



Literacy Skills

For Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing



Parents read to their children who are deaf and hard of hearing for the same reasons that parents read with children who are hearing. Reading together is fun! It is a chance for closeness, communication, and sharing ideas. It helps children learn language and make discoveries about the world. It helps children know what stories and writing are all about. There are differences, however. Hearing loss causes a smaller listening bubble and reduces the amount of incidental language learning that a child will hear. It is said that about 80% of vocabulary is learned from overhearing – or incidental learning. Factor in the reality that it takes about 20,000 hours of listening before a child's brain is ready to learn language and reading. Together, these factors bring home the reality that children with hearing loss are often not ready to begin to learn to read at the same time as their age peers. This handout gives caregivers suggestions for enjoying reading time with infants and young children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Always remember, your infant/child who is deaf or hard of hearing...

- **Needs to see you more than other children.** They may not know you are there or that you are talking to directly to them without seeing you first.
- **Responds well to visual information.** For example, children will watch your movements and body language to gather extra information.
- **Uses your face to understand what you say.** Children will watch their caregivers face for a questioning, happy, sad, or firm facial expression when talking.
- **Prefers simple books, pictures, or objects.** Children may become confused when there is too much to look at and simple items will create better understanding and focus.
- **Communicates their preferences to you.** Keep a list of things you do together based including what your child was interested or not interested in to guide your reading.

As your infant/child starts new activities and responds to you, expand on their language by adding new words and ideas, such as:

- Talk about routines and what the child is interested in as it's happening
- Use what your infant/child expresses and restate it as a complete sentence
- WAIT for your child to respond with verbal, signed, or gestural communication
- Supplement books with toys and activities that encourage reading, writing, and speaking
- Pre-reading activities; these don't even include books themselves
- Integrate touch, vision, sounds, smells, taste, and gestures
- Offer choices to stimulate thinking and decision making
- Get rid of other distractions while reading and learning



Tips for reading with your child who is deaf or hard of hearing:

- Choose books both you and your infant/child like.
- Make sure your infant/child can see your face, your signs/words, and the print at the same time.
- Don't be limited by the words. You can also explain the books ideas or images.
- Talk about the story with your infant/child as you read. Ask your infant/child questions even if they can't respond yet.
- Connect ideas in the story to a real life experience that you or your child have had.
- Guess what may happen next in the story or talk about what you wish could have happened.
- Be dramatic and silly. Play with signs and exaggerate your facial expression and movements to show different characters.
- Vary where you make the signs. Sometimes on the page, sometimes on your child, sometime in the usual place for the sign. This could include pointing to the page and pointing to your face.
- If you don't know some signs, don't panic. Use gestures, point to pictures, and act out that part of the story. Later, you can ask your infant/child's teacher for the sign if you need it.
- Keep attention by tapping lightly on your infant/child's shoulder, or giving him/her a gentle nudge.
- Act out the story with dolls, puppets, or people after you have read it.
- Read the story over and over again if you infant/child asks. This is an important part of their language development.
- Have fun! Make your time together a positive experience!



These are general guidelines for reading to infants and children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Each infant/child will differ in how they respond to books. Follow your little one's lead, read their signals, and don't give up. Continue to introduce books and find times when your infant/child is most receptive to the experience. If enjoying books together is one of your favorite activities, your baby will enjoy it too!

Resources for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Literacy:

CDC: Early Hearing Detection and Intervention-
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/hearingloss/ehdi-programs.html

My Baby's Hearing-
www.babyhearing.org/LanguageLearning/ReadWithMe/index.asp

Success for Kids with Hearing Loss-
www.successforkidswithhearingloss.com/getting-ready-read

SKI-HI Curriculum/Project H.E.L.P (Hearing-Impaired Early Literacy Project)- www.skihi.org/HELP.html

Communicate with Your Child-
www.communicatewithyourchild.org

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association-
www.asha.org/public

Starting with Assessment: A Developmental Approach to Deaf Children's Literacy –
www.clerccenter2.gallaudet.edu/products/?id=183

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