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Welcoming Children with Hearing Loss to School

Most teachers know very little about hearing loss. If they know someone with hearing loss it is most likely an adult who developed a hearing loss in older age. If they have any experience with hearing aids, they will be from adults who complain that the hearing aids do not sound like what they remember normal hearing sounding like. For the most part teachers are not prepared for a child with hearing loss. It was not covered in their training.

Mainstreaming

With the technology available today, children with hearing loss are being mainstreamed, and that is terrific. Mainstreaming provides excellent language and academic models. But it also makes significant demands on the school system if it is to work. It will require a little more effort on the part of all the mainstream school staff to help kids succeed.

What does the school staff need to know

Just because a child has a hearing loss, it does not mean that the child is deaf. Children with hearing loss hear a lot with their technology. For every child with a profound hearing loss, there are 10 children with partial hearing loss. Children with hearing loss can learn to listen and speak and can succeed in school using their hearing.

The “Listening Bubble”

The idea of a listening bubble was developed by Karen Anderson. Hearing is a distance sense. We use hearing to monitor what is happening across the room as well as right next to us. Children with hearing loss have a smaller listening bubble. Even with technology, they will not hear well at a distance. It is important to know how far away a child can hear so the teachers know what to expect. The audiologist and the parent should tell the teachers what to expect. *“Johnnie will be able to hear you if you are within 5-6 feet of where he is standing. If you are farther away, he will not hear you.”* It is also important to tell teachers what to expect in noise. If it is noisy, the listening bubble will be smaller and the teacher will need to be closer for Johnnie to hear.

What do hearing aids do?

School staff needs to understand that hearing aids and other technology make things louder but they do not completely overcome the effects of the hearing loss. Children with hearing loss are listening through a damaged auditory system and the signal may not always be clear. It may be necessary to repeat what is said, or to rephrase it in another way. It will be necessary to rephrase things occasionally to be sure it is understood, It is the teacher’s responsibility to be sure that the child understands.

Listening is the key to language and learning

Listening is the way we learn. If the child hears well he will learn. If he does not, he will not. Children with hearing loss need to hear things about four times more than a child with normal hearing to learn it so it is critical that we be sure that the child with hearing loss is hearing. Children need to have their hearing technology on ALL DAY LONG. It is not okay to take them off to give their ears a rest. We all need to hear all day long, and children with hearing loss really do. Teachers of young children should be given a quick lesson in how to check aids, change the battery, and put them on if they come out.

FM systems

FM systems will help the child hearing in the classroom. They need to be used for ALL academic subjects. If there is a pass mic, the other children in the class can use it to speak into so the child with hearing loss can hear them. If there is no pass mic, or if the pass mic is not being used, the teacher should repeat what is said into the FM mic.

Who to contact if something is wrong

School staff needs to know who to contact when there is a problem - If the earmold is whistling, or the hearing aid seems dead. The first call is likely to be to the parents. It would be a good idea if the school had an audiologist to contact. Ideally there should be an educational audiologist who would be available, if not, the school should have a consultant audiologist who can come in to manage issues. There may be a teacher of the deaf who consults with the school district who can come in to help. There needs to be a plan worked out in advance to help figure out who the person will be. Everyone will panic less and the child will get serviced better if a plan is in place.

It takes a village to raise a child with hearing loss

Everyone needs to be willing to put in a little bit more effort to make it succeed. If the school staff feels there is support for them they will put in the effort. Parents are a critical part of the support team and they need to be included in the effort.

For more information contact
www.JaneMadell.com