

# Building blocks: You and your grandchild with a hearing loss



aussie deaf kids

# Starting the Journey



The birth of a grandchild is such a **happy occasion** and the news that your grandchild has been diagnosed with a hearing loss comes as a big shock to all of the family. It can be hard to imagine that the **baby you hold in your arms** has difficulty hearing. Most of us know old people with hearing aids but not babies or children.

It can be difficult time for grandparents when a baby is diagnosed with a hearing loss. You experience feelings of sadness for your grandchild, your own child and yourself. The **emotional support** grandparents provide to their son or daughter is important for their psychological adjustment and in reducing their stress.

Your grandchild will have every opportunity to lead a full and independent life. Along the way, they will love doing all the things children do with their grandparents.

# Diagnosis & Management

There are now tests available to screen for hearing in **very young** babies. Babies who are diagnosed early and start wearing hearing aids and attending **early intervention** by 6 months of age generally make excellent progress.

You may be interested to know that parents of deaf children have played a large part in the demand for **newborn screening for hearing**. Parents know from experience how important an **early diagnosis** is. It is better to know from the outset and start to build solid foundations for the development of appropriate **language, social and cognitive skills**.



# Diagnosis & Management



The diagnosis and **management** of hearing loss in children has changed dramatically over the past few years.

**Technology** has made newborn hearing screening possible and **hearing aids** are sophisticated and powerful. **Cochlear implants** are available to the small percentage of children who receive little benefit from their hearing aids.

And **Auslan** (Australian Sign Language) is a vibrant and expressive language. Deaf children receive the same **education** as their hearing peers.

# Why does your grandchild have a hearing loss?

One of the first questions we ask is “**Why?**” Most families have no history of deafness and it seems incomprehensible that your grandchild has been diagnosed with a hearing loss.

There are many **causes of hearing loss** in children and the doctors will recommend some specific tests to find a possible cause. The family can choose whether to do further testing or not. Knowing the cause of a hearing loss doesn't usually change how the hearing loss will be managed.

What is important is learning to accept the diagnosis and ensuring your grandchild has the **best opportunity** to develop language from the start.



# Grandparents are important



Your son or daughter will be on a roller coaster ride at the moment. They will be **adjusting** to having a new baby in their lives.

They will be **coping** with all their emotions about their baby's hearing loss.

And they are being told that they need to make some **important decisions** about their child's future.

This is where grandparents can be **invaluable**.

# Enjoy being a Grandparent

The kind of attention we most want to shower on babies – hugging, comforting, rocking, singing and talking – are precisely what your grandchild needs now. You can build a **loving** and communicative relationship with your grandchild from those **first cuddles**.

**Celebrate milestones** - first smile, first hearing aids, first teeth are all exciting developments in the life of your grandchild.

Accept your grandchild for the child he or she is. Recognise their achievements and simply **enjoy** them.



# Things That Help...

**LISTEN** →

Be there

Help

Learn

## Be available to listen

- Let them talk. They are on a steep learning curve and may need a non-judgmental sounding board.
- Support their decisions and respect their choices.
- Accept that your advice may not always be welcome.
- Allow them to be angry or irritable and don't take it personally.



# Things That Help...

## Let them know you care

- Offer support, empathy and encouragement.
- Give them patience and understanding.
- Let them know you are there if they need you but allow them time to be alone - they may need some breathing space.
- Be involved. Attending some appointments can help you better understand the journey the family is on. Even if you don't live locally, stay actively involved in what is happening and maintain regular contact with the family.

Listen  
← **BE THERE**  
Help  
Learn

# Things That Help...

Listen

Be there

**HELP** →

Learn

## Offer practical help

- Some families may really appreciate practical help with cleaning, washing and ironing or shopping. Allow the parents to guide you – avoid taking control.
- Babysitting your new grandchild or their siblings can allow the parents some time-out to relax and enjoy themselves. An hour's break can recharge the batteries and bring some perspective back into their lives.
- Remember your other grandchildren also want some quality time with you.

# Things That Help...

## Learn with the family

- Read all you can manage about hearing loss in children. Being informed and knowledgeable can be one of the best ways of coming to terms with your grandchild's hearing loss.
- Don't be afraid of the technology. Learn how to put in the hearing aids and how to test them, change the battery and so on. It is reassuring to the parents to know they can leave their child with you and you will be confident with the hearing aids or cochlear implants.
- If the family chooses to use Auslan for communication, see if you can join in on the lessons.

Listen

Be there

Help

← **LEARN**

# Things that won't help...

Avoidance  
Criticism

- Don't tell them not to worry - "He is so young; he will grow out of it; give it some time." This is not the case. But, with early fitting of hearing aids, early intervention and a loving and supportive family, your grandchild has the best possible start.
- Try and avoid criticising or offering opinions. Parents who receive support and good unbiased information will make the right choices for their child and family (even if they are different to yours).

# Children and hearing loss

Hearing loss occurs in 1 to 2 babies per 1,000 live births.

Over 90% of children with a hearing loss are born to families with little or no experience of deafness.

The hearing loss can be in one ear or both and can range from a mild to profound loss.

Most babies with a permanent hearing loss CAN hear. But there is a difference between an 'audible' sound and an 'intelligible' sound. A child may be able to hear when someone is talking (the sound is audible) but not be able understand what exactly is being said (the sound is not intelligible). Hearing aids and cochlear implants help to make sounds both audible and intelligible and assist children to develop spoken language.



Empowering families raising a child with hearing loss through online support, information and advocacy.

Support and knowledge are a key to a bright future.

[www.aussiedeafkids.org.au](http://www.aussiedeafkids.org.au)