



Getting Connected:

Five Ways to Strengthen Communication in Your Home

Communication plays a vital role in building and maintaining strong relationships among family members, and social interaction within the family is important to a child's emotional and social development.

These five tips can help strengthen communication in your home:

Make a family photo album with your Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing child. Many Deaf adults have shared they often had little knowledge of family members outside of the home while growing up, even if they saw them regularly! Rather than rely solely on in-person introductions (which can easily be missed by the DHH child), using pictures of family members, with names and relationships written underneath, can help your child feel more connected with his/her family. PLUS – it's a fun project you can work on together!

When attending family gatherings, have everyone wear name tags. If you use American Sign Language, help your child choose a name sign for each person. Name signs are given to people based on personality traits and physical characteristics – this is a great way for your child to learn more about the family – and the family gets to practice sign language!

Be mindful of casual conversation in the home. Hearing children easily overhear information about upcoming social plans, important lifestyle changes – and even family gossip. Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing often miss this information, and can be caught off-guard by what feels like sudden change within the family. Make a conscious effort to sit down with your child and talk about important family information; you might be surprised to discover what s/he knows, or doesn't know.

Make a point to connect your child with other DHH children through Deaf camps, day trips and other accessible activities. For many children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, summer vacation and other school holidays can be bittersweet, due to communication challenges at home. Many Deaf young adults say going to camp was great for their self-esteem and making new friends! When the kids are home, consider introducing your Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing child to Deaf adults in the community by attending family friendly Deaf events such as coffee nights, bowling, ice cream socials, etc. Conduct a Google search or contact your local Deaf agency to find events near you... and don't be shy about reaching out to the local Deaf community. (If you are shy, recruit a friend or family member to go with you!)

Travel plans? Make vacation travel more accessible to your child by providing a visual map and outlining your route ahead of time. Share details about the journey – where you're going, what you'll pass along the way, etc. We all feel more comfortable when we know what's going on! While in the car, practice signing or finger-spelling words for things you see out the window! If you're going to an amusement park or other tourist attraction, call ahead and ask about an interpreter or other accommodation for live shows and exhibits to help create a fully accessible experience for your child.