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5 Star Services for Aged Care, Childcare & Retirement Living

Communication & Hearing

By Delaney Sadler, OSCAR Care Group Speech Pathologist

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Communication is the process of sending & receiving a message. Many people use speech to verbally communicate however there are other forms of communication that may be used instead of speech or in addition to speech. Signing, picture communication systems & text to speech devices are types of non-verbal communication systems. Gestures, body language & facial expression are types of communication used in addition to verbal or non-verbal communication systems.

Communication involves many skills, one of which is hearing. Hearing loss can impact speech and language development and individuals with hearing impairment may require alternative modes of communication. Hearing loss requires early intervention by a team of professionals including the GP, Audiologist, Speech Pathologist and potentially an Ears Nose and Throat doctor. Hearing loss impacts more than just communication and children with hearing loss may experience difficulties with learning and social engagement.

FACTS

- 3.6 million people in Australia have some form of hearing impairment
- 3 in every thousand babies are born with hearing loss
- 3-6 of every thousand children will experience permanent hearing loss
- Approximately half of children will experience temporary hearing impairment before the age of 3 due to an ear infection

Otitis media

The most common form of hearing impairment in children is **ear infections** (otitis media). This infection occurs in the middle ear due to a build-up of fluid. The fluid blocks sound from travelling through the ear properly. Hearing loss associated with ear infections is often fluctuating and temporary whilst the infection is present. For children who have multiple and persistent episodes of infection it can cause permanent damage to the structures involved in hearing. Otitis media occurs at least once in most children and is treated medically.

Congenital

When a child is born with a hearing impairment it is termed a congenital hearing impairment.

Congenital hearing impairments are less common and around 3 in every thousand babies will be born with hearing loss. The cause of this form of hearing loss may be due to genetics, being born premature, trauma during birth, infection during pregnancy or maternal diabetes.

Acquired hearing loss

Acquired hearing loss occurs any time from birth. Infections, diseases, head injuries and excessive noise exposure can all cause acquired hearing impairments.



Diagnosis of Hearing Impairment

Assessment and diagnosis of hearing impairments is completed by an audiologist. Ear Nose and Throat doctors may also be consulted to assist in diagnosis and management.

At birth all newborns are screened for hearing loss. If the screen is not passed a comprehensive test is completed by an audiologist. Younger children in Australia can receive free hearing assessments & GP's can complete a referral if you have any concerns.



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There are many methods of communication available for children with hearing impairment and their multi-disciplinary team can assist in determining which is best for them.

Every child with hearing impairment differs and the best communication method is determined by an array of variables.

Common forms of communication

Auditory-verbal communication

Involves using speech to express oneself and hearing to understand others. Some children with hearing impairment may be able to use this form of communication without devices and some children may use hearing devices to assist.

Hearing aids and cochlear implants are designed to assist with perceiving sounds, however, may not achieve perfect levels of sound detection. Children may require hearing aids or cochlear implants on one ear or both ears. Children of any age can begin to wear hearing aids or have a cochlear implant inserted. The earlier a hearing device is introduced the better the outcomes for auditory-verbal communication, with best outcomes if aids are started prior to 6 months of age.



Key word sign

Key word sign is a communication method where the person uses verbal speech in addition to signs for the important words in a sentence. For example, the person may state "Hi, my name is Ella" and as they say the sentence they would sign for 'hi', 'name' and 'Ella'. Signing the key words provides visual support to the person with the hearing impairment and their communication partner.

Sign language

Sign language is a comprehensive language with its own rules for grammar and own lexicon.

Sign language incorporates signs produced with the hands, body language and facial expression. In Australia the dialect of sign language used by the deaf community is AusLan.

Total communication

Total communication is a communication system that combines all methods of communication. Children using total communication learn to talk and listen whilst simultaneously learning sign language and fingerspelling. Those using total communication also use lipreading to enhance their understanding of speech.



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Signs a Child is Having Difficulty Hearing

- Not responding to their name
- Not being startled by loud noises
- Appear to not be paying attention
- Difficulty following instructions
- Complaining of pain or discomfort in the ear
- Having the television/music volume up loud
- Minimal or unclear speech



Summary

- Hearing loss can impact speech and language development
- Individuals with hearing impairment may require alternative modes of communication
- Hearing loss requires early intervention by a team of professionals including the GP, Audiologist and Speech Pathologist



Delaney Sadler
Speech Pathologist

Do you need support in assisting a child with hearing loss?

Delaney Sadler, **OSCAR** Care Group Speech Pathologist, can assist this. Please call or email Delaney via our contact details below.

References

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