babyhearing.org

Coping with the Diagnosis: What are Normal Reactions?

When we are told that our child is deaf or has a hearing loss, we normally experience a variety of emotions. These emotions may include relief, shock, fear, denial, sadness, grief, confusion, anger, guilt, disbelief, and surprise.

Most of us have never had any experience with deafness or hearing loss of any kind, and therefore suddenly find ourselves launched into very unfamiliar and uncomfortable territory. For many, this experience is not unlike the grief process. It is very individual; everyone reacts differently.

Some parents have little problem accepting the diagnosis and seem to move on without a hitch, while others find themselves struggling to come to terms with it, sometimes for an extended period of time. Regardless of what your reaction is, be assured that it is normal. There is no right or wrong way to react.

Accepting the Diagnosis

Just as individuals react differently to the news that their child is deaf or hard-of-hearing, acceptance of the diagnosis is also a very individual process. Most parents describe acceptance as an ongoing process, one that comes and goes over time. When talking about acceptance, we are not just talking about accepting the hearing loss itself. We are also talking about the acceptance that life as we knew it has changed. Initially it feels like everything has changed.

Over time, we become educated and realize that the hearing loss is merely a part of who our children are, not a definition of who they are. We knew how to communicate with our child, and suddenly that has all changed. We had a pretty good idea of where they might attend school and dreamt of the college they would attend and the career they might pursue. Now we have no idea how to even go about educating a deaf child or hard of hearing child, or even what options are available, let alone what the future might hold for them.

The good news is that we do find acceptance and begin to adjust. Over time, dealing with a hearing loss just becomes a part of our family. It is still a part of our lives, but it is just that...a part of it. It is not the defining factor in our relationship with our child. It becomes comfortable and when we look at our child we no longer see the hearing loss, we see the child.

Coping Strategies

Fear of the unknown is often worse than the reality of the hearing loss. Parents are often given the news that their child has a hearing loss, but are given little in the way of an explanation of what this really means.
For most parents, finding out all we can about our child's hearing loss and what it will mean in terms of language acquisition, communication, family dynamics, education, and social development is the key to coping.

As we take our child from appointment to appointment, we are bombarded with unfamiliar technical and medical terms. We know we need to be asking the right questions, but don't even know what those questions are.

To make sense of it all, many of us turn to libraries, the World Wide Web, or phone books to find agencies that serve the deaf and hard of hearing. Some of us even walk up to complete strangers who are wearing a hearing aid or signing. This quest to educate ourselves is something all parents with a child who is deaf or hard of hearing have in common.

Dealing with the Reaction of Others

In the midst of having to accept and come to terms with our child's hearing loss, we are also in the position of having to deal with the reaction of family and friends, and sometimes the community we live in. Just as each of us reacts differently, there is no way to predict how those closest to us will react.

An important thing to remember with Grandparents is that not only are they sad for your child, they are sad for you as well. Just as we want to make everything right for our children, they want to do the same for us. They feel helpless and often go through their own time of grieving.

While most want to be able to support you through this time, realize that they themselves may be having a difficult time of accepting the news that their precious grandchild has a hearing loss. Seeing your child wearing a hearing aid or the thought of trying to learn a new language to communicate with their grandchild (if sign language is the chosen method of communication) may be very difficult for them. Just as you need time to adjust and adapt to the changes in your life, they too need time.