

Getting Ready for School

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School is about to start for a lot of kids. Kids and parents are excited. New clothes, new books, new backpacks. What can we do to make this easier for children with hearing loss as the new year starts?

Preparing the Children

If possible, children with hearing loss should have the opportunity to go into the school in advance so they can see the new classroom, meet the teacher, meet the teacher of the deaf, the speech pathologist, the resource room teacher and anyone else who will be working with the child. This is a good opportunity to get some sense of where things are and what is expected. Even preschool children should know how to put his/her hearing aids on and take them off, and hopefully turn them on and off. By school age, children should recognize when the battery is dead and change it.

Preparing Technology

It is crucial that technology work well for kids to succeed in school. Parents need to be sure that kids have seen the audiologist a few weeks before school starts to ensure that the technology is working and that the child is hearing at a sufficiently soft level (20-25 dB HL). The technology needs to be FM compatible.

Every child with hearing loss should have a personal wearable FM system at school. Hopefully, at the end of the last school year the school determined what FM system will be needed and ordered parts. Trying to get all the necessary parts for an FM system together on short notice is difficult and may delay a child's ability to participate in school.

The School's Preparation

There is a lot for a school to do to meet the needs of children with hearing loss, because the school has the responsibility to see that the children succeed!!

Technology

1. The school must sure there is a current working FM system for every child who has an FM system on their IEP or 504 plan (which should be every child with hearing loss). In addition, the school needs backup equipment so that if the FM systems break down, children won't lose out on any information. Repairs can take days or weeks, and during that time the child cannot participate fully in school.
2. Someone at the school needs to be assigned the task of charging the equipment daily.
3. Someone needs to be responsible for training the child and teachers how to use the FM system appropriately. This is usually best handled by the school audiologist. If the school has no audiologist, there may be a consultant audiologist, or a teacher of the deaf may be able to provide this training.

4. Someone at school needs to know how to troubleshoot the child's personal technology, and there need to be spare batteries at school.

Classroom Acoustics

1. Everyone needs to understand that the classroom must be quiet.
2. Windows and doors need to be closed.
3. HVAC systems need to be checked so they are quiet.
4. Classrooms should not be near the bathrooms, playground, or gym.
5. Kids with hearing loss should be strategically seated so they can both see and hear the teacher, and should be able to move around the room if needed to see and hear.

Communication

1. We need to be sure the child is able to communicate in the classroom.
2. Does the teacher know how to use the FM system? If there is no pass-around mic, is the teacher repeating all the comments of other students?
3. Does the student have sufficient language to understand what is happening?
4. Is the teacher checking to be sure that the child hears? (e.g. Asking questions to ascertain that the child got the message.)
5. Is the child using interpreters? Are the interpreters helping with or interfering with socialization?
6. Does the teacher speak at a reasonable rate and face the child when speaking?
7. Is classroom lighting good?

Monitoring Academics

1. Who is monitoring academic performance and making sure that the child is doing not just "okay," but as well as s/he is capable of doing?
2. Do the school staff have sufficiently high expectations or are they satisfied with "good enough"?
3. Is someone responsible for pre-teaching and reviewing academic material? How is that person getting the academic material to work on?
4. Is the school waiting for the child to fail before it provides academic assistance?

Socialization skills

For school to be successful, children must be able to socialize with peers. If a child cannot communicate, socialization will be poor. Data shows that language level is a significant factor in socialization skills. Kids need to have the same language level as their peers if they are going to socialize. Is someone at school working on socialization skills? Support groups for kids with hearing loss will also help with socialization. (For more on such groups, see my [post](#) on the topic from March 2012.)

Teaching Kids to Advocate for Themselves

Who at school is working on helping children learn to advocate for themselves? Advocacy includes helping kids both recognize when they are not hearing or understanding and helping them ask for clarification.

Is this a long list? Yes it is, but every item on it is crucial in helping kids succeed. Please let me know what I have left out.