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Your Early Intervention Team

Teamwork is an Important Part of Early Intervention

An old African proverb says that it "takes a village to raise a child." Early intervention also "takes a village." It helps to have a **team of professionals** working with the family to ensure that the child's needs are met. This team of professionals is referred to as your **early intervention team.**

You may not work with all the team members here – it will depend on your child's needs. However, we are introducing players who often work on early intervention teams. Generally, you and members of your team will plan strategies for meeting your baby's needs; a strong team can be a wonderful support for parents.

Meet Your Early Intervention Team

You, the parent

You are the first and most important member of the team. No one knows your baby as well as you.

- You are there to observe your baby's development, from rolling over to sitting up, from standing to walking, from cooing and babbling to first spoken words or from gestures and pointing to first words in sign.
- You will be the person who puts on the hearing aids or cochlear implants and communicates with your baby throughout the day.
- You will be the person to tell other team members when the first words come.
- You will guide professionals to understand what works best with your baby.
- You will work with your family-infant teacher to become an advocate throughout your child's years of development.
- Teachers and team members will come and go, but you and your child will grow and develop together.

Audiologist

The audiologist is a very important member of the team. This individual:

- Keeps track of the amount of hearing your baby has.
- Uses special technology and knowledge to fit hearing aids.
- Monitors and programs cochlear implants.
- This is the person to contact if you have any questions or concerns about how your child is hearing or how listening devices are working.

- You will get to know this person well, because it is best practice for little ones who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) to visit the audiologist often.

Educational Team Members

Services Coordinator

- A services coordinator is one of your first contacts with the early intervention program.
- This individual will meet with you to explain the services in detail and assist you with getting your child and family enrolled.
- Your services coordinator becomes a central point of contact between you and the early intervention program and/or other professionals.
- This professional will work with you to identify and meet the baby's needs by coordinating both formal and informal supports. Often, this person is a neutral sounding board who can talk with you about your questions or concerns.
- Sometimes many professionals become involved in your team. It can be overwhelming to keep up with all the contacts to keep things running smoothly. The services coordinator can assist with this and many other needs.

Family-Infant Teacher

- The Family-Infant Teacher may have a background in a **variety of disciplines** (e.g., teacher of the deaf, speech-language pathologist; audiologist, special education teacher, early childhood specialist).
- Be sure to know the professional background of your teacher.
- It is important that your teacher have **special expertise** in working with infants who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families.

Speech/Language Pathologist (SLP)

- Sometimes, your family-infant teacher is a speech language pathologist (SLP), who has special training in working with young children who are DHH.
- An SLP is skilled at promoting spoken language development; guiding your through the development of listen, talking, and learning words and concepts.
- Some SLPs are skilled in sign language, and can help the family learn to sign, if that is the family's chosen approach. If the SLP is not skilled in the use of sign, this individual will help you find appropriate resources.
- An SLP is also skilled in promoting communication through alternate approaches (pictures, communication boards) for children with additional special needs.

Teacher of the Deaf/Hard of hearing

- This professional has specialized training in educating children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- These teachers may be endorsed to work with young children, or they may work in classrooms with school age children.
- A teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing has in-depth understanding of the ways in which hearing loss affects learning, and knows strategies to promote listening, language, learning and communication access.

Listening and Spoken Language Specialist (LSLS)

- Some professionals who work with infants who are DHH and their families pursue an additional certification through the Alexander Graham Bell Association.
- These certified professionals assist the family in promoting listening and spoken language as the outcome for the child.
- These individuals work with families in a variety of settings.

Medical Team Members

Otolaryngologist (Ear, Nose, & Throat (ENT) Physician)

- The ENT physician specializes in evaluating and diagnosing the cause of your child's hearing loss and makes recommendations for your child's medical treatment options.
- Your child's ENT physician will take care of your child's medical hearing and other ENT needs throughout their childhood and adulthood.
- The ENT doctor will examine your child and provide medical clearance for obtaining hearing aids.
- Your ENT doctor may be involved with a Cochlear Implant (CI) team or will help you link with a Cochlear Implant team, if you desire such services and they are indicated for your child.
- If a CI is indicated and a family chooses for their child to have a CI, an ENT doctor who specializes in CI surgery should perform the surgery.
- The ENT doctor's recommendations are sent to your child's primary care physician, so that medical services are well coordinated.

A Primary Care Physician

- Your baby needs to see the family practitioner or pediatrician regularly in order to grow up to be healthy and strong.
- Your primary care physician will be asked to approve and sign the Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP) developed by your baby's team.
- Your team will work to ensure that educational and medical services are communicating with each other and coordinating care. This is in everyone's best interest.

Other Important Supports

Other Families with Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Most families tell us that they did not expect to learn that their baby was DHH. Naturally, it takes time and support to adjust.
- Most families tell us that meeting other families with deaf or hard-of-hearing children is an informative and healing experience. They highly recommend that you seek out family-to-family experiences.
- There are a variety of ways to meet other families who have "walked in your shoes," and your early intervention team will help you make those connections.
- Your team will let you know if parent support groups are available.
- Some states have a Guide-by-Your Side program through the Hands and Voices where trained parents may make home visits to provide support in the early weeks after identification or your baby's hearing status.
- This is vitally important, even if you do not have such contacts in your community, there are creative ways to connect with other families.
- Sometimes it helps to have an experienced parent help you understand how the IFSP works, or how to advocate for your child's needs at the IFSP meeting. By law, you have the right to invite another parent to meetings concerning your child.

Role Models

- Like meeting other families, meeting a deaf or hard-of-hearing adult can also be a supportive learning experience.
- Role models know what it is like to grow up as an individual who is DHH.
- They can share vitally helpful experiences and insights.
- Your early intervention team can help you access these valuable supports.