

Advocacy for Children with Hearing Loss

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Parents and others who work with children with hearing loss feel the need to advocate for the children. However, the most important part of advocacy is learning to advocate for oneself.

When children rely on others to advocate for them, they do not feel powerful. But when they are capable of advocating for themselves they feel good about who they are. They feel competent.

Even very young children can learn some self-advocacy skills. It is important to develop self-advocacy skills early. If a child does not do so at a young age, it becomes more difficult to gain these skills later on.

Pre-school

Pre-school children can learn to put technology on and take it off. They can put it into the “hearing aid box” where it will stay overnight. They need to be taught to recognize when the equipment is not working and to report it to an adult. They can be encouraged to ask for repetition when they do not hear or understand what is said.

Kindergarten

By kindergarten, children should recognize that they hear better when they are closer to the talker, and they should be encouraged to move closer on their own. A kindergarten child should be able to ask for specific help if she does not understand: Please repeat, please speak louder or slower, etc.

First Grade

By first grade, children should be able to let the teacher know if the FM system is not working, and should be able to use a pass mic to improve their ability to hear other children. They should understand the different parts of the hearing aid, cochlear implant, and FM system and be able to talk about what they do.

Second Grade

Second graders should be able to report situations where listening is difficult, to recognize when something does not make sense, to begin to use communication repair strategies, and be able to perform basic troubleshooting.

Third Grade

By the time they are in third grade, children should be able to develop self-advocacy strategies for difficult situations. They should be able to explain to the teacher how to use the FM system, and to have become better able to discuss when there is a communication breakdown.

Who Teaches Self-Advocacy Skills?

Everyone who works with a child with hearing loss should participate in advocacy training. Parents need to wait for children to answer and encourage them to ask for repetition. When the earmold

comes out or the hearing aid falls off, we need to help the child make the repair and not do it for them.

We need to ask children if they heard what we said and understood it. If they say “no” we need to ask them what they are supposed to do when they do not understand, and encourage them to ask for repetition or clarification rather than just asking to have the statement repeated. When I ask a child a question, parents frequently jump in and repeat the question to the child “Jane wants to know.....”

That is not helping. It’s true that a child will definitely have an easier time listening to a more familiar voice, but he really needs to be able to communicate with a lot of people. It is a team effort. We all have to work on it.

More information about self advocacy can be found at <http://successforkidswithhearingloss.com>