Emotional Sticking Points of Parenting a Child who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Adapted from Krystyann Krywko, Ed.D.

As a parent, it was emotionally overwhelming for me when I found out that my son was Hard of Hearing.

I am not alone - over 90 percent of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) have parents with typical hearing. This means that very few families have first-hand experience. Also, most families don't have contact with other families in the same situation.

It may be tempting to ignore your feelings and put them aside. After all, your child's needs come first. Another common reaction is to feel overwhelmed and unsure of the next steps.

When parents' emotions are not addressed properly, they can become "sticking points" and it can be hard to move forward. Dr. Stanley Greenspan, author of *The Child with Special Needs: Encouraging Intellectual and Emotional Growth*, believes that parents of children with special needs have the added responsibility of understanding themselves before they are able to help their child. He refers to this practice as "observing yourself."

Dr. Greenspan suggests that we all have ways of feeling and behaving that are automatic. These emotional responses are very much a part of who we are as parents. Emotional responses are learned from our own families, as a result of circumstances in our lives, and from the culture in which we live.

Below is a brief description of some emotional "sticking points."

Accepting the Diagnosis

The moment of diagnosis is often the most difficult sticking point. Even if you were the one who suspected that your child might be Deaf or Hard of Hearing, it can still be emotionally challenging. Your child's diagnosis might feel like a negative moment in your life, but it is actually a very positive step in moving towards finding her the help she needs.

Moving Forward with your Emotions

The tricky part during this stage is to work through your own emotions even as you move forward. You might have all sorts of pre-conceived ideas floating around in your head about a certain approach, or you might have negative feelings about the terms "special education" or "special needs." It is important to keep an open mind.

Practice Your Game Face

In the beginning, you might need to fake your excitement when your child puts her hearing aids or cochlear implant processors on in the morning. You might need to force yourself to smile as you answer a friend's questions about your daughter's diagnosis. Do whatever it takes so that your child views being Deaf or Hard of Hearing as a positive part of her life. The fact that she is Deaf or Hard of Hearing may be all you can think about at the beginning. As you grow and change, it will slowly begin to fade into the background. Don't worry; talking about it will become easier with time!

Find Help for Yourself

It's important to acknowledge where you are at the moment. This journey is a marathon, not a sprint. Do not think that you need to have everything figured out in the first week after a diagnosis, or even in the first year.

The experience of others can help. Other parents who have already entered this world can share their advice, expertise and can identify with the emotions that

you are dealing with. Alberta Hands & Voices offers a support network of parents and professionals. You can find the support that you need.

Whether you are just beginning your journey or if you have been on the road for a while, this was just a quick overview of emotional sticking points.

For a more detailed explanation of these sticking points, please visit my website at www.kidswithhearingloss.org and download your own copy of my free mini-ebook, *Five Emotional Sticking Points of Parenting a Child with Hearing Loss*.

I am an award-winning education writer and researcher, specializing in hearing loss and how it affects children and families. Originally from Calgary, Alberta, I spent 15 years living in New York City where my husband and I started to raise our family. We recently left the hustle of the city behind, and now live in Westchester County, New York.