

# Communicating with your baby



## Recognise signals

- Recognise your baby's signals and ask "What is my baby trying to say with his or her eyes, face, body or voice?".
- Take the signals your baby provides — facial expressions, eye contact, cooing and babbling or movement — and react to them with appropriate words, gestures, expressions or signs.
- Encourage your baby to communicate more by repeating and adding to what they say.

## Imitate

- Imitate the sounds and gestures your baby makes and wait for him or her to repeat them.
- Model actions and words eg. waving goodbye.
- Let your face reflect what your child is showing.

## Playing with sound and language

- Make language one of your favorite toys and use it at every opportunity.
- When you notice an interesting sound, turn your head to the left or right to help locate it — "Where is that sound coming from?".
- Play games such as 'Blind Man's Bluff' and 'Peek-a Boo'.
- Play with 'noisy toys' and games.

## Self esteem

- Talk openly about the hearing loss to your child, and to friends, family and teachers, but avoid emotive language.
- Get into good listening habits when your baby is young and accepts everything unquestioningly.
- Communication is made up of many things: speech, gesture, facial expressions, touching and sign to name a few.
- Every person uses a combination of these methods to communicate.
- Use as many of these strategies with your baby from the start so as to increase your baby's communication and language learning.



## Communicating with your baby

### Special tips for unilateral babies — what strategies can I use to help my child?

#### Changes to the physical environment

- Position your baby so that the good ear is directed to the sound you want them to hear.
- Place furniture such as cots and high chairs away from background noise and in a position to take advantage of the better hearing ear.
- Place the baby's car seat on the opposite side of the car to the better ear.
- Ensure that your baby is seated so more interesting sounds are presented to the better ear.
- Be sure there is good lighting in the room.
- Once your child is at school, preferential seating in the classroom, to take advantage of the better hearing ear, is recommended.

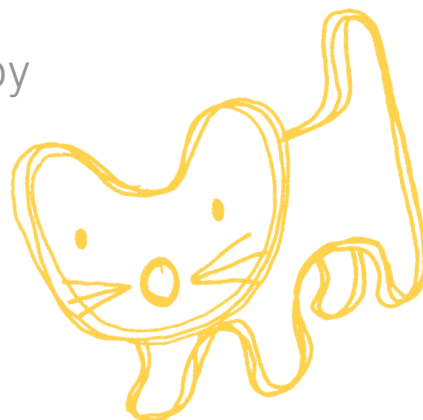
#### Communication strategies

- Minimize the distance between you and your baby when talking to him/her. Come even closer in a noisy environment.
- Move away from or reduce background noise when you want your child to listen to you.
- Position your baby with the good ear towards you for conversation, or away from you to listen to other sounds.
- Show your baby where sound comes from.
- Gain your baby's attention then speak.
- Provide visual cues or gestures when you speak or make a sound; let your baby see your lips.
- Tell your child what room you are in when you call them.
- When you notice an interesting sound, turn your head to the left or right to help locate it – "Where is that sound coming from?" "What can be done?"

#### What can be done at home

- Keep the level of background noise to a minimum, if possible, when your baby is in a listening situation.
- Make sure that your baby can see you when you are speaking.
- As your child may have difficulty in determining where a sound is coming from, teach your child to be very aware in situations such as crossing a road.
- Protect the better hearing ear from loud sounds such as power tools or personal headphones.
- Have your child's hearing assessed regularly to ensure that the normal ear is hearing at adequate levels. Your Audiologist will tell you how often this should occur.
- If your child gets an ear infection, you may notice that their hearing is much worse. It is important that you see your doctor as soon as possible.
- Ensure that your child is vaccinated on time for measles, mumps and rubella.
- See Section 7: Support for parent support groups.

# Communicating with your baby



## Hearing aids

### What can be done at pre-school and school

- Inform the teacher that your child has a hearing loss in one ear.
- Your child should be seated close to the teacher or where they can hear the best.
- The normal hearing ear should be closest to the teacher.
- Your child should be seated away from background noise such as fans or air conditioners.
- In some circumstances, an FM (radio transmitted sound) or hearing aid may be beneficial. You could ask your Audiologist about these.

Your baby will get the most benefit from hearing aids when they are worn regularly.

Hearing aids should not be uncomfortable or painful for your baby if they are fitted correctly.

Each hearing aid is attached to an ear mould that is the exact size and shape of your baby's ears. The Audiologist at *Australian Hearing* will take regular impressions of your baby's ears so the ear moulds fit snugly as your baby grows.



## Advocacy — how to help your child

Advocating for your child means promoting his or her welfare and interests.

Parents want the best for their children. We want to provide them with the best opportunities we can so they grow up to be happy, independent adults. Parents are responsible for the child's welfare and have their child's best interest at heart — they are natural advocates for their children.

As your baby grows, you will find there are situations where you require advocacy skills. The tips below may start you along the advocacy path:

- 1.** You are the key member of your baby's support team and should work with the health care professionals involved with your baby. Successful advocacy will depend on working with others in your baby's team.
- 2.** Be educated and informed about hearing loss and its effects on your baby. Read and talk to professionals and other parents to develop a good understanding about your baby's needs.

- 3.** Become familiar with the terminology, jargon, rules and processes of the various services providing your baby with assistance.

- 4.** Be confident about your abilities and rights. Effective communication is one of the keys to success — use the knowledge and skills you already have.

- 5.** Train yourself to write things down. Keep copies of all letters and reports and notes on phone calls.

It may seem overwhelming at present to consider that you must become an expert in your baby's needs and the system designed to offer your family the assistance and support you need. However, involved and informed parents are the most effective advocates for their children and you will never regret the time spent ensuring your baby's needs are met.

“For us it is a team thing, although we both take different roles depending on the situation. I know more about the day to day aspects of supporting our kids, but ... is there for them actively in all they do — we are both very committed to making sure that there are no barriers for these kids in their learning and their lives, so we model that — we have accepted that they have a hearing loss, so have they. We are just trying to bring up kids who are happy and healthy and who are outward looking — not victims.”

## Your family



### Brothers and sisters

Having a new baby in the family can be tough for brothers and sisters at the best of times. When a baby is diagnosed with a hearing loss, it affects everyone in the family including the brothers and sisters. There are things you can do to make the situation easier for your older children.

- Tell the older children about hearing loss in age-appropriate language. Knowing the facts reduces their uncertainty and puts their fears into perspective.
- Try to be a good listener and allow them to express their feelings.
- Set aside some special time for each child through the day. Ask for help from family and friends so that you can spend time with your other children. Ten minutes of uninterrupted time with mum or dad can make a difference to how valued and loved they feel.
- Remind family and friends to pay attention to the other children.
- Take the time to enjoy all of your children — they all have needs and want to feel special and loved.

### A message to grandparents

We know it is a difficult time for grandparents when a baby is diagnosed with a hearing loss. You experience feelings of sadness for your grandchild, your own child and yourself. We also know that the emotional support grandparents provide to their son or daughter is important for their psychological adjustment and in reducing their stress. The parents of a baby with a hearing loss appear to be most appreciative of the support offered by their own parents.

There are a number of practical ideas to assist your son or daughter's family. The kind of attention we most want to shower on babies — touching, holding, comforting, rocking, singing and talking — are precisely what your grandchild needs now.

Some families may really appreciate practical help with cleaning, washing and ironing or shopping. Allow the parents to guide you — avoid taking control.

Babysitting your new grandchild or his or her siblings can allow the parents some time-out to relax and enjoy themselves. An hour's break can recharge the batteries and bring some perspective back into their lives.

Don't be afraid of the technology. Learn how to put in the hearing aids and how to test them, change the battery and so on. They can be fiddly but with a little practice you will soon be an expert.

Accept your grandchild for the child they are. Recognise their achievements and simply enjoy them.

### Things that won't help:

Don't tell them not to worry — "He is so young; he will grow out of it; give it some time" because this is not the case. With early fitting of hearing aids, early intervention and a loving and supportive family, your grandchild has the best possible start.

Avoid 'blaming' one side of the family or a family member for the hearing loss — it is unhelpful and upsetting. Even families with a history of hearing loss, are shocked and upset when the littlest family member is diagnosed with a hearing loss.

Try and avoid criticising or offering opinions. Parents who receive support and good information from professionals usually make the right choices for their family (even if they are different to yours).



## Early intervention

### What is early childhood intervention?

Early childhood intervention is a system of coordinated services that promotes a child's growth and development and supports families during the critical early years, from birth to school entry.

Early childhood intervention should be a multidisciplinary approach. Early intervention programs for children with hearing loss usually focus on language development but also consider the intellectual, social, emotional and physical growth/needs of the child and his/her family.

Parents should be involved in the process from the beginning. You should be a core member of your child's support team. The team is usually coordinated by the parent/caregivers and can include Paediatricians, Audiologists, Teachers of the Deaf, other

Doctors, Speech Pathologists, Social Workers, Counsellors and Educational Psychologists. Other personnel may include Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and others, depending on the needs of the child and family.

### Why does my baby need early intervention?

Research has shown that intervention before 6 months of age maximises your baby's potential for speech and language development and minimises developmental delays, regardless of the mode of communication you choose. Early identification of your baby's hearing loss allows you time to consider your choices carefully. You don't need to rush, however, it is not a good idea to take months.

### How will I decide which early intervention service is best for my baby?

You will receive a copy of *CHOICES* on your first visit to *Australian Hearing*. *CHOICES* is a good place to start looking for information about the services that are available to you. It provides information on all aspects of your journey with a child with hearing loss including an overview of each early intervention service and how to contact them. Seek out all the information you can find on early intervention services in your area. Visit more than one program and sit in on a session. Seek out other parents who have gone through the same process. It may also help to talk to deaf and hearing-impaired adults to get feedback on the choices their parents made for them. Don't listen to just one person. Be open to advice, but also trust your own instinct and judgment.

Choose a service that you feel is right for your family, you may choose more than one service; these may not necessarily be the most convenient. There is no right or wrong choice and no decision is permanent.

## Early intervention



### How do I contact other parents and/or deaf adults?

There are several ways:

- Parent Support Groups — details of these are provided later in this resource
- Deaf Society of NSW — particularly if you would like to meet some Deaf or hearing impaired adults

The SWISH Social Worker can also put you in touch with other parents.

### Early intervention checklist

The early intervention checklist to be inserted in your baby's Personal Health Record shows you the questions to ask when considering what type of early intervention service you want your baby to go to. It is important to find one that is right for you and your baby's needs. Please remember that there is no right or wrong answer and you can change decision at any time.

“Family and friends are just amazing. Early intervention feels like you are part of a community. Support groups have been great. If you don't agree with what someone says, you don't have to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Take what is good from these sources, it doesn't always have to be about 'hearing loss support' I think the best support can be what makes you feel good as a person, then you can be the best parent for your child. My mum and dad are just great at doing things like folding washing, helping me make my garden look nice, cooking me a yummy soup. It has nothing to do with ...'s hearing loss, but when I'm exhausted from so many appointments, I really do appreciate it all the more.”



## Support

### **SWISH Social Workers**

SWISH Social Workers are concerned with the emotional and social well being of families after the diagnosis of hearing loss in a newborn baby. They offer a child focused, family-centred approach.

The Social Worker is a member of the SWISH team and the Audiologist who diagnosed your baby's hearing loss can refer you to the SWISH Social Worker. You may meet with the Social Worker at the time of the diagnosis or you can contact the Social Worker later on.

There is a SWISH Social Worker at The Children's Hospital at Westmead, at Sydney Children's Hospital, and at John Hunter Hospital. The Social Worker can be contacted through Department of Social Work in each hospital.

The Social Worker can help with a range of issues including:

- Dealing with your child's hearing loss — feelings about the diagnosis can be overwhelming and it can be helpful to discuss this with someone from outside your family
- Accessing services and resources within the hospital and community — if you need additional assistance the Social Worker can help you find out about services and resources that are appropriate for your family. This could include family support services, housing or other practical resources or referral to other services relevant to you or your children
- Family and relationship concerns — diagnosis of a hearing loss will affect every member of the family
- Parenting difficulties
- Coping with changes and grief

Services include:

- Assessing the support needs of families
- Counselling with parents and families
- Education and support groups
- Information and assistance in accessing services and resources

The Social Workers can see you at the hospital or in some circumstances may be able to visit you at home.

# Support



## Benefits

### Travel assistance

*Transport for Health* — subsidised travel schemes are financial reimbursement schemes for patients who are disadvantaged by distance and isolation and need financial assistance to use transport services to access specialist medical services not available locally.

*Transport for Health* provides assistance by either purchasing or providing direct transport assistance through brokerage, contractual arrangements, or by direct transport provision by an Area Health Service for example. The program also provides assistance by subsidising the cost of patient transport to medical specialists, dental surgeons and, Audiologists (for all babies screened under the Statewide Infant Screening-Hearing (SWISH) program).

*Transport for Health* subsidised travel schemes currently funded by NSW Health include the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) and the Statewide Infant Screening-Hearing (SWISH) Travel.

### The Isolated Patients Travel & Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS)

IPTAAS is designed to provide assistance to people who live in isolated and remote communities to access specialist medical treatment. Families who live more than 100km (one way) from the nearest treating specialist are eligible to apply.

IPTAAS provides travel assistance through reimbursing rail or bus rates for a child and one escort, or by providing a standard fuel subsidy. It does not pay for airfares unless medical approval has been obtained. IPTAAS also provides assistance with accommodation costs. It is important to note that IPTAAS does not provide full reimbursement and that a personal contribution is deducted from the total benefits paid each claim. IPTAAS will not reimburse for other living expenses such as food.

It is important that you hold on to your receipts to receive reimbursement.

More information about IPTAAS can be found on the NSW Health web site at <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/living/transport/>

### SWISH Travel Assistance Scheme

SWISH Travel Assistance Scheme is similar to IPTAAS. SWISH travel is available to families who live more than 100km (one way) from one of the three SWISH associated tertiary diagnostic centres, for diagnostic auditory assessment. These centres are:

- The Children's Hospital at Westmead
- John Hunter Hospital
- Sydney Children's Hospital

Your Area Health Service SWISH Coordinator or Social Worker will assist you with accessing SWISH travel.

### Financial stress

If you are experiencing significant financial difficulties please speak with your SWISH Coordinator or Social Worker who may be able to assist you and provide financial assistance prior to attending diagnostic audiology.

### Carer's Allowance

You may be eligible for a Carer's Allowance to help with extra costs that you may incur having a child with a hearing loss. Your hospital Social Worker can provide the forms and information on how to apply for this payment. Alternatively you can contact Centrelink on 132717 for more information or to make a time to meet with them.

## Parent and other groups

### **Aussie Deaf Kids**

[www.aussiedeafkids.com](http://www.aussiedeafkids.com)

Aussie Deaf Kids provides online support and resources for parents of hard of hearing and deaf children living in Australia.

### **ACT Deafness Resource Centre**

[www.actdrc.org.au](http://www.actdrc.org.au)

For the Canberra Deaf Children's Association  
Tel: (02) 6287 4393  
(Leave a message)

### **Canberra Deaf Children's Association**

[www.canberradeafkids.org.au](http://www.canberradeafkids.org.au)

### **Deaf Children Australia**

[www.deafchildreinaustralia.org.au](http://www.deafchildreinaustralia.org.au)

Deaf Children Australia provides information, advocacy, support services and educational resources that respond to the needs of hearing impaired children and their families.

### **Deaf Children Australia Hotline**

Tel: 1800 645 916

Available Australia-wide, Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm (EST)

Fax: (03) 9525 2595

TTY: (03) 9510 7143

### **Deaf Mothers' Club (NSW)**

Tel: (02) 9626 5137

Fax: (02) 9262 3418

Support group for Deaf mothers. The club meets every 4th Tuesday of the month in Marayong, Sydney.

### **Deafness Forum of Australia**

Tel: (02) 6262 7808

TTY: (02) 6262 7809

Fax: (02) 6262 7810

The Deafness Forum represents all interests and viewpoints of the Deaf and hearing impaired communities of Australia. The Deafness Forum exists to improve the quality of life for Australians who are Deaf, have a hearing impairment or have a chronic disorder of the ear.

### **Deaf Society of NSW**

Tel: 1800 893 855

Fax: 1800 898 333

TTY: 1800 893 885

[www.deafsocietynsw.org.au](http://www.deafsocietynsw.org.au)

The Deaf Society of NSW works within the community to ensure Deaf people achieve their full rights and fulfil their responsibilities as Australian citizens.

The Deaf Society NSW has offices in Parramatta, Newcastle, Coffs Coast and Lismore.

### **Dubbo & District Parent Support Group for the Deaf/Hearing Impaired Inc**

[www.pcde.org/information/dubbo\\_psg.html](http://www.pcde.org/information/dubbo_psg.html)

Tel: (02) 6884 6714

### **North Shore Deaf Children's Association**

Tel: (02) 9438 3919

(02) 9953 4864

The North Shore Deaf Children's Association (NSDCA) is a support network for parents, friends and professionals of children with hearing loss which provides information and support to members from across Sydney and beyond. NSDCA also lobbies to improve education and hearing services for children & young adults.

### **Parent Council for Deaf Education**

Tel: (02) 9871 3049

TTY: (02) 9871 3026

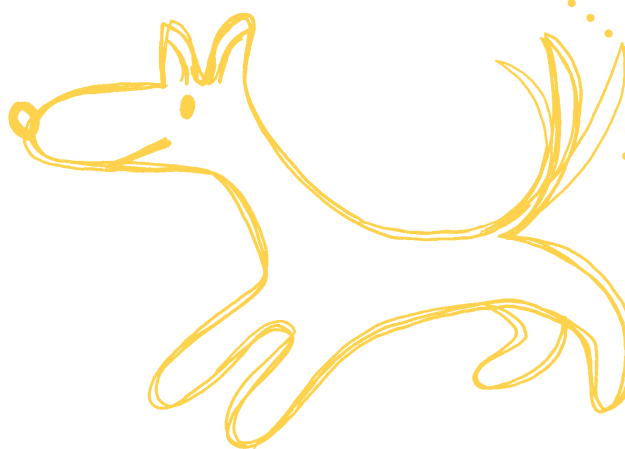
Fax: (02) 9871 3193

The Parent Council for Deaf Education (PCDE) is a state-wide organisation that provides parents and children with information and support in all aspects of deafness. PCDE offers an advocacy service on behalf of individual families and all parents and children who have a hearing loss.

### **Parents of Deaf (POD) Lismore**

Tel (02) 6622 5572

## Internet resources



### **Australian resources**

#### **Australian Hearing**

Information on hearing loss, hearing aids and research in Australia

[www.hearing.com.au](http://www.hearing.com.au)

#### **Australian Association of the Deaf**

Provides information and views of the severely hearing impaired

[www.aad.org.au](http://www.aad.org.au)

#### **Aussie Deaf Kids**

Online support and resources for parents of hard of hearing and deaf children living in Australia.

[www.aussiedeafkids.com](http://www.aussiedeafkids.com)

#### **Audiological Society of Australia.**

Provides information on Hearing Services in Australia.

[www.audiology.asn.au](http://www.audiology.asn.au)

#### **Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre (SCIC)**

Provides information about cochlear implants

[www.scic.nsw.gov.au](http://www.scic.nsw.gov.au)

### **International resources**

#### **Beginnings**

For parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing

<http://beginningssvcs.com>

#### **Boystown National Research Hospital**

Information on hearing loss in children

[www.boystownhospital.org/Hearing/index.asp](http://www.boystownhospital.org/Hearing/index.asp)

#### **Deafness @ birth**

[www.deafnessatbirth.org.uk/index.html](http://www.deafnessatbirth.org.uk/index.html)

#### **Department of Orthohinology**

Health Sciences Centre, Louisiana State University School of Medicine in New Orleans,

Information on what can be done for Auditory Neuropathy/ Auditory Dysynchrony

[www.medschool.lsuhs.edu/otorhinology/deafness\\_article6.asp](http://www.medschool.lsuhs.edu/otorhinology/deafness_article6.asp)

#### **Hands And Voices (USA)**

Parent driven organisation supporting families and their children who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as the professionals who serve them.

[www.handsandvoices.org](http://www.handsandvoices.org)

#### **John Tracey Clinic**

Provides worldwide parent-centred services to young children with a hearing loss

[www.johntracyclinic.org](http://www.johntracyclinic.org)

#### **Listen Up (USA)**

On-line information and support hearing impaired children and their families.

[www.listen-up.org](http://www.listen-up.org)

#### **My baby's hearing**

[www.babyhearing.org](http://www.babyhearing.org)

#### **National Deaf Children's Society (UK)**

Provides support, information and advice for deaf children, young people and their families

[www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)

# Building blocks

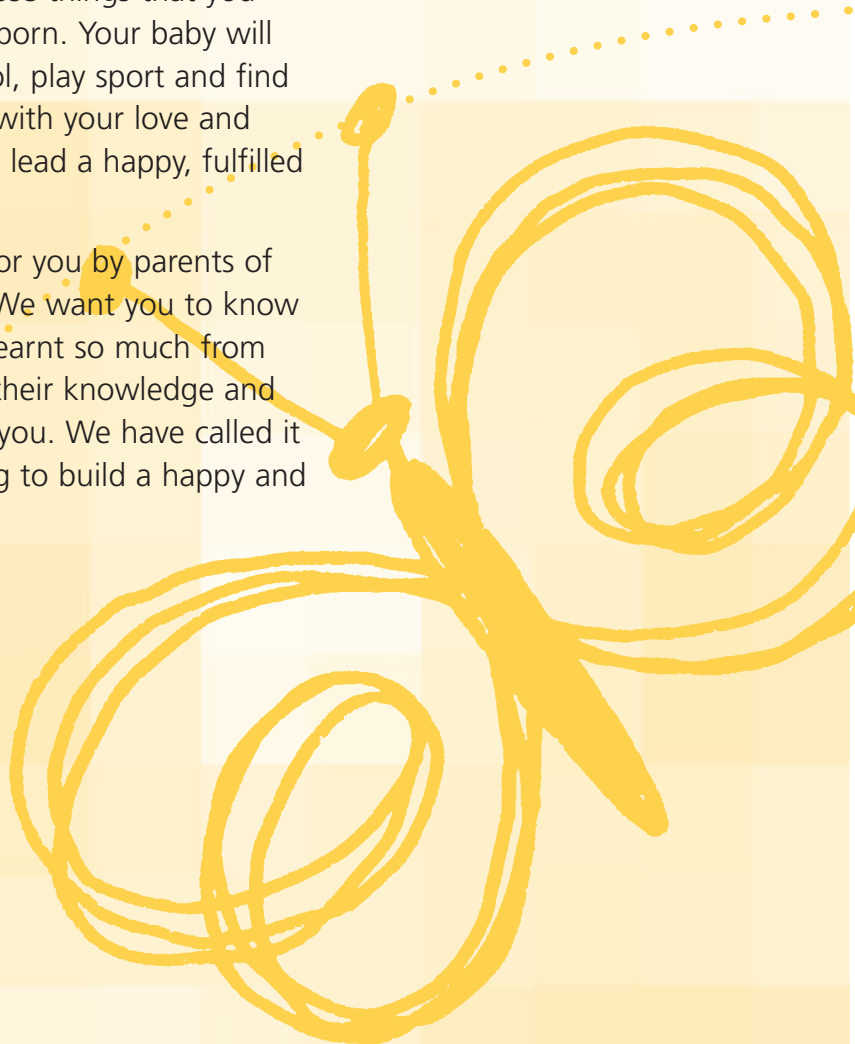
Dear Parents,

If your baby has recently been diagnosed with a hearing loss, we know how you are feeling now. We have all experienced those feelings of isolation and sadness when our children were diagnosed. The diagnosis comes as a huge shock.

In the weeks, months and years ahead, however, you will discover that your baby will do all those things that you dreamt about before your baby was born. Your baby will smile at you, talk to you, go to school, play sport and find a job. Life won't always be easy but with your love and assistance, your baby will grow up to lead a happy, fulfilled and independent life.

This booklet has been put together for you by parents of deaf and hearing impaired children. We want you to know that you are not alone. We have all learnt so much from other parents and have drawn from their knowledge and experience to create this booklet for you. We have called it 'Building blocks' as you are beginning to build a happy and successful future for your baby.

All the best and enjoy your baby!



# Firstly...

**The main goal** of early identification of hearing loss is access to communication. Cuddling, comforting, rocking, smiling and singing are all forms of communication.

**You have your** baby's best interests at heart. Parents are natural advocates for their children and you should play an active role in planning your baby's future.

**Take one step** at a time — great journeys start with a single step.

**Get as much** information as you can from many different sources. Parents who receive unbiased information and support will usually make the right decisions for their baby and family.

**Take the time** you need to make decisions — you don't need to rush. However, it is not a good idea to take months.

**Ask questions and** make sure you understand the answers.

**Ask your baby's** doctors and audiologists to write down the main points they have discussed with you.

**Speak up about** your concerns and worries.

**Allow people to** help and support you and your family — ask for help when you need it.

**Store all the** information you have about your baby's hearing loss in one place.

**Be gentle on** yourselves — take time out.



# Good foundations...

Finding out your baby has a hearing loss is a shock. Fortunately, what your baby needs most from you at the moment are all those things that parents are so good at — touching, talking, comforting and loving. While there is a lot for you to learn and decisions need to be made, enjoy your baby and settle into a comfortable routine.

You have probably already started to learn a little about what having a baby with a hearing loss means from your doctor or audiologist. All the information can be overwhelming. But parents have learnt that the more information we have about hearing loss and its management, the more in control we are and the easier it is to get on with the things that need to be done.

Knowledge is power. Gather as much information you can from many different sources. Read brochures, books, articles and web sites. You will find some resources very helpful and others that you may not like. Our babies are all individuals and our families have different needs. What suits one family may not be right for yours.

# Looking after yourself...

Parents respond in different ways to finding out our baby has a hearing loss. Denial, anger, sadness and fear are all common reactions. Most of us cry. How we respond to the diagnosis depends on many things that are unique to us and our family. Over time these strong feelings fade. We learn to accept the situation and get on with our lives — we develop some perspective about the role of deafness in our lives. There will still be times of sadness or grief — it is part of being a loving parent.

Having a baby with a hearing loss affects the whole family. Parents may approach their new roles differently. They may feel and react differently. Talk to your partner about how you are feeling and be aware of their needs as well. It can also be beneficial to share your feelings with family and friends you trust and love. Being honest and open with family and friends will help them understand that it is OK to talk about your baby and his/her hearing loss and help you to better deal with the situation. If you have other children, be aware of their feelings and needs.

You are the centre of your baby's universe and it is important that you look after yourself over these next few months. Try and get enough sleep; eat healthy meals and do some regular exercise. A walk each day is good for you and your baby!

In the first few weeks after your baby's diagnosis, it can be difficult to concentrate and 'get your act together.' Accept help from family and friends. We have put together a brochure you can give your family and friends which has some helpful tips and suggestions for them. A good meal, babysitting or taking your other children to school are all things that will help you and allow them to show you that they care.

# You will need...

**Two ring binders** — one for your baby's test results and reports and the other for information about hearing loss, services etc.

**A business card holder** — ask each person you see for a business card and you will have all their contact details handy.

**A calendar** — you will have many appointments over the next few months. Remember to book in time for coffee with friends or a meal with family (let them cook!).

**A journal** — write things down. We often forget things that are said to us when we are stressed and it can be a good idea to jot things down. Keep written records of appointments and phone calls etc. They can be brief but useful. Many parents also find writing down their thoughts and feelings can be helpful.



# Your team...

You and your baby will be meeting a number of different people over the next weeks and months. They are all part of a multi-disciplinary team and are there to guide and support you.

- You and your family are the most important people on your baby's team and it is important that you build up a good rapport with your team members. You will then feel comfortable expressing your concerns and communicating your needs to them.
- Take a list of questions with you to appointments. We often forget the most important questions when we visit the doctor or audiologist.
- No question is too silly — someone has always asked the same question before you.
- Make sure you understand the answers to your questions — don't go home wondering.
- Ask for a professional interpreter if you are not fluent in English.
- Make sure you get copies of reports and test results for your records. These can be very useful over time. Keep them in that folder you have started!
- It is OK to question a professional's recommendations or ask for a second opinion. You must feel comfortable with the management of your baby's hearing loss.

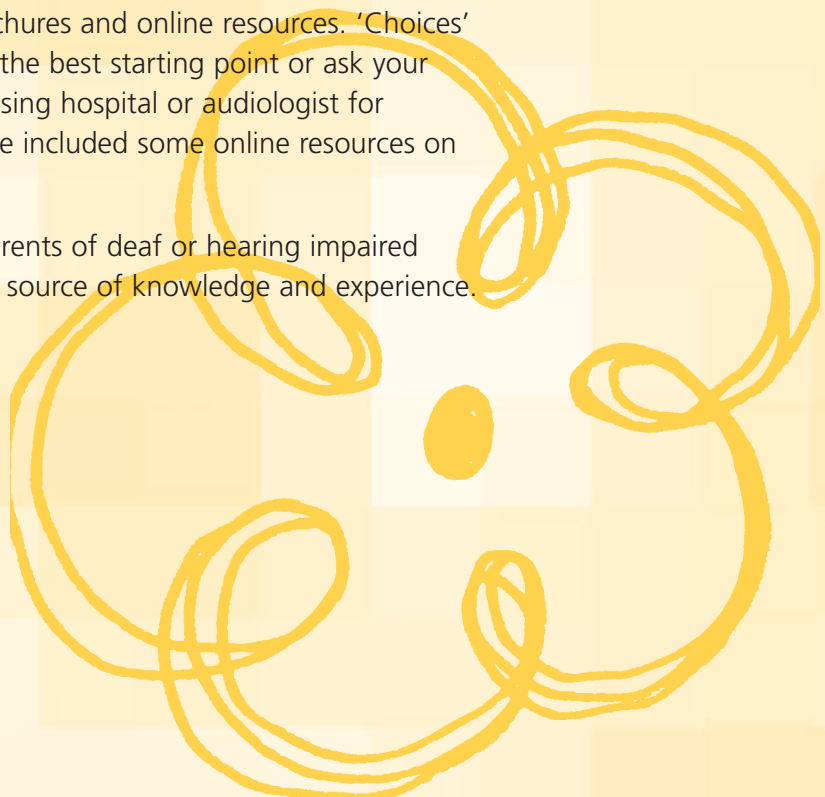
# Information...

Good quality information about hearing loss and its management is so important. Get as much information as you can from many different sources and discuss what you have learnt with the professionals in your team, your family and friends and other parents of children with a hearing loss. You will then be able to make informed choices about your baby's future.

Some parents find all the initial information overwhelming and difficult to absorb while others can't get enough information. Go at a pace that suits you. But remember that it will be important that you keep up with current information for many years to come. Technology, government policies and so on change over time and you need to keep up to date and informed as your baby gets older.

There are many excellent sources of good, accurate and reliable information — books, brochures and online resources. 'Choices' from *Australian Hearing* is the best starting point or ask your paediatrician at the diagnosing hospital or audiologist for recommendations. We have included some online resources on the last page of this guide.

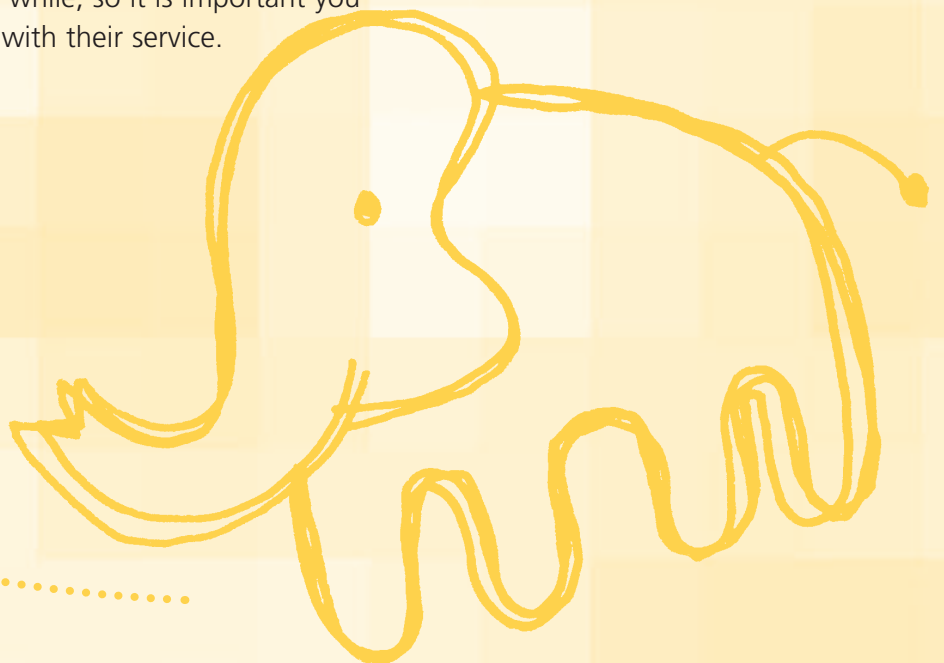
Most parents find other parents of deaf or hearing impaired children to be a wonderful source of knowledge and experience.



# Decisions...

There appear to be so many decisions to be made when our baby is diagnosed with a hearing loss, and we need to make them when we are still in shock and know so little ...

- Don't rush into things. Taking a few weeks to find out more about your baby's hearing loss and needs will not affect his or her future. However, it is not a good idea to take months. It is recommended that your baby is aided and has started early intervention by the time he/she is 6 months old.
- You are entitled to choose the path that best suits your baby and family. Make sure that you know all the options available to you before making decisions. Be an informed decision-maker.
- Decisions you make now can be changed — decisions that are right for your family today may no longer be right in a few years.
- Shop around for an early intervention service that suits your family. Visit them and talk to the staff. They will become an important part of your life for a while, so it is important you feel comfortable and confident with their service.



# Rural families...

Living outside a metropolitan area presents a number of other challenges for families. You will probably need to travel greater distances to access specialist and audiological services. Issues about work, looking after other children and travelling with a small baby increase the stress for rural families. It can seem like you have just arrived back home and you must be off again.

This will improve over time. There will be fewer appointments and you will be able to attend an *Australian Hearing Centre* closer to home. There are some services available to you that can relieve the financial burden. Ask your doctor, audiologist or hospital social worker about financial assistance for travel and accommodation in your State.

Travel safely. Don't drive if you are upset. It might be better to stay overnight after an appointment and drive home when you and your baby are rested and more relaxed.

Be organised. Keep all the information in one place. Remember any forms that may need to be signed. Have all your questions written down. Don't allow the doctor, audiologist or other health professional to rush you. You have travelled a long way to attend the appointment and you should return home feeling the visit was worthwhile.

Try and organise appointments that will be easiest for you and your family. Late Friday afternoon or early Monday morning may be less disruptive to family life.

Remember that the people who care about you would like to offer you help and support. Ask them when you need help — there will be other times when you can repay the favour.

# You are not alone...

Most parents feel very isolated when their baby is diagnosed with a hearing loss. But you are not alone. There are many parents who have been on the journey before you and know how important it is for families to make contact with other families in a similar situation.

Where can you find other parents? Speak to your audiologist and tell him/her that you would like to meet other parents in your local area. Your early intervention service will be an excellent source for support and friendship with other families. There are Parent Groups in most States who provide information and support to parents with children of all ages. And last, but not least, there are online groups where many families have found support and good practical information from other families living with kids with a hearing loss in a day-to-day situation.

You will learn so much from other parents. They have a vast wealth of experience and knowledge from which you can benefit. And other parents can learn from YOUR unique perspective and experience. You really are not alone...



## Acknowledgements

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