

# Consistent Use of Hearing Devices

While it is important to use hearing aids consistently for all of the reasons listed below, it is also common to experience periods of resistance to hearing aid use, and therefore equally important to understand the reasons. Multiple reasons exist for children resisting hearing aids. Be open to these possibilities: Are the hearing aids working properly? Are the hearing aids causing discomfort? Has your child been to the audiologist lately – could their hearing have changed?

If you have chosen for your child a primarily auditory mode of communication, using hearing aids, then read more about:

Why your Child Needs to Wear Them After School, on the Weekends, During the Summer and All the Time...

Reason #1: Getting Ready to Read

Reason #2: Background Knowledge

Reason #3: Changing the Brain

Reason #4: It's Easier on Your Child

Reason #5: Children Get Messages from All Sources

Reason #6: Building Friendship Skills

For the remainder of this article, the term "**hearing devices**" is meant to represent both hearing aids and cochlear implants.

## **Reason 1: Getting Ready to Read**

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In children with typical hearing, about 80% of new words are learned by overhearing!

Children with hearing loss have a smaller **listening bubble**. This smaller bubble reduces the amount of language that your child will overhear. Without hearing devices, the listening bubble is much smaller.

### **The Connection Between Hearing and Reading**

Can hearing loss affect reading skills? YES! There is a direct connection between listening and reading. The first skill in reading is being able to hear and then orally manipulate sounds in words (such as deleting, substituting, rhyming, and finding smaller words within larger ones). The next pre-reading skill is to apply a sound (e.g., the 'b' in book) to a particular letter. This skill is called **sound-letter association**. Other examples (which all rely on careful listening) include:

- Knowing the difference between letters, words, and sentences.
- Figuring out what a word is by sounding out the letters.
- Blending two to four sounds into a word.
- Changing the sound in a word to make a new or rhyming word.

### **Why Do They Need to Wear Hearing Devices All the Time?**

It takes about 20,000 hours of listening before a child's brain is ready to learn reading. In other words, a child needs consistent auditory input for 5–6 years before the brain is ready to make the connection between letters of the alphabet and the sound associated with them.

When children do not have that consistent input for 5–6 years, they are less ready to read and learn with their peers. As a result, children who don't wear hearing devices all the time are often not ready to read at the same time as their age peers.

### **Five Things You Can Do to Promote Reading Readiness**

1. Help your child to listen all day, in the evenings, all weekend, and all summer with hearing devices.
2. Help your child develop "text awareness" by pointing to words as well as pictures as you read books to your child.

3. Talk about sounds in words. Change a letter in a word to create a word that rhymes.
4. List words that start with the same sound as your child's name (phonemic awareness).
5. Talk about synonyms and antonyms.

Adapted from:  
[\*-Success for Kids with Hearing Loss\*](#)

## **Reason 2: Background Knowledge**

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Children who do not wear hearing devices all the time may have little or no phonemic awareness, so hearing sounds within words can be a challenge. For those children, the words "good night" from their parents might be heard only as vowels if hearing devices aren't worn. What does "oo ai" mean to you? The sounds missed by children with hearing loss affect the development of an accurate auditory memory. As a child, if your experience is that "oo ai" means something, when other letters are added "g\_d n\_ght" this may cause greater confusion.

Ultimately, children with hearing loss miss out on a significant amount of auditory information, because of the smaller listening bubble. This background knowledge is readily available to children with typical hearing. With less background knowledge, children with hearing loss may not be able to fill in gaps when unfamiliar words or ideas appear on a printed page. When children don't wear their hearing aids, the background information is even more limited.

Adapted from:  
[\*-Listening and Spoken Language Knowledge Center \(AG Bell\)\*](#)

### **Reason 3: Changing the Brain**

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Wearing hearing aids all the time is *critical* to change the brain. Why?

Here is what we think happens: if you have high-pitch hearing loss, you won't be able to hear high pitch sounds. The area of the brain that processes soft, high-pitch sounds is not being used. So, the brain assigns this area a new task—processing the middle pitches.

Here's an analogy: if you keep breaking your drinking glasses in the dishwasher, and they don't get replaced, the empty space in your cupboard will soon become filled with other items—because there is room for them.

When you get hearing devices, the high pitches become audible. But in essence, the sound may have nowhere to go. (We need to make room in the cupboard!)

This may be why some children don't like their hearing devices right away. The brain has to re-organize again, and "make some space" for the new high-pitch sounds that are coming in.

The brain needs consistent sound to make these changes. If the hearing devices are not worn all the time, brain re-organization will not take place. And until these brain changes take place, the hearing devices will sound loud, noisy, and echoey. *It's easier to get used to the hearing devices when you wear them all the time.*

Adapted from:

[-Hear Better in 60 Days: Keys to Success with Hearing Aids](#)

### **Reason 4: It's Easier on the Child**

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It's actually easier on your child if you take the decision out of their hands. As a parent, you decide where your child goes to school, where they live, and so on.

You make those decisions because you are the adult and you know what is best for your child.

If you leave the decision about wearing hearing devices up to your child, they start to think: "Maybe hearing devices aren't the best thing for me, because my dad doesn't care if I wear them or not." "Maybe my mom doesn't like my hearing devices either." "Maybe this isn't important because I can change their minds about it."

Hearing devices are easier to get used to when you wear them all the time. They are also easier to get used to when your parent says, "You should wear your hearing devices because it is important. I want what is best for you."

### **Reason 5: Children Get Messages from All Sources**

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Parental feelings and emotions about hearing loss can be a huge factor in the development of your child's self-image and how they feel about their abilities. If you are conflicted about your child's hearing loss and unsure of how to react to it, your child can pick up on your feelings and internalize that there is something wrong with them; that they are not complete because they have to wear cochlear implants or hearing aids. When you encourage your child to wear their hearing devices, it sends the message that the hearing devices are a positive part of your child's life.

### **Reason 6: Building Friendship Skills**

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Research shows that children who are bullied typically have inadequate social skills. "Well-developed listening skills are the basis of well-developed social skills, which is something that children with hearing loss need some extra practice with," says Lois Heymann, director of the Steven and Shelly Einhorn Communication Center in New York City.

Hearing loss can reduce the number of opportunities that children may have for learning social rules. They may not "overhear" their friends, families, and others discussing social rules and conflicts, and this creates a gap in knowledge. This is

why it is so important to consistently wear hearing devices. Children should practice taking turns in a conversation and asking questions about others; learn how to advocate for themselves when they have difficulties following conversations; and learn how to make “small talk” with others, such as complimenting them on what they are wearing or how they play a particular sport.

Adapted from:

[-Listening and Spoken Language Knowledge Center \(AG Bell\)](#)