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A Baker's Dozen: School Recommendations for Families With Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

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The typical school classroom can be a very difficult listening situation for a child with a hearing loss. Children with hearing differences must overcome three primary challenges when listening in a classroom, including: background noise, distance from the teacher and other communication/instruction sources, and reverberation. As we approach the beginning of the academic school year for many of our children, the following are some of the key recommendations that should be strongly considered for adoption into a child's Individual Education Plan/Program (I.E.P.) in order to reduce the above-noted challenges:

1. FM (Frequency-Modulation) or IR (Infra-Red) technology is a non-negotiable item for implementation. For group instruction, that includes the student with hearing loss, the teacher should be required to make use of a microphone/transmitter which should be coupled to a boom microphone or a collar microphone versus a lavaliere-type microphone (unless the lavaliere mic has been determined to be omni –directional — head movements to either side by the teacher reduces the signal-to-noise ratio/SNR due to the loss of consistent mic-to-mouth distance of approximately 6 inches). A pass-around microphone/transmitter should also be used by the student's peers, in order that all of the students, along with the teacher, can have their voices amplified and delivered to the room's speaker/s (or the child's individual hearing aid/s and/or cochlear implant/s). In this way, the student will have access to the teaching and discussion of all members of the classroom.
2. Acoustic ceiling tiles, and areas of soft, sound-absorbing surfaces in order to reduce reverberation ("bouncing of sound waves") in the classroom (tennis balls on chair/desk legs-feet, use of bulletin boards, and window treatments).
3. Carpeted floor in teaching space/s.
4. Removal or "noise-treatment" of assorted noise sources (both internal and external noise in the classroom can be ameliorated by closing the classroom door, windows, and the treatment of heating, cooling, and other ventilation systems.
5. Small class size.
6. Preferential seating (however, to quote a marvelous article by Flexer, Wray, & Ireland, 1989, "Preferential Seating is NOT Enough!"). This may not automatically mean front and center of the classroom). The key is the physical placement of the child in the classroom, so that the teacher's voice and his/her visual (speechreading) cues are best received by the student.
7. Teacher/s with clear, appropriately intense (but not "Loud"), minimally accented voices/speech production skills and abilities.
8. Teacher/s with an accepting attitude for teaching a child who is deaf or hard of hearing being placed in his/her classroom.

9. Reasonable teaching accommodations such that visual/written cues (especially as the student becomes a “reader”) are routinely used to supplement the auditory instruction. For example, printed class schedules on the board; use of transparencies and PowerPoint; captioned videotapes/films, etc.
10. Pre-teaching of schoolwork as needed/as appropriate. Parents should be provided with loaning of class textbooks and weekly materials for pre-teaching of vocabulary words and pre-teaching/review/reinforcement of upcoming schoolwork.
11. Inservice as required to inform all school personnel about the student’s hearing loss, hearing aids/cochlear implants, use of other sensory technology, teaching needs, ways to facilitate communication between and among the family members, school personnel, school- and other service providers (special educators).
12. Other acoustic/physical and teaching accommodations, as outlined by the student’s IEP/504 Plan team members.

Finally, #13 — families are encouraged to be in touch with their Audiologist, the school’s educational audiologist, their cochlear implant team members, and if available, “Outreach” personnel at their State’s School for the Deaf — who all can serve as valuable resources for the family and the school personnel in the implementation of reasonable accommodations for the student with hearing loss.

RESOURCES

Flexer, C., Wray, D., & Ireland, K. (1989). Preferential seating is not enough. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 20*(1), 11-21.

Johnson, C.D., & Seaton, J. (2012). *Educational audiology handbook* (2nd ed.). Clifton Park, NY: Delmar/Cengage Learning.

Mangiardi, A. (1993). *A child with a hearing loss in your classroom? Don’t Panic: A guide for teachers*. Washington, DC: AG Bell Association for the Deaf.

www.phonicear.com
Classroom simulations of FM/HA technology

Cochlear Implant Manufacturers
Advanced Bionics – ***“Tools for Schools: Helping Children with Cochlear Implants Succeed in School”*** ToolsforSchools@AdvancedBionics.com

Cochlear Americas – HOPE Program

MED-EL – BRIDGE to Better Communication; ***“Educator Packet: Resources for Education and Rehabilitation Professionals”*** www.medel.com