and language development, including grammar and vocabulary
  - Peer relations and social confidence
  - Fatigue and may tire more easily than classmates
  - Missing small words (e.g. an, the, word endings including '-s', '-ing', '-ed')
  - Passive learning: Hearing impaired children miss important information when the conversation is not directed towards them
  - Hearing individual sounds clearly enough to identify fine differences in words (e.g. talked vs. talk vs. top)

### Make the classroom a good listening environment:

- The child should sit close to where the teacher instructs and away from noise sources when possible (e.g. door, window, heater, trash, pencil sharpener). The better hearing ear should be close to the teacher.
- Arrange desks so the children have a clear and unobstructed view of the teacher (e.g. short rows, horseshoe).
- Reduce noise and echo in the classroom:
  - use area carpets, curtains and acoustic ceiling tiles

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Adapted from Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, Helping Children with Mild or Fluctuating Hearing Loss, May 2003

- put bulletin boards and artwork on the walls
- close doors and windows
- cover desk or chair feet with soft materials (e.g. felt pads, used tennis balls, socks)
- make sure heating and air conditioning systems are in proper working order
- use overhead projectors without noisy fans
- turn off noises (e.g. television, radio, overhead projector) before saying important things
- An FM system improves the child's ability to hear and understand the teacher's voice in a difficult listening environment such as a classroom.

### **Watch the child for signs of frustration:**

#### **The child may:**

- Respond inconsistently and not be aware of your attempts to communicate.

#### **The child:**

- Should tell the teacher when they do not hear or understand something, or if noise bothers them.

#### **Give the child enough time to process spoken information before they respond.**

- If the child does not understand something, change the wording and simplify the language instead of repeating the same question or statement.
- It is important to be patient and encouraging.

### **Help the child focus and follow what you are saying:**

- Get the child's attention before talking, giving instructions, or starting new activities. Try flicking the lights or using a specified word or hand signal.
- During classroom discussions, identify the child who is talking and repeat or rephrase what they say.
- Ask questions related to the subject under discussion to make sure the child is following the lesson.
- Give the child short breaks during lessons.
- Children can pass around the FM system microphone during classroom discussions or presentations.
- 'Chunk' instructions into short pieces and include only necessary information.
- Write important instructions on the board but always face the students when giving spoken instructions.

### **Give the child visual cues:**

- Face the child, speak clearly, use a slow rate of speech, and stand still when talking.
- Keep objects away from your mouth and face (ie. gum, mustachio, pen, hands, and book) when talking.
- Encourage the child to watch the speaker's face.
- Display charts, lists, or diagrams of classroom routines and lesson examples.
- Write new vocabulary on the blackboard.
- Write assignments on the board and make sure the children copy them down.
- Use experiments and demonstrations to reinforce learning.
- Keep a light on near the teacher's face during movies so the child can see the teacher's comments.
- Room lighting should shine on the speaker's face because it causes a glare when it is behind them.

### **Give the child as much individual attention as possible:**

- One-on-one teaching and extra language assistance help fill in gaps in language and understanding.
- The child may need help understanding instructions and questions during exams so they are being tested on their knowledge and not their language skills. They may also need to move to a quieter room.
- Give lesson outlines to parents/resource personnel so they can make the child familiar with new vocabulary and concepts before the lesson.
- Agree on an appropriate peer that can help the child if they miss important material or instructions or do not understand assignments.

### **If the Child uses hearing aids and/or an FM system, consider the following:**

- Hearing aids and FM systems help the child to hear better but do not 'fix' the hearing loss; the child still does not have normal hearing.
- Request in-services by parents or educational audiologists.
- Learn how to do a listening check, change or charge batteries, turn device on/off, and ensure volume controls are set correctly.
- Watch for behavior changes that suggest the child's hearing aids/FM system are not working properly.

For more information, call 614.263.5151 to speak with a licensed and certified Audiologist at the Columbus Speech & Hearing Center