

DO THIS TO IMPROVE YOUR LITTLE ONE'S LISTENING ABILITIES

Make Listening Easier – May seem like an obvious thing to do for children who are deaf or hard of hearing but it's actually a listening and spoken language, or LSL strategy, and you'd be surprised about all the different ways you can use this strategy and how big of an impact it will have for your child. Let's talk about how you can Make Listening Easier and support your child with hearing loss so they can hear all the sounds of speech their brain needs to learn and grow.

Hi, I'm Dr. Teresa Caraway with Hearing First. We're here to help and support families just like yours who have a child with hearing loss. We want to empower you as your child learns to listen, talk, read, and thrive, just like kids with typical hearing.

First, what is the Make Listening Easier strategy? Well, this is when you control the listening environment or place emphasis on the sounds and words your child hears. This can look like minimizing background noise in the home or using a remote microphone. It's also when you make your speech and language easier for your child to pay attention to and notice the sounds and words put together, so maybe you might lean in or move closer before talking to your child. Even being a drama mama or dramatic daddy counts as making listening easier. This is an important strategy to use at every age.

So for every activity or routine, think about the noises going on around you. What can you do so your child can hear all that you have to say?

Now let's talk about why this strategy is so important. Your child needs to hear every single speech sound and every word clearly. Their little brain needs access to all the sounds of speech and language happening around them, because it's how they learn. Learn to listen, learn to talk, learn to read and learn about the world around them. Hearing aids not only amplify your voice but all the sounds happening around your child and that can make it difficult for a child with hearing loss to listen and attend to the most important sounds and language. Because they haven't fully developed their spoken language skills yet, they aren't able to fill in any missing sounds or words the way you and I might do. As adults, we've learned to ignore that background noise which means we may not even be aware of all the sounds that could be impacting a child's ability to hear clearly. So, pay special attention. For a child with hearing loss, conversations decrease in loudness and clarity when there are competing sounds present.

How can you Make Listening Easier? Either control the listen environment or change how you say it. Let's start by talking about controlling the listening environment.

1. Do a listening audit at home during different moments of the day. Notice what sounds are coming from where. Is it people, certain rooms, appliances.
2. Pay attention to where routines happen like diaper changing, reading, getting dressed, and make adjustments so your child can hear you clearly.

3. Turn off and tune in. Avoid background noise such as TV or music when you're not actively watching or listening.
4. Find different times for louder appliances. Consider running the dishwasher, washing clothes or vacuuming after your child's bedtime or when they're at school.
5. Note where sounds may bounce off of hard surfaces. You may want to place carpets or area rugs over hard flooring.

While these are helpful tips, the most important one I can share is to use a remote microphone. A remote mic is a wireless microphone that you wear. It sends sound directly to a receiver that's in the device your child is wearing. You can talk to your pediatric audiologist about using the remote microphone if you haven't yet. I encourage you to consider all the different places your child could benefit from you wearing a remote mic. We have more information about remote microphones linked below so you can learn more.

Okay, so that's controlling the environment. Now let's talk about how you can change how you say something to make listening easier.

When talking with other adults like family and friends, you're usually speaking at a conversational level, not too loud and not too soft. If your child has trouble hearing, you might think that raising your voice to talk louder will help, but loud voices actually make listening harder. The best way to talk to your child is at a normal speaking volume, which allows them to hear better and more clearly.

And, the further away you are from your child's ears and hearing devices, the harder it is for them to hear you, which means their brains can't receive the full auditory information. You'll need to be intentional about staying close when you're talking and try to aim for no more than three to six feet away. This is especially important in noisy places, and of course your trusty remote microphone can really help you in those situations.

There are also some specific techniques you can use known as acoustic highlighting. This makes the words we say easier to hear and understand for your child. This includes rewording, rephrasing, pausing, waiting, whispering, singing, and emphasizing specific sounds.

Try these five tips:

1. Exaggerate certain sounds with emphasis on a word or a grammar marker. The red ball is big, the green ball is bigger, and the blue ball is the biggest.
2. Pause before keywords and slow your speaking rate down. Oh, you have a red car.
3. Whisper to give them better access to soft sounds. Oh, it's so soft.
4. Exaggerate a certain syllable or sound in a word, that is a slippery snake.
5. Talk in complete sentences, instead of, in bucket, you could say, "Put the block in the bucket."

And this is just one LSL strategy. LSL Strategies are based on research about what little brains need to learn to listen and talk and align with child developmental milestones. You'll learn and practice them in early intervention so you can make them part of your family's everyday life.

Click the link below for a free handout explaining the strategies. You'll also find more helpful information and resources you can use to help your child with hearing loss, learn to listen and talk.

Wherever you are on this journey, and however you may be feeling, you are not alone. Hearing First is here to help you every step of the way. Subscribe to the YouTube channel for the latest videos. Visit hearingfirst.org to find more resources and support for your journey.