Self-advocacy in children with hearing loss will permeate many aspects of the child’s life. Once it has been determined that the family’s desired outcome is to have their child take advantage of the technology that is available to them, fostering self-advocacy can be woven into the routines of every day family life as well as into early childhood curriculum. As many parents of children with hearing loss will attest, the introduction of the amplification system, either hearing aids or cochlear implants, can be a frustrating time in the journey. Even though logic dictates that the more the child wears the device, the sooner the child will recognize its value, and the sooner he/she will accept the amplification and begin to embrace its use, for many families it is a difficult time.

Practicing the 3 P’s Can Prove Helpful: Persistence/Patience/Positive attitude

Persistence refers to the hundreds of times a day that the child will remove the device or it will fall off on its own.

- Simply put it back with a smile on your face and a word of praise or encouragement.
- This is not negotiable (many parenting decisions you make will be non-negotiable).
- Once your child realizes that you will continually replace it, one (or both) of two things will happen: The child will give up and leave it alone AND the child will begin to understand that life is different (better!) when it is on.

Patience refers to the parents’ ability (and willingness) to accept the fact that this is a phase and that “this too shall pass.” Patience also refers to the realization that this, as with many things, is a process that will take time and effort on everyone’s part.

Positive attitude begins with you!

- Your attitude about your child’s hearing aids will be reflected to them.
- If you are positive, upbeat and approach hearing aid use as part of the routine, they will adopt that attitude.
- If you approach it as a chore and something that needs to be done, it will just delay their acceptance.

Positive attitude also refers to pairing early use with a positive experience.

- A gradual introduction can be accomplished by stipulating that if you want to watch TV, your hearing aids need to be on. It will be more fun, too!
- If you want to play with playdough, your hearing aids need to be on. If the hearing aids are removed, the fun activity is over until the hearing aids are put back on.
- Involve children in hearing aid care early, to the safest extent possible.
- Choose/select/decorate/shop for a special container to place the hearing aids in at nap and bedtime.
- Give the child a choice of which hearing aid will be removed/checked first.
- Teach the “pinch & pull” method for removal by modeling it for the youngest user, providing hand-over-hand guidance for the older toddler and encouraging proper removal for the preschoolers. Pinch & pull involves slipping a finger under the earmold, pinching the earmold itself and pulling it by the earmold, not by the tube.
- Talk about what you are looking for while you visually inspect
the mold for dirt and wax; gently wipe off the mold.

- Listen with a stethoset and give an exaggerated happy expression when you hear the sound. “That sounds great!” “Wow! That sounds nice!” Replace the device (or put it away for the night).
- Once the child has accepted the device and has begun to use it regularly, when reinserting the aid or reattaching the coil, do it in the “off” position and prompt the child to “Listen!” as you turn it on. This is a good first step in raising a child’s awareness of the function of the device.

**Self-Advocacy for CI users**

Self-advocacy for cochlear implant users can be developed in a similar manner. Using proper terminology for the parts of the device, encouraging the child to use it by sharing your excitement for listening and by practicing the 3 P’s, your child will soon be asking for the cochlear implant!

As with so many aspects of childhood, routine and expectation lead to predictability and security. Competence and confidence in amplification care will result in greater self-esteem about themselves and their hearing loss. It’s never too early to start!

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