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How Early Intervention Helps Your Child

Early intervention begins soon after your baby has been diagnosed with hearing loss. Intervention will usually be provided by Infant and Family Services in or near your community.

Infant and Family Services

Infant and Family Services are special education services provided by your public school system. Two federal laws - PL 105-17, Part C, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) - regulate these services. Together, these laws encourage states to develop coordinated programs of early intervention services for children with disabilities from birth to age three, and require that these children and their parents have the same legal right to a free and appropriate education as children without disabilities.

The early intervention provided through participation in infant and family services can help you understand hearing loss and gain confidence as a parent of a deaf or hard of hearing child. It also will guide you in identifying your child's strengths and needs and help your child develop important language skills necessary to become part of the larger community.

There are two main goals of early intervention:

- **Goal # 1 is to help the baby who is deaf or hard of hearing learn to communicate, to use any available hearing and to interact socially.** All children learn skills best at certain ages. During these "sensitive periods," your baby's brain is ready to learn. If these opportunities for learning are missed, it will be more difficult to learn the skills later on.
- **Goal # 2 is to help your baby become a fully participating member of the family.** Everyone in the family is important to your baby's development, especially in developing language and social skills. For example, you'll want your baby to know what your family talks about at mealtime and what big brother and sister did at school. And, like all other young children, you'll want your baby to understand where you're going when you get into the car, when it's time to go to bed, when it's time to play, who Barney, the Teletubbies and Big Bird are and what they talk about.

Infant/Family Specialists

Early intervention begins with a visit from an infant/family specialist. She or he is part of a team of professionals, including an audiologist, speech and language therapist, primary care physician, school district representatives, an advocate of your choice, and most importantly, you.

Infant/family specialists know ways to help your baby develop some skills at the same age that hearing children do. She or he may help your child listen with hearing aids or a cochlear implant.

The infant/family specialist also will show you how to give your baby chances to look at your face for gestures so your baby can understand the language you use to communicate about everyday life. Your infant/family specialist will help you feel confident when you play with your baby and respond to things your baby finds interesting.

Your specialist is a trained professional who has knowledge about hearing loss and its effect on a child's communication development. The primary goal of your specialist is to help you communicate with your child and encourage his or her development. Your specialist will work closely with you to identify your needs and set priorities for your baby, help you locate resources, and answer your questions.

You and your specialist will schedule regular visits to take place in your home or another natural environment, such as daycare or places where your child spends a majority of his or her time.