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What are some of the Important Decisions I Will Make?

There are many decisions ahead, but thankfully you won't be asked to make them all at once. Normally, shortly after a child's hearing loss is diagnosed, a number of professionals begin working with your family to provide support and help you figure out what you need to do next. Some of the people who might become involved with your family at this time include:

- Service Coordinator
- Infant/Family Specialist
- Pediatric Audiologist
- Ear, Nose and Throat Physician
- Pediatrician or a Family Practitioner

Because each child and family situation is unique, it would be nearly impossible to try to list all of the decisions that you will be faced with. Some of the most common ones include:

- Amplification
- Cochlear Implants
- Communication Options
- Educational Placements

Your Rights as a Parent

If you are to become an effective advocate for your child, you must first know your rights, and the rights of your child.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

In June 1997, President Bill Clinton signed The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) PL 105-917 - Part C. This law guarantees all children with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education.

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

An IEP is basically an outline of the goals and objectives developed by the IEP team for your child. This team is made up of teachers, professionals who will be working with your child, and you, the parent. An IEP addresses how goals and objectives will be reached, and should include ways to measure your child's progress.

The Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)

The IFSP is similar to the IEP, however it is used with children from birth to age three. The IFSP differs from the IEP in that it is family-centered, and includes goals not only for the child, but for the family as

well. It is designed to help families and professionals work together to meet the developmental needs of the child and provide support to the family.

One Step at a Time

We have all experienced making a decision for our child that we thought was the right one at the time but later discovered that it might not have been the best choice after all. Unfortunately, that is a part of life for all of us. None of us is going to make the right decision every time. Fortunately, most decisions are not a matter of life or death, and we have the opportunity to re-evaluate the situation and look at other options.

While the thought of having to make so many decisions for your child may be overwhelming, remember that most do not need to be made immediately. You are not alone in having to make these decisions. There is a wealth of information available to you through professionals, other parents, individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing, books, and many good websites on the Internet.

First and foremost, don't forget that you need to give yourself time be able to accept your child's hearing loss and adjust to the changes that it might mean for your family. Once you have begun to do this, you will be able to start to educate yourself and move towards making the decisions that need to be made. As you learn more you will have the information and confidence needed to make tough decisions. This is a learning process, and it is important to be flexible and open to the advice and expertise of others. One parent said it very well when they said, "The key to making good decisions for your child is to get all of the information you can from reliable sources. Make the decision based on the best information you can get at the time, and don't look back." If you remember this, you can't go wrong.