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Decision Making

Decision-making is a process. Before you make a decision, take a deep breath and realize that you are not deciding your baby's entire future. You are deciding to try a type of amplification or a communication approach, to see how your baby responds. The following steps can be very helpful as you think about what you want to do.

▶ Step 1: Think About What Needs to Be Decided. Be Specific.

For example, you might say, "We want to decide on a way to give our baby access to people talking and environmental sounds." As you and your audiologist try different means of amplification, you will know what you are hoping to see from your baby's responses. In another example, you might say, "We want to decide on a way for our baby to understand us, and for us to understand our baby." As you and your infant/family specialist communicate with your baby, you will be looking for indications that the baby understands and is trying to communicate with you.

▶ Step 2: Gather Information

Now, you can gather information. Use the sources listed on the section titled Information Gathering on this web page. Think about your baby's needs and look at what parents and professionals have to say about amplification and communication options relative to those needs. If your baby is hard of hearing, reading about work with profoundly deaf children will probably not give you the information you need. If your baby is profoundly deaf or for some reason does not benefit from amplification, then you will want to read about options for other children with a similar hearing loss.

▶ Step 3: Make a Preliminary Decision

When you have enough information, both from your infant/family specialist's home visits and your own information gathering, it is time to make a preliminary decision. You are saying to your baby, "We know that you are special, and we think that these choices might work well for you."

▶ Step 4: Try Out What You Have Decided

Now it is time to try out what you have decided. Any decision will take commitment and action on your part. As you consistently use the amplification and communication approache(es) you have chosen, your baby will show you with his progress and preferences which way to go.

▶ Step 5: Evaluate Progress. How Is It Working?

If you do not see progress, or you feel that the results of your first decision are not what you and your infant/ family specialist hoped for, then make changes. You may need to add something, try a different hearing aid, or shift your communication strategies. Sometimes, you may find that a baby has made a decision different than yours. Once the hearing aids are working, your baby may go straight to using

voice, or, no matter how much you provide auditory stimulation, your baby may watch you and the world very carefully, copying your gestures and facial expressions rather than your speech. That is just fine. All children will give parents signals about who they want to be. We just have to be alert and willing to adapt our expectations.

► Step 6: Modify Decisions If Necessary

You want to monitor your baby's progress at regular intervals to measure the appropriateness of what you have chosen for your child. There is no "right" or "wrong" decision. Give your choice a serious effort and be open to modifications to the original plan.

Follow Your Instincts

You will know if your baby is excited, frustrated, moving forward steadily, or hitting plateaus in learning. What used to be a perfectly appropriate plan may need to be reconsidered as children grow and develop.

The communication mode that your baby needs at home may need to expand to several approaches after school starts. Many middle school and high school students make changes in their communication strategies to help them meet the challenges of later education.

For Example:

- High school students using spoken language techniques may add captioning or a note taker to enhance understanding in the classroom.
- A hard of hearing student may meet new signing peers in middle school and may add American Sign Language for social interaction.
- A Deaf student might decide to move out of a self-contained program and into a public school for some classes to help prepare for college.
- You need to make decisions along the way, but none of them are set in stone. As your baby grows and changes, new decisions will help fulfill new needs.