

kids klub

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Unitron Hearing is committed to improving the lives of people with hearing loss. Additional information and printable resources are also available in Parent's Corner, a section of the Kids Klub site dedicated to parents of children with hearing loss. This parent guide, as well as the wealth of information available in Parent's Corner, can help you contribute to your child's success.

www.kidsklub.unitron.com

BEGINNING YOUR JOURNEY TOGETHER

From your child's first hearing evaluation through to his or her fittings with hearing aids, your support and encouragement will play an essential role in your child's ability to take part in life to its fullest. This guide offers factual information as well as practical and emotional tips to help you, your child – and others who play a role in your child's life – make your journey together a successful one.

Hearing is one of our most important senses. Learning that your child has a hearing loss can be very upsetting and feel overwhelming, but it's important to remember, you're not alone. Approximately six out of every 1000 children are born with some degree of hearing loss. The vast majority of these children will lead full, rewarding lives with the use of hearing aids. Making the decision to have your child fitted with hearing aids is the most caring and responsible step you can take.



SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

Children with hearing loss require additional support and patience. Not only are they dealing with hearing loss and adjusting to their hearing aids, they are also dealing with speech, language, social and emotional development – a big job for any child.

From the beginning, children's acceptance of hearing aids is affected by those around them. The praise and encouragement of family members, educators and peers when your child consistently uses the hearing aids is essential to his or her self-esteem. Your child needs to understand why he or she is wearing hearing aids.



Here are a few practical ways to encourage hearing aid use in the early days, as well as continue to encourage speech and language development.

- ▶ Keep a hearing aid calendar. Keep track of how many hours a day your child uses his or her hearing aids as well as any information about the hearing aids themselves, your child's acceptance or resistance to the aids and any new responses your child has to sounds when the hearing aids are in. This is a helpful reminder to you and your child and is invaluable information for the hearing healthcare professional.
- ▶ Help your child learn his or her name. It is important that your child recognizes his or her name: this allows you to begin communicating readily with each other. Remember when you call your child's name, make eye contact and have a reason. If you call your child's name just to see a response, your child may soon tire of this and stop responding.
- ▶ Observe everyday sounds with your child. When sounds occur around you, put your hands to your ears, point to the source and exclaim "I hear that!" This draws your child's attention to sounds. Later, you can extend this exercise by bringing your child to the source of the sound and identifying it (for example, "Listen to the dog barking!"). Praise your child when he or she does a good job of listening.
- ▶ Maintain your journal. Listen to the sounds your child makes when using the hearing aids. Changes in how your child vocalizes (for example, does your child use mostly vowels or consonants when making sounds) are excellent indicators of how well the hearing aids are working for your child.

Your Everyday Role

As your child grows and matures, the groundwork of support and encouragement you've established will help your child flourish. Here are some suggestions to keep in mind:

- ▶ Let your child speak for him or herself and continue to praise your child when he or she does a good job of listening.
- ▶ Encourage your child to become more independent with respect to listening.
- ▶ Treat your child the same as you treat his or her siblings: don't be afraid to set high expectations.
- ▶ Give your child an age-appropriate level of responsibility and demonstrate the confidence you have in his or her abilities.
- ▶ Continue to discuss hearing loss with your child, but not to the extent that your child's self-identity is based on his or her hearing loss.
- ▶ Similarly, avoid labels as a way to describe your child. Your child has a hearing loss, but should be known first and foremost for all his or her other characteristics and qualities.

Your Child's Team

Put together a support team to ensure you and your child receive all the help and encouragement you need. A child with hearing loss may have delays in speech, language, academic, social or emotional development because of reduced auditory input during critical language-learning years. Check to see if your school employs resource teachers or teacher's aides who are trained in supporting children with hearing loss. Educational audiologists, speech language pathologists, school psychologists or social workers can also provide support and education to a child with hearing loss.

In addition to these professionals, your child's teachers, coaches, and peers, along with adult family friends and relatives, will become an integral part of your child's – and your – support network. Your child may also benefit from the experiences of other people who are successful hearing aid wearers. Sharing the information in this guide and on the Kids Klub web site (www.kidsklub.unitron) with these people is an excellent start to involving them in supporting your child effectively.



Parents' Checklist

The following are some tips to help you support your child in his or her hearing loss:

- ▶ Realizing your child has a hearing loss can be overwhelming. Take time to learn about hearing loss and how to best help your child.
- ▶ Take time out for yourself when you need it, or talk to someone about how you are feeling.
- ▶ Support your child to help his or her confidence.
- ▶ Speak to your child in a normal voice. Many children find loud sounds uncomfortable, even with a hearing loss.
- ▶ When you speak to your child ensure you are no further than six feet away.
- ▶ Keep background noise to a minimum (it may be difficult, even impossible, for your child to hear you while the television is on).
- ▶ Make eye contact with your child before speaking and maintain it while you talk.
- ▶ Keep distractions (such as chewing or touching your hair or face) to a minimum when speaking.
- ▶ Do not repeat or interpret what other people say to your child: let your child do his or her own hearing.
- ▶ Offer positive encouragement to your child. Older children may feel frustrated or angry: make yourself available if your child wishes to discuss feelings of frustration. It's better to acknowledge rather than deny the feelings, and discuss ways to manage the frustration.
- ▶ Praise your child when he or she listens well. This will encourage independence.

YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Raising a child with a hearing loss has its unique joys and challenges. And just as positive encouragement, support and the cultivation of independence is important at home, it also plays a role in your child's world outside your home. As your child grows up, he or she will have the opportunity to function in more and more environments, with more and more individuals who will need to know how to offer effective support.



Social

From day one, nurturing your child's ability to develop good social skills is important. Part of that nurturing deals with giving your child the confidence and the language to teach others about his or her hearing loss. Equally important is establishing expectations that will help your child build positive, rewarding relationships. Here are some strategies to keep in mind:

- ▶ Help your child describe his or her hearing loss in age appropriate language. Children are naturally inquisitive and will likely stare, point and ask questions about the hearing aids. If your child has the words to explain what they are and why he or she uses them, other children will find it easier to accept. For example, most kids can understand that hearing aids are like eyeglasses – only they're for hearing better rather than seeing better.
- ▶ Teach your child how to verbalize his or her needs with confidence. Role play to help your child find appropriate ways to tell others – friends, teachers, other adults – what he or she needs to hear better. As your child grows up, he or she should understand that you will not always be there to assist with this role.
- ▶ Encourage your child to face others who are speaking, and to work hard at paying attention. This is not only an important communication skill but plays a lifelong role in developing positive relationships with others.

- ▶ Reinforce with your child that we are all different and no one is perfect. While others may not have a hearing loss, they may have other health or emotional issues to deal with. This strategy is not intended to be stressful for children but rather to remind them that they are not alone in coping with a challenge.
- ▶ Find mentors. Some children may believe that they will outgrow their hearing loss. By introducing them to happy, successful adults with hearing losses, they will not only come to accept that their hearing loss is for life, they will see how hearing loss does not hold people back from doing what they want to do.
- ▶ If you know or suspect that your child has been the object of teasing or bullying at school, do not hesitate to enlist professional advice for coping strategies. Again, giving children the words and the skills to advocate for themselves is important; however, this is a time when your child will need your close involvement.
- ▶ Set high expectations for your child. Do not excuse your child from good manners or household responsibilities or shield him or her from social situations.



At School

If you have made the decision to enrol your child in a “mainstream” school environment (as opposed to a school specifically for children with hearing loss) you will need the support of your child’s teachers, classmates and the school. Preparation and communication are key to a smooth school experience.

- ▶ Begin by meeting with the school’s administrators and your child’s teachers to identify your child’s specific situation, and his or her needs such as an FM system for the classroom when appropriate.
- ▶ If your child’s school does not have experience working with children with hearing loss, the staff should be put in touch with another school that does in order to gain greater insight.
- ▶ Enlist the help of a teacher trained in the special needs of those with hearing loss to modify classroom materials and assist in lesson planning.
- ▶ The entire staff, including gym and music teachers, librarians, caretakers, lunchroom staff and bus drivers should be informed of your child’s needs. An atmosphere of encouragement, acceptance and respect is paramount.

- ▶ Provide a checklist (available in the parents' corner of www.kidsklub.unitron.com) to your child's teacher to summarize your child's requirements and strategies for success.
- ▶ Have your child meet with his or her teacher several times before school begins. This is an excellent opportunity to establish a comfort level as well as identify academic and social strengths and challenges.
- ▶ Show your teacher how to create a classroom that will offer an ideal listening environment for your child, including an appropriate seating plan, background noise reduction tips and good lighting (natural if possible) for speech reading.
- ▶ The support of peers is invaluable: encourage your child's teacher to incorporate a segment on hearing into the classroom learning. This can include some discussion of hearing loss – even a show and tell by your child about his or her hearing aids (Note: it's important to first ensure that your child is comfortable with this approach.)
- ▶ Show your child's teacher how the hearing aids work and provide a supply of spare batteries.
- ▶ Direct your child's teacher to this guide or to the parents' corner of www.kidsklub.unitron.com for further information and ideas.

ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES

There are a number of technologies available that work in conjunction with hearing aids to permit your child to hear better in the classroom and in other public places, while watching TV and using the telephone.

These include:

- ▶ Loop systems that pick up specific sounds using a strategically placed microphone
- ▶ Headsets and closed captioning services for television viewing
- ▶ FM systems that use FM-radio waves to improve hearing in background noise or over distances.
- ▶ Telephone technologies to improve listening on the phone

If your child's school plans to use assistive listening devices, be sure his or her teachers receive full operating instructions and have access to technical support should the system go down. You can also refer to your child's Unitron Hearing User Guide that came with his or her hearing aid for further information on assistive listening devices.

YOUR CHILD AND HEARING AIDS

Hearing aids help your child connect with the world of sound. Technological breakthroughs with digital hearing aids, FM systems and assistive listening devices are giving children with hearing losses the ability to be as successful in the classroom, on the playing field and in extra-curricular activities as their hearing peers.

From the beginning, your child's acceptance of his or her hearing aids is affected by the people in his or her environment. As a parent or caregiver of a child with hearing aids, family members and children in your child's class will look to you to see how they should react to and treat your child. The praise and encouragement of family members, educators and peers when your child consistently uses the hearing aids is essential to his or her self-esteem. While there are certainly unique challenges involved in parenting a baby or child with a hearing loss, it is important to remember that your son or daughter is a child first – a child with a hearing loss second. As your child grows and matures, the groundwork of support and encouragement you have established will help your child flourish.

For more information on hearing loss and how you can support your child with his or her hearing loss, visit the parents' corner of www.kidsklub.unitron.com.



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