

Tips for Parents of Students who have Hearing Losses and Additional Disabilities

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“Additional disabilities”, sometimes called “Deaf Plus” covers a wide spectrum of individuals with a variety of learning styles, physical and emotional needs in addition to their hearing loss. The following tips are suggestions to assist you in supporting your child’s educational needs:

1. Have high, yet realistic, expectations for your child. Parents are the most valuable advocate a child has now and in the future because parents have the most invested in his or her educational success. It is important to have a plan for the future. Looking beyond today may be difficult, however, having a vision of where your child will be in five, ten or fifteen years may make it easier to prioritize the skills needed to be learned today. The goal of every parent is to support their child in becoming as independent and productive as they can be. It is important to remember to focus on your child’s strengths and build upon them. Sometimes, academic and emotional growth may occur in small increments, but each step of progress should be noted and celebrated.
2. Expose children to healthy community activities such as visiting public libraries, community centers, parks, places of worship, restaurants, and sporting events either as a participant such as Special Olympics or as a spectator. Attending and participating in such events will help in the development of appropriate personal and social skills even from an early age. Children will find appropriate role models and will learn from them. Learning to recognize safe environments and people is an important task for all children and youth. Having the skills to recognize a safe from an unsafe environment may be critical to your child’s well being.
3. Develop a social support system for your child and yourself. As individuals, we connect with others who have similar likes, interests, and attitudes. We gravitate toward other individuals who have something in common with us. Being involved in activities with other parents who have children with similar disabilities can offer you other ways to approach circumstances that you may share. Other parents can help you eliminate the need to “reinvent the wheel”. Develop allies within your family, your child’s educational environment and your community. In today’s high tech world, individuals are not limited by time and space. Investigate support groups on the internet for information pertaining to your child’s additional disability and to locate individuals within your community or state who are dealing with the same challenges.
4. Encourage choice-making as a form of communication for your child. Choices may include deciding what to wear, eat, play, touch or watch. The mere act of being able to choose fosters independence and encourages the use of language. Your child will also learn that you are willing to not only allow him/her to make a choice, but that you will also respect that choice within the limits that you have

established. Choice-making can be fostered through the use of as little as two objects and a point, eye gaze, head turn or smile.

For younger children and children with significant delays, start with choices of an object with which to play. Always pair the object with a sign and/or a verbal label. As choice-making develops, objects can be replaced with photos, magazine pictures, simple line drawings and words. Advanced forms of choice-making include providing various options with follow-up discussions related to pros and cons of each option. Remember, in the activity of choice making, never offer a choice that is not readily available or that is really not an option.

5. Scheduling and consistency are important factors to consider with children who have additional disabilities. Schedules or calendars for your child can include anything from the next three activities of the day to a full day's schedule. Activities can be represented by objects, photos, magazine pictures, or line drawings. Include photographs, if that is appropriate. Allow your child to make choices of the activities whenever possible. By being able to anticipate what will happen and involving your child in developing their schedule, he or she will develop vocabulary and language skills. The anxiety that your child may feel related to not knowing what to expect throughout the day will be alleviated.

Helpful Reference:

<http://addictions.about.com/od/coexistingdisorders/tp/parenttipsdevdis.htm>