

Mom's Troubleshooting Guide to

Early-Childhood Speech and Hearing Problems

- ➔ Helping moms sort through their child's recent diagnosis of hearing impairment
- ➔ Spotting speech/language delays
- ➔ Understanding auditory-processing disorder
- ➔ Testing hearing in babies and children
- ➔ Choosing the best hearing instruments for kids



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Welcome!

The Mom's Troubleshooting Guide to Early-Childhood Speech and Hearing Problems presents the original five articles that were posted on Chicagoparent.com, the online version of Chicago Parent magazine.

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For our partnership with Chicagoparent.com, we contributed the expertise of our speech and hearing professionals. Through an interview process with Shannan Younger, the writer, our audiologists and speech-language pathologists provided their special knowledge gained from years of clinical practice involving thousands of children.

We understand moms are the front lines of communication development. Shannan and our clinical team crafted the articles from this perspective. We hope you find them useful.

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Five tips for Chicago parents learning their child has hearing loss

by Shannan Younger

Christy Woodall



Christy Woodall is an audiologist at Sertoma Speech and Hearing Centers. Woodall has five children, two of whom have profound hearing loss, despite having no risk factors.

Christy Woodall decided to become an audiologist in eighth grade after hearing one speak to her middle school science class. She realized that goal and, five years into her career as an audiologist, she received life-changing news.

Her 9-month-old daughter had profound hearing loss.

“Like every mother, I cried. It was hard,” says Woodall, an audiologist at The Sertoma Speech and Hearing Center. Woodall has five children, two of whom have profound hearing loss, despite having no risk factors.

When interacting with families who have just learned about their child’s hearing loss, she says, “I can give them the best of both worlds, as an audiologist and with parent perspective.”

Woodall offers advice for parents dealing with the discovery that their baby or child is hard of hearing or has profound hearing loss.

"She shared stories of hearing aids flushed down toilets and eaten by dogs..."

1. When you first receive the news, make a second appointment with your audiologist.

“Initially, it’s a shock. Parents probably won’t remember anything they heard at the first appointment. They need to come back and talk about it more later.”

2. Be patient.

Woodall says the biggest challenge parents of very young children face is getting them to wear their hearing aids. “Put them back in! You don’t want them missing out on the auditory information that they’re receiving,” she stresses.

3. Keep a little humor in your life or you’ll probably go crazy.

She shared stories of hearing aids flushed down toilets and eaten by dogs, and says she has experienced such instances as a professional and as a parent.

4. Remember that kids are flexible.

One of the biggest questions that parents have is what kind of communication to use. Woodall says she struggled, feeling pressure to

make the right decision. She wishes she had known it wasn't a final decision. "If the choice you make doesn't work, it's okay. Switch your mode."

5. Often friends and family want to support a family but don't know how.

"Be willing to take the extra step," Woodall advises. "Support parents struggling to get a child to wear a hearing aid. Also, there are online sign language classes and even access through YouTube. There is no reason why people can't learn."

What parents should do if they suspect their child has a speech or language problem

by Shannan Younger

Michelle Morrison



Michelle Morrison, Ed.D., CCC-SLP is a speech-language pathologist and the Executive Director of Sertoma Speech & Hearing Centers.

One of the most treasured moments of parenthood is hearing a child say “mama” or “dada” for the first time. Parents presume language development will take off from that special point and continue, but that is not always the case.

While children can have difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings in the early stages of speech development, if a parent suspects a speech or language delay, they shouldn’t second guess themselves.

“Parents are our first and best line of defense when it comes to identifying speech language delays,” says Michelle Morrison, Ed.D., CCC-SLP, a speech-language pathologist and executive director of Sertoma Speech & Hearing Center. “As a parent, you should absolutely trust your gut instincts. You know your child better than anybody else.”

Parents who have a concern about a toddler not expressing wants and needs at age appropriate level should consult with their pediatrician and ask for a referral or an order to see a speech/language pathologist.

She says a speech/language pathologist will conduct a full evaluation for children under age 3 and either an evaluation or screening for an older child. This evaluation will allow the speech-language pathologist to assess sound production, language comprehension (understanding), language expression (use) and pragmatic language (social) using play-based interactions and parent interview.

“As a parent, you should absolutely trust your gut instincts. You know your child better than anybody else.”

While some parents and even doctors think a child will grow out of speech-language delays, Morrison says, “If there’s any suspicion at all of a problem or delay, an evaluation cannot hurt. If anything, it provides a baseline of where that child is functioning right now and then you’ll know how to plan and move forward for the child.”

Early identification of a problem is important. Children will eventually be assessed when entering either preschool or kindergarten but it is possible the child will be behind because speech is the precursor to learning to read.

“One of the reasons we want a child to speak early on is so they will be academically successful,” Morrison says. “Parents who are not prepared to seek intervention early on should remain in contact with their pediatrician so the physician can monitor the child’s development and make recommendations that will benefit the child. Parents should utilize all the tools they have available to them in order to make the decisions that are best for their child.”



What parents need to know about Auditory Processing Disorder

by Shannan Younger

Jennifer Gagesch



Jennifer Gagesch, Au.D. is an audiologist at Sertoma Speech & Hearing Centers.

Auditory Processing Disorder occurs when a child hears normally but they cannot digest that information, or they do it in a way different from most children their age.

“APD has nothing to do with intelligence. It has to do with an auditory system that is not maturing at the same rate as their peers,” says Jennifer Gagesch, Au.D., an audiologist at Sertoma Speech & Hearing Center.

Signs of APD include short-term auditory memory and if a child struggles to process information when there is a lot of background noise, like that found in an active elementary school classroom. Academic difficulty is often a sign of APD, especially when a child is not reading well or understanding what they are reading.

The only way to identify APD is to do testing with an audiologist.

While many children are diagnosed with APD around third grade, it is not uncommon for older kids to be diagnosed.

“If it is more severe, we often catch them younger, but it’s not unusual that they can compensate,” says Gagesch. “At some point, though, it becomes too difficult for them to take it all in, learn more material and keep up with their class.”

Addressing APD can be key to a student’s success, Gagesch says. “It can result in a child who is struggling, tired and failing. We don’t want them to hate school before their system matures.”

“APD has nothing to do with intelligence. It has to do with an auditory system that is not maturing at the same rate as their peers...”

Modifications in the classroom and at home can allow children to focus on the person speaking, and training with a speech pathologist can help the auditory processing system mature faster.

APD often occurs along with ADHD or ADD, as well as dyslexia. There has been some controversy over APD, but Gagesch says it is becoming more accepted both by audiologists and school officials. With treatment, kids do get better.

Don't delay on hearing tests for babies and young children

by Shannan Younger

Jaclyn Riel, Au.D. Tom Wardzala, Au.D. is an audiologist at Sertoma Speech & Hearing Centers.

Babies aren't known to say, "Please speak up, I can't hear you" or "Can you please turn the music down?" Their inability to communicate made testing their hearing challenging in the past but thankfully, modern medicine has found ways to precisely calculate the hearing of infants and young children.

In Illinois, all infants have their hearing screened after being born and before they leave the hospital. "Most babies sleep through the initial screening test," says Dr. Tom Wardzala, an audiologist at Sertoma Speech and Hearing Centers.

Many parents, when told their baby needs follow-up testing, might immediately think their child has a hearing problem. That's not usually the case, says Jaclyn Riel, Au.D., an audiologist at Sertoma Speech and Hearing Centers. "The majority of the kids that we test for follow-up end up having normal hearing."

Still, it is important to do the follow-up testing without delay, she says.

“If there are any hearing problems, we want to get them everything we can as soon as possible to help them be as successful as possible with speech and language development,” she says.

The tests to measure hearing in babies and young children are painless experiences.

“The majority of the kids that we test for follow-up end up having normal hearing. Still, it is important to do the follow-up testing without delay.”

For babies, the auditory brainstem response test (ABR) records how the brain reacts to a series of clicks. Electrodes placed on a baby’s head allow audiologists to measure brainstem waves and again, babies often sleep through the test. In fact, sleep is preferable.

“The ABR is the best way to gauge the health of the inner ear and is the test most often used for diagnosing hearing loss,” Dr. Wardzala explains. For toddlers and young children, “We play with bubbles and have fun.



For toddlers and young children, “We play with bubbles and have fun. This is not like going to the dentist or an eye doctor where the procedures are more involved,” Dr. Wardzala says.

The common test for children up to age 3 is visual reinforcement audiology, which involves projecting speech sounds or noises over speakers, meaning children do not have anything on their ears that might irritate them

The tests are fun for the children but they also produce very accurate readings. The tests generate precise measurements showing the child’s eardrum and hearing function, which is exactly what audiologists need to best help their patients.

Five ways to pick the best hearing instrument for your child

by Shannan Younger

Tom Wardzala, Au.D. is an audiologist at Sertoma Speech & Hearing Centers.

After a child is diagnosed with hearing loss, parents must determine the best hearing solutions for their child. While technology continually evolves, giving families a variety of hearing instruments to choose from, navigating all the possibilities can be confusing.

Dr. Tom Wardzala, an audiologist at Sertoma Speech and Hearing Centers, understands. He offers five tips to make the process easier.

First, he stresses the importance of working with a trained pediatric audiologist to determine the best option for each child. Working with someone who specializes in helping children is important to the child's future. "If a child's hearing instrument is not set properly, they could miss out on a lot," he explains.

Second, he advises parents to remember that newer technology may not always be better. "Just because a company makes the smallest, newest, connect to iPhone, whiz bang item does not mean their technology is the best choice," he says.

Wardzala says, however, that some of the latest options are very effective, including those using the iPhone or Bluetooth technology.

“Six months ago, nothing existed for iPhone. Now three different companies have hearing instruments using the iPhone,” he says. Because it is a rapidly changing industry, make sure your audiologist is aware of the latest developments.

“Just because a company makes the smallest, newest, connect to iPhone, whiz bang item does not mean their technology is the best choice.”

Third, consider the warranty for each option and also ask about insurance coverage. “More insurance is covering hearing instruments, whether it’s direct coverage or a discount program through your primary care insurance.”

Fourth, once an option is selected, parents need to ask about the routine follow-up care required. “Kids grow and need to get refit,” Wardzala says. One hearing instrument on the market has an indicator light to assure a good fit and to alert parents when new ear molds are needed.

Finally, a good relationship with the child's audiologist is vital. Wardzala stresses that parents need to feel they can ask the audiologist questions and have ways to contact them. "You're going to be seeing the audiologist for a while. If you don't get along with them, either work it out or look around," he says.



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