

# when your friend's child has a hearing loss

The birth of any child is such a happy occasion and the news that a friend's baby has a hearing loss can come as a shock. Initially it can be difficult to know how to respond and what role you might play in your friends' lives and the life of their child. You may feel a range of different emotions; for your friends, for their child, and at a personal level.

It might help to know that children and adults with a hearing loss have every opportunity to have full, happy, successful lives. Your involvement and support of your friends and their child is an important part of making this happen.

The information in this resource is designed to give you some ideas on how you might be able to support your friends at this time.

## BABIES AND HEARING LOSS

Hearing loss occurs in 1 to 2 newborn babies per 1000. The hearing loss can be in one ear or both ears and can range from a mild loss to profound. Fortunately, over 98% of babies born in Queensland now have their hearing tested before they leave hospital. This gives children who have a hearing loss the opportunity to start early intervention at a very young age. Babies who are diagnosed early and start wearing hearing aids and attending early intervention by 6 months of age usually make excellent progress.

The management of hearing loss in children has changed dramatically over the past few years. Hearing aids are sophisticated and powerful and cochlear implants are available to children who receive little benefit from their hearing aids. Because of these technological developments, most children who are deaf or have a hearing loss now attend regular schools and develop good spoken language skills. Some children develop Auslan (Australian Sign Language) either instead of, or as well as, spoken language.

## WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

One of the first questions many people ask is 'Why?'. There are many causes of hearing loss in children. As advances occur in many areas of medicine it is becoming more possible to answer this question for a greater proportion of children, however some families never find a definite reason for their child's hearing loss. The doctors caring for your friend's child will work with their family to explore this question. Your friends will probably be offered specific tests for their child to help answer this question. Some parents choose to go ahead with these tests, but others make the choice not to. It's important to respect the decisions that your friend makes on this issue.

Ultimately the biggest priority is for a family and those who support them to develop an understanding of the child's diagnosis and make sure they have every opportunity to develop their skills from as young an age as possible.

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## SUPPORTING YOUR FRIENDS

Everyone is different, so not all of the information below will be relevant to you. Trust your own judgment and your knowledge of your relationship with your friend.

### EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Responses to a child being diagnosed with a hearing loss are different from family to family and will change at different times. Take cues from your friend about what role they want you to play at different times. Your friends might want your support from day one, or they might want time to themselves before involving others too much. If there are times that your friend prefers to do things without your input, this isn't necessarily a reflection of how they feel towards you.

- Don't be afraid that you won't know what to say – just be yourself.
- Cry with them, laugh with them and, most importantly, listen to them. Your listening might be just what they need. They're on a steep learning curve and may need a nonjudgmental sounding board.
- Asking questions shows that you're interested, but try and make sure that you ask them at appropriate times and that your questions are sensitive to how they might be feeling.
- Try not to express strong opinions about your friend's decisions and plans for their baby's future unless they ask for your input. Like all parents, they want the best for their child and will have given their decisions a lot of thought.
- Let them know you care and will be there for them when they need you.
- When you're with your friend's child, do all of the things you would do with any other baby. Touching, holding, comforting, rocking, singing and talking are all just as important for a child with a hearing loss.
- Your friends may be very busy attending appointments, so it is a good idea to ring before visiting.
- Even if they say they don't need help, it doesn't mean a gesture of support and friendship won't be most welcome.
- If the opportunity seems right, ask your friend if they have any information you could read that would help your understanding.

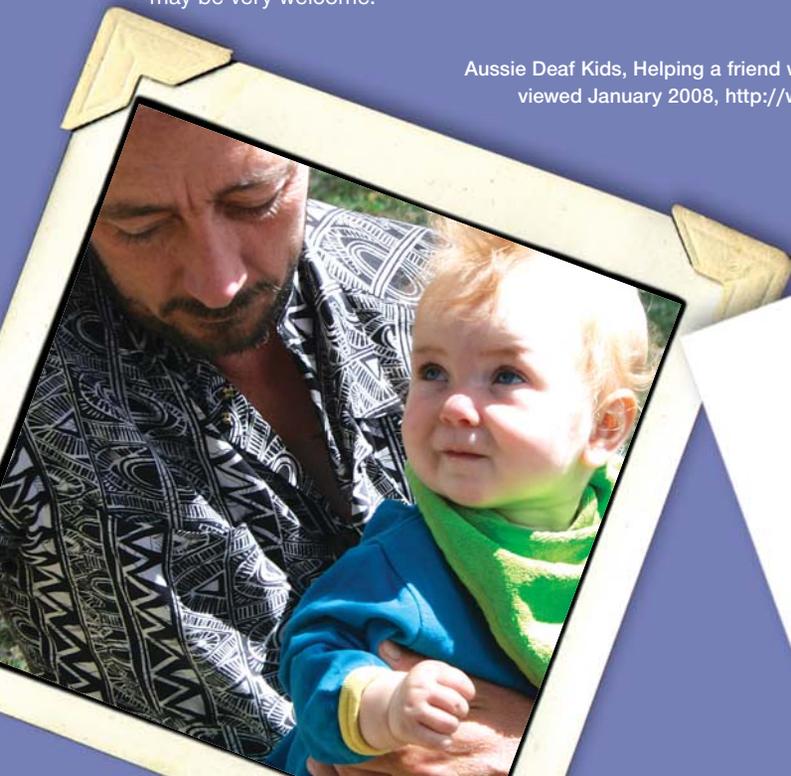
### PRACTICAL SUPPORT

- Prepare a healthy meal for them that can be frozen. They will be very busy in the early days following the diagnosis.
- Drop off some simple nutritious snacks that are easy to grab when they are busy or tired.
- Offer to pick up some groceries on your way over for a visit.
- Organise some opportunities to socialise and have fun – arrange to have coffee, go on a picnic, or look after their baby and let them go to the movies with their partner.

If there are other children in the family, they would like some special attention too. You could read them a book when you visit or take them to the park for a play. Baby sitting the siblings when the family has appointments may be very welcome.

### Reference

Aussie Deaf Kids, Helping a friend whose baby has been diagnosed with a hearing loss, viewed January 2008, [http://www.aussiedeafkids.com/pdf/helping\\_friend\\_girl.pdf](http://www.aussiedeafkids.com/pdf/helping_friend_girl.pdf)



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Additional copies of this resource are available from  
the Queensland Hearing Loss Family Support Service on  
**1800 352 075** or online at [www.health.qld.gov.au/hearing](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/hearing)