

Daily maintenance and use of hearing aids in the home

Extract from *Using residual hearing effectively. Education guidelines project*. London, Royal National Institute for Deaf People, 2001

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The role of professionals in providing advice and support to the families of young deaf children, particularly immediately following the identification of deafness, is a crucial one. Ideally, a teacher of the deaf should be present at the diagnostic clinic where deafness is confirmed, but if this is not possible it is essential that professionals make contact with the family as soon as possible. The general role of professionals supporting parents of young deaf children is explored in more detail in a parallel set of Education Guideline materials (Effective early intervention for deaf children 0–5 and their families, RNID (2001).

In relation to the effective use of residual hearing, the role of the teacher of the deaf is to:

- provide information about the nature of deafness and the degree and type of hearing loss which has been identified
- introduce families to how hearing aids work
- provide information and support as the first set of aids are prescribed and fitted
- provide accurate information for families on what hearing aids can and cannot achieve
- establish everyday routines for managing and checking equipment
- offer advice and support about how to create a rich language and communication environment in which listening and sound are rewarding experiences
- if and when it is appropriate, provide information about cochlear implantation to inform the decisions that families need to make about surgical intervention and other options.

Therefore it is recommended that:

- a home visit from a teacher of the deaf, to provide support, is provided as soon as possible after diagnosis
- there should be one 'key worker' or named person to support the child and family – this is usually a teacher of the deaf, but may be another appropriately trained professional

- close professional links should be established and maintained with the paediatric audiology service which is assessing the child, supplying and fitting the hearing aids and making earmoulds
- appropriate, accessible information is made available to families about the nature and limitations of hearing aids
- technical information about the audiological realities of life with hearing aids is balanced by the message that effective amplification will be of limited value if sound does not become meaningful – the provision of stimulating and enjoyable listening experiences is as important as the provision of hearing aids.

The following published materials are designed for use by parents and may be particularly useful when explaining the nature of deafness and the function of hearing aids:

Understanding Deafness, National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) (1998)

Deaf Children Talking: Parents' Guide, DELTA (1999)

Knight P & Swanwick R *The Care and Education of a Deaf Child: a Book for Parents*, Multilingual Matters (1999)

What do parents need to know about hearing aids?

"Hearing aids do not perform a corrective function like spectacles. The glasses that you may need for reading adjust your focus and effectively restore visual efficiency. Hearing aids cannot do this to hearing loss. The most they can do is to aid the residual hearing that you have and make accessible more of the sounds from the environment than would otherwise be possible." Fraser B *Supporting Children with Hearing Impairment in Mainstream Schools*, Franklin Watts (1996)

It is important that the families of young deaf children understand that while the potential positive contribution of hearing aids to a child's development is enormous:

- hearing aids do not usually restore normal levels of hearing conventional analogue
- hearing aids amplify generally and the microphone picks up background noise as well as spoken language or other sounds which the child may wish to listen to – so it is important to think about listening conditions.
- hearing aid microphones can only pick up sounds which are close (within two metres).
- young children find it tiring to listen to amplified sound for very long periods
- young children need time to get used to sound and to use it
- hearing children listen for a year or more before they begin to produce their first recognisable words – deaf children with severe and profound hearing losses begin to listen for the first time when their hearing aids are fitted.

The experience of listening through a hearing aid for yourself is the best way to understand what the quality of amplified sound is like, but teachers and parents should use a stetoclip with an attenuator to reduce the sound

level.

Everyday checking routines

From the time that hearing aids are first fitted, families need to develop confidence in their daily handling and use of equipment. Regular routines to check and maintain children's hearing aids and to replace batteries have an important part to play in this process. The role of the professional is to work in partnership with parents and others to establish these routines. The information requirements of families where a spoken language other than English or British Sign Language is used in the home need particular consideration, but all families require information to be presented in appropriate and family-friendly language.

- to agree clear routines for checking and maintenance
- to develop routines for taking off and storing aids when not in use, making sure the aids are always kept in a dry place
- to communicate a sense of urgency about getting an aid fixed when it breaks down
- to agree arrangements for contacting the appropriate agency to get aids fixed when there are problems and to make sure that contact details are up to date.

Encouraging parents to keep a record of the hearing aids being used. Parents will find it helpful to keep a record of the following details about their child's hearing aids in case an aid is lost and needs to be replaced at short notice:

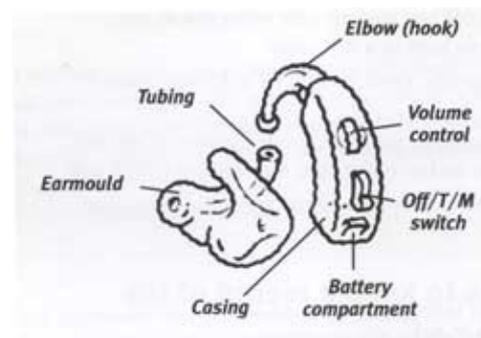
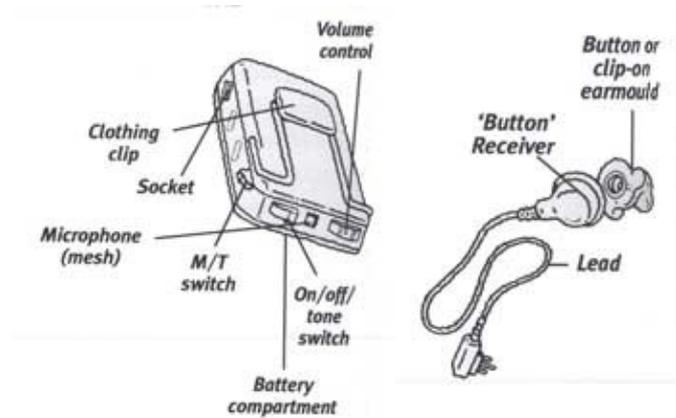
- make, type and serial number
- internal settings
- volume level required for optimum listening
- type of battery
- type of ear hook or elbow (post-aural aids)
- type of receiver and cord (body-worn aids)
- details of the type of earmould used and the date when the last earmould impression was taken.

"...Yes, but he loves custard."

"It must not be forgotten that hearing aids are worn on little ears, and little ears are fitted to little heads and bodies and the owners of those little heads and bodies like to experiment with sand or water or jams and to see just how messy stewed prunes can really be and to practise the art of hanging upside down from climbing frames and to see if dogs like hearing aids.... Hearing aids lead the life of Riley. Keeping them on can be particularly tricky with children. Having a well-fitting earmould and making sure that the BTE fits snugly behind the ear can help. Other tricks can be tried. 'Huggies' are plastic loops that fit round the ear and to which aids can be fitted. Double sided sticky tabs can be used to stick the aid to the skin, keeping the aid firmly in place. Some clinics use toupee tape for the same purpose"

Green R Audiological management in the first 18 months. In Stokes J (Ed) *Hearing impaired infants: Support in the first 18 months*. Whurr (1999)

Checking routines for parents testing a child's aids



Check all settings to ensure the child is using aids at the settings recommended

- check volume setting
- check tone control

Carry out a visual check of the hearing aid

- check the casing and switches
- the elbows for cracks and debris
- the earmoulds and tubing for cracks and moisture
- whether the tubing has become discoloured or gone hard – if it has, it needs to be replaced

- the earmould is not blocked by wax or dirt
- the batteries are inserted the right way round
- cleanliness of the battery compartment
- listen to the hearing aids using a stetoclip and attenuator while talking and wiggle the cords to check for intermittent faults

In addition, for body worn hearing aids

- check the microphone and lead
- check microphone mesh for dirt or blockages
- check cover/clingfilm is in place if necessary
- look for fraying or breaks in the cord/lead
- listen to the aid with stetoclip and attenuator while talking and wiggle the cords to check for intermittent faults
- whether the connection with the aid is loose
- replace the cord if there is silence or an intermittent signal
- in the case of young children, check harness is secure
- check position of aid for good ear-voice link
- make sure the microphone is not covered by clothing

With young children, it is a good idea to check the volume and other settings on their hearing aids every time their clothes are changed.



deafnessatbirth.org.uk

A website developed by the RNID/NDCS joint initiative on training issues