

# How Can I Keep Hearing Devices on my Child?

One of the most common challenges that parents face is how to keep hearing aids or cochlear implants securely fitted to their children's ears. It is important to understand that there is no one solution that will work for all children. It may be necessary to try different options.

Let's talk about some of the reasons why it is challenging to keep hearing aids and cochlear implants on. (For the remainder of this article, the term "**hearing devices**" is meant to represent both hearing aids and cochlear implants.)

## 1. Feelings of Guilt, Grief, and Loss

When parents have difficulty accepting that their child is Deaf or Hard of Hearing, it can feel like an insurmountable challenge to find ways to encourage a child to wear hearing devices. Many parents will find excuses to limit the use of hearing devices. If you are struggling with guilt and grief, you are not alone. Many parents have felt this way. Contact Alberta Hands & Voices for support.

## 2. Children Remove the Hearing Devices

All children remove hearing devices at one time or another. It is normal and typical. Young children like to explore, and that includes exploring their hearing aids, cochlear implants, and ear molds! Starting at about the age of nine months, a baby may be enjoying his new ability to yank, pull, grab, and push. He may grab a hat off of his head, or work very hard to take his socks off. He may also start to enjoy pulling off his hearing devices (*Look what I can do!*). Infants spend a majority of their waking hours exploring. This includes their ears and their hearing devices.



Keep hearing aid batteries out of reach of small children to prevent ingestion. Seek medical attention if a battery has been ingested as serious complications can occur.

When they get older, they like to know how things work. Your child may take off a hearing device to have a closer look at it. The child is not necessarily removing the hearing devices because he does not want to use them. He may be practicing the skill of removing everything on his body.

The reasons for removing hearing devices at nine months are different than the reasons for a three-year-old. As some toddlers become more independent, the hearing devices can become a power struggle between the parents and the child. Preschoolers may also remove them as part of a power struggle, especially when having a temper tantrum. There is a fantastic resource from the "*Children's Hearing Aid Retention Project*" by Anderson and Madell that describes what to expect with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The website (listed below) has printable brochures for families that explain what is happening at each stage of development and what to do about it.

For older children (school-aged) who get hearing devices for the first time, a reason they may give for wanting to remove them is that they are "too noisy" or "too loud." It is important to remember that before getting the hearing devices, the world was quiet for them. Suddenly having access to so much sound in our noisy world can be a surprise. It can actually be jarring.

Imagine that you lived in darkness for the first few years of your life. Then imagine one day, someone turned the bright lights on. Your first reaction would not be wonder and delight. The glare would be unpleasant. You might even cry. Even though seeing things clearly has many advantages, at first, it might be more comfortable to turn the lights off again.

Adults with hearing loss often say that the first few minutes of wearing hearing devices or cochlear implants in the morning (after eight hours of quiet), can be loud. After a short time, the brain adjusts to sound.

### **3. Small Ears**

In infants and small children, the ears are soft and small. Their ears will often bend, causing the devices to fall off. Sometimes hearing devices and cochlear implants fall off when a child is very active. When hearing devices flop around or

fall off often, parents might feel that it is easier to remove them than to keep putting them back on. However, when the hearing devices are off - even for a few minutes - the child is missing language and listening input.

The ultimate goal is for hearing devices and cochlear implants to go on first thing in the morning, and are taken off only for bath time or bed. Sometimes it helps to break this goal up into smaller, more workable steps over a period of a month or two. The time it takes to reach the goal of full-time hearing aid use is different for each child and family - however, this period should not stretch out over many months, or even years. A child needs to use hearing devices all day, every day, to develop speech, language, and social skills like other children.

### **So What Can You Do to Help Keep The Hearing Devices In?**

The first thing to remember is that *it pays to be persistent*. Some young children accept hearing devices easily, while others show resistance to wearing them. Just as some children refuse to wear a hat, gloves, or shoes, they may not like having something in their ears.

*Children will learn that wearing the hearing devices are non-negotiable*. Unless you suspect that they are in pain, (i.e., ear infection, broken hearing aid), *always* replace them if they have been pulled out. The behaviour will eventually stop.

*Keep your expression calm and neutral*. Whatever you choose to do in response to your child taking off the hearing devices, it is important to stay positive. Praise your child for keeping the hearing devices on. If you become frustrated and angry, your child may associate the hearing devices with your anger, as this may make them want to avoid hearing devices.

*What about taking a break from wearing hearing devices or cochlear implants?* "Taking a break" from wearing hearing devices for an hour, morning, day, or weekend should not be encouraged. If your child begins to pull their hearing devices out repeatedly, one approach is to use the hearing devices during times when there is direct contact and communication. Even an infant who has worn hearing devices with no problems at first may go through stages where it is

difficult to keep the aids on for more than a few minutes at a time. Try not to get discouraged – this is a common experience for many parents. Talk with your audiologist and other parents about tips for keeping the hearing devices on your child and ways to distract them from taking them off. Breaks, if you need them, may be for short periods initially, and wearing times can be expanded over time. Both the parents and the child benefit when hearing devices and cochlear implants are part of the daily routine.

It is important for you, as the parent, to establish yourself as the authority about hearing aid use. Even if your child is pulling her hearing device out regularly, you can put it back in again and set a time limit for wearing it before Mommy or Daddy takes it out.

Daily use is the key to success. Even if wearing time is short for a while, you can focus on using the hearing devices every day. This can be a difficult challenge for some families. Your audiologist and other parents can provide helpful suggestions for handling this issue with your child, so do not be afraid to share your concerns.

*Engage your child.* Older toddlers and preschoolers may have colour preferences for their earmolds and hearing devices. Engaging your child in selecting her preferred colours can improve acceptance of the devices and give them a sense of ownership. Colourful stickers and jewelry can also be used to decorate hearing devices.

Several hearing aid manufacturers have special books and kits for children. Ask your audiologist. Information about hearing loss is presented at a child's level, which can help your child understand their hearing loss better. Child-friendly colouring books about hearing devices can promote a sense of ownership and independence.

## **Are You Concerned About Losing the Hearing Devices?**

Some parents are afraid that the child will lose her hearing devices or cochlear implants at daycare, on the bus, or at the store or at the park. Hearing devices

and cochlear implants are very expensive and parents often worry about losing such small devices. The following information should be helpful:

*Loss and Damage Warranty:* Hearing aid and cochlear implant manufacturers offer a loss and damage warranty when the hearing devices are purchased. For some manufacturers, the warranty may be renewable. Ask your audiologist. Homeowner insurance policies will also cover the loss of hearing devices and cochlear implants - ask your insurance agent.

*Hearing Device Retention Accessories:* Anderson and Madell have a great resource about the most popular ways to keep hearing devices on with accessories. A survey was sent to parents and audiologists to find out which accessories were most liked. A total of 286 parents and 101 audiologists responded to the survey. The survey asked about effectiveness, safety, durability, ease of use, and how much they are used.

The chart that follows this article (Hearing Aid Retention Accessories) shows the accessories that were the most popular. Ear Gear, Hanna Andersson Caps, and SafeNSound received the best ratings by both parents and audiologists. Clips (Critters Clips, Phonak Junior Kidz Clips, Otoclips) received high scores from audiologists - but not parents.

One concern is how well a child can hear if the microphones are covered by sleeves and caps. Anderson and Madell measured the “acoustical transparency” - which means how well sound can get through the material - of these accessories. The accessories listed in the chart have an acceptable acoustical transparency. One exception is the Hearing Henry Headband. If the Hearing Henry Headband is worn appropriately, the microphone will not be covered. However, active children can easily move the headband. If this particular headband is placed over the microphone, sound will be significantly reduced.

## Resources

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<http://successforkidswithhearingloss.com/hearing-aids-on>

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Adapted from:

- [\*How Can I Help My Baby to Adjust to Hearing devices? –Practical Tips by Boys Town National Research Hospital\*](#)
- Improving Hearing and Hearing Aid Retention for Infants and Young Children: A practical survey and study of hearing aid retention products. Anderson, K.L., Madell, J.R. (2014). (February) Hearing Review.*
- Meeting the Challenge: Keeping Hearing Devices on Children. Anderson, K.L., Madell J.R. (2013). Children’s Hearing Aid Retention Project.*
- [\*Parents’ Guide to Hearing devices by Ontario Infant Hearing Program\*](#)

## Retention Accessories

### Ear Gear (Rated #1)



**Spandex sleeve slips over hearing device. Has stretch cord and plastic locking clip.**

**PROS:** Stretchy cord, allows for full range of head motion. Spandex sleeve protects from mess/damage and from hearing aids being swallowed by infants. Plastic clip to clothing has no sharp edges, is hypoallergenic and locks to make it difficult for a child to remove. Spandex sleeve increases comfort of device wear; prevents and assists in healing from chafing; also diminishes wind noise. Comes in many different colours to increase interest and pride in wearing devices. Use with hearing aids, cochlear implants, and BAHA for all ages. Can attach to one or two devices.

**CONS:** Some difficulty installing for the first time, because earmold must be removed and then reattached.

[www.gearforears.com](http://www.gearforears.com)

### Caps (#2)



**Caps cover hearing devices securing them from busy or yanking fingers.**

**PROS:** Effective at discouraging toddlers from yanking hearing aids off. Washable and durable. Hanna Andersson and Hearing Henry caps are cotton and have ties long enough to cross in front of neck and tie behind. Silkawear caps have mesh side panels and fasten securely under chin via Velcro. Discontinue after toddler 'yanking' phase subsides so child can practice putting on hearing aids (should be independently putting hearing aids on by age 3). Use with hearing aids, cochlear implants, and BAHA. Come in various colours.

**CONS:** Warm for summer or southern climates.

[www.silkawear.com](http://www.silkawear.com)  
[www.hannaandersson.com](http://www.hannaandersson.com)  
[www.hearinghenry.com](http://www.hearinghenry.com)

### Safe-N-Sound (#3)



**Plastic loop slips over hearing device. Has poly cotton cord and metal alligator clip.**

**PROS:** Easy to install. One size fits all hearing aid and cochlear implant models. Flexible cotton cord comes in many different colours to increase child's interest and pride in wearing hearing aids. Option with barrette can be effective to discourage young child yanking out the hearing aids, while not causing discomfort when removed by parent. Used by children of all ages. Models can attach to one or two hearing devices or be used with eyeglasses. Works with hearing aids, cochlear implants, and BAHA.

**CONS:** Nonstretch cord. One size loop may not tightly fit all hearing instruments. The Alligator clip has nickel content, and can cause allergic reactions.

[www.getsafensound.com](http://www.getsafensound.com)

#### Wig/Toupee Tape (#4)



**Tape specifically made for use on skin. Attaches to both hearing device and skin. Must replace tape on a regular basis to maintain security.**

**PROS:** Good short-term strategy. Tape does not require much of a 'tug' to remove hearing aid, but is helpful in preventing dislodging when child is just starting to use his hands to explore or when the device is large/heavy for the child's ear. Used primarily when child is young or very active. Can use with all hearing devices.

**CONS:** The tape discourages child from pulling the hearing aid off due to possible discomfort when removed – by child or by parent. Child could learn to shy away from hearing aid because it is not comfortable when it is removed. If used frequently, tape can be expensive over time.

#### Oto/Critter Clips (#5)



**Plastic loop security system, with thin poly cotton cord and metal alligator type clip. Models that attach to one or two hearing devices.**

**PROS:** Low cost, easy to install solution. One size fits all hearing aid models and implants. Cords come in many colours, and some models are available with cute animals on the face of the clip - encouraging small children to wear their aids. Used by children of all ages wearing hearing aids, cochlear implants, or BAHA.

**CONS:** Breaks easily/not very durable. Cute animals can come off and be swallowed. Security level varies due to one-size fitting for all hearing instruments. The Alligator clip has sharp teeth and may pinch child's skin. Clip has nickel content, and can cause allergic reactions.

[www.westone.com](http://www.westone.com)