Starting a New School Year: Advice from an Educational Audiologist

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What equipment, supplies, etc., should I send with my child to school?

The supplies that a parent will send with a child vary based on what type of amplification device the child is utilizing. For children with hearing aids, there really isn’t much to send. We do like the parents to send an extra package of batteries to keep in the teacher’s desk in case the batteries go dead. For children with cochlear implants, it is important for the parents to send all the necessary direct audio input auxiliary cables. We need to be able to connect the child to any necessary electronic devices, such as computers.

Most of the equipment and supplies that are utilized by the child at school are supplied by the school district. It is the responsibility of the educational audiologist to work with the child’s school to provide a suitable and accessible location for the equipment. If the school does not have an educational audiologist, then the parent must work with the school to be sure there is adequate accessibility to the equipment. The parent should contact the school principal directly.

Where will they be kept? How will my child be able to access them when they need it?

Usually, equipment is kept in a safe place in a classroom. Because much of the FM systems utilized have to be charged overnight, there is usually a central location. In kindergarten through early elementary school, the child is usually in the same classroom all day so it makes sense to keep the equipment in that classroom. It should be kept in a safe place where other students cannot access it. It becomes the teacher’s responsibility to be sure the child has the proper equipment to start the day. As an educational audiologist, I work with all of my students to advocate for themselves if for some reason the teacher forgets to get the equipment out. The child should always feel comfortable asking for what they need and the teacher should always be respectful when the child asks.

What information will the educational audiologist need to know about my child?

As an educational audiologist, I like to establish a rapport with the parent at the beginning of each new school year. Even if it is a parent I have known for many years. Our team likes to know if any changes have occurred over the summer. Did the child get new hearing aids or earmolds, did they get a processor upgrade (if utilizing a cochlear implant), how much remapping was done in the summer, are there any changes in the hearing loss, did the child receive any private speech services, etc. If your educational audiologist has a good relationship with your local pediatric audiology program and your local implant center, he/she should have all of this information, but it is always important to check as well. I also like to know if they switched clinical or implant audiologists over the summer. I need to know the name of that person so I can have direct contact.
How will (or should) the educational audiologist work with my child’s general education teachers?

I typically know by the end of the previous school year whom the teacher will be for the child in the next school year. If this is the case, I like to meet with that teacher at the end of the previous year to prepare them for having a deaf/hard-of-hearing student in their classroom. Many teachers have not experienced this and I find the earlier you prepare them, the better the transition is in the new school year. I provide all inservicing on equipment to all of the teachers and para-professionals in that classroom. And anytime there is an equipment issue, the teacher knows they can always contact me.

What else should I know as a parent new to this transition?

Most importantly, the parent needs to know that they contact me at any time. I always provide the parents with my work phone and email addresses. I make sure they know that I will respond to them quickly to answer their questions. They need to know that they can ask me anything, and nothing they deem important will ever be looked at as unimportant. Parents need to feel support and it is my responsibility to provide that support. Many times the educational audiologist is the link between the parent and the school district.