

when your
grandchild

has a hearing loss



INFORMATION FOR GRANDPARENTS OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE A HEARING LOSS



The birth of a grandchild is such a happy occasion, and for many, the news that their grandchild has a hearing loss can come as a shock. It's important to remember, however, that the relationship a child has with their grandparents is a very special one and this is no different for children who have a hearing loss. You have a special and important role to play in their life, and they will undoubtedly play an important role in yours.

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 in your grandchild's development and experiences in life are an important part of making this happen.

Initially it can be difficult to know how you should respond and what role you might play. You may feel many different emotions; for yourself, your grandchild, and your own son or daughter. There's certainly no right or wrong way to feel.

Over 90% of children with a hearing loss are born to families with little or no experience of deafness. So it's no surprise that many grandparents are not sure what role they might play. We hope this resource will assist you on your path to building some understanding of your grandchild's hearing loss and the role you can play in their life.

BABIES AND HEARING LOSS

Hearing loss occurs in 1 to 2 per 1000 newborn babies. 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 families 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 grandchild will work with your son or daughter to explore this question. Your grandchild's parents will probably be offered specific tests 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 son or daughter makes on this issue.

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

Here are some suggestions you might find useful to help you meet your own needs, support your grandchild's parents, and build your relationship with your grandchild.

YOUR OWN NEEDS

Your own feelings and need for information is important. There are lots of different sources of support available to help you learn more about deafness and what this means for your grandchild and their family.

GATHER INFORMATION

Read all you can manage about hearing loss, its implications and management. Being informed and knowledgeable can be one of the best ways of coming to understand your grandchild's hearing loss.

Information might come from:

- your family and friends
- your local community
- services for deaf children
- voluntary organisations
- websites, and
- brochures and information books on hearing loss.

Your son or daughter may have been given information that you can look at too. Although the information may be aimed at parents, it may still be useful.

Have a look at the following resources:

- **'Possibilities'** – provided to your grandchild's parents at the time their child was diagnosed, and available online at www.health.qld.gov.au/hearing
- **'Choices'** – provided to your grandchild's parents by Australian Hearing, and available online at www.hearing.com.au
- **'Aussie Deaf Kids'** – www.aussie.deafkids.com
- **National Deaf Children's Society (United Kingdom)** – www.ndcs.org.uk/family_support/our_publications

These resources will also provide you with links to many other valuable sources of information.

FIND SUPPORT

You will have your own responses and feelings to your grandchild's hearing loss, and possibly questions and concerns about their needs and their future. There will probably be times when it's fine to talk about these things with your son or daughter. But there will also be other times, that it might be important that they're not your main support. Because of this it would be valuable to have someone else you can talk to if you feel you need to.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Find out if there are any groups in your area for families of deaf children. There may also be other families or grandparents who live near you and have a deaf child or grandchild. It's good to be able to meet and talk with other families and other grandparents.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

When a family member has some extra needs you might want to do everything you can to help. This is a very natural response, but it's also worth remembering that a little bit of steady help might be far more valuable than a lot of help that you can't keep up with in the longer term.

THE NEEDS OF YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER

We know that the emotional and practical support grandparents provide to their son or daughter can be very valuable in helping them to adjust to their child's hearing loss. Here are some specific suggestions that might be useful. Remember, you don't need to do everything that's suggested here, they are just ideas that some people find helpful.

FIND OUT WHEN AND HOW YOU'RE NEEDED

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 son or daughter about what role they might like you to play at different times and for different things.

Some parents want their extended families to be a part of things right from the start and look for a lot of contact and support from day one. Other families might want more time before involving other people too much. If there are times that your son or daughter prefers to do things without your input, this isn't necessarily a reflection of how they feel towards you.

STAY CONNECTED

If your son or daughter wants to talk about things, your listening might be just what they need. They are on a steep learning curve and may need a non-judgmental sounding board.

Listening and asking questions shows that you are interested. Try and make sure that you ask questions at appropriate times and that your questions are sensitive to how you're your son or daughter might be feeling.

OFFER HELP WITH APPOINTMENTS

Find out when your grandchild's appointments are, check if your son or daughter needs any help with transport, looking after other children, support during the appointment, or if you don't live locally simply a chat once they've returned home might be very welcome.

OFFER PRACTICAL HELP

See if your son or daughter would like any practical help. Particularly in the early days, parents spend a lot of time going to appointments. Offering to cook, clean, shop, or help with transport to appointments may be a big help, but also be careful not to take over.

OFFER BABY SITTING

Babysitting and looking after your grandchildren will give you time with your grandchildren as well as giving their parents some time-out to relax and enjoy themselves. Even just an hour's break can recharge the batteries!

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

SOME THINGS TO AVOID

AVOID MINIMISING THE CONCERNS

Don't tell your son or daughter not to worry — "He is so young; he will grow out of it; give it some time". This is not the case. With early fitting of hearing aids, early intervention and a loving and supportive family, your grandchild has the best possible start.

AVOID JUDGING

Be careful not to judge your son or daughter if they are finding it difficult to come to terms with what their child's hearing loss may mean for their child.

AVOID BLAMING

Avoid 'blaming' one side of the family or an individual family member for the hearing loss — it is unhelpful and upsetting. Even families with a history of hearing loss, can be shocked and upset when the littlest family member is diagnosed with a hearing loss.

AVOID OFFERING OPINIONS

Try not to criticise and be careful about offering opinions unless you're asked for them. Parents who receive support and good information from professionals and others who have had similar experiences usually make the good choices for their family — even if the choices they make might be different to the choices you might think are best.

YOUR GRANDCHILD'S NEEDS

DO ALL THE THINGS YOU WOULD DO WITH ANY OTHER BABY

Touching, holding, comforting, rocking, singing and talking are all precisely what your grandchild needs from day one. You can build a loving and communicative relationship with your grandchild from those first cuddles.

HAVE FUN

Talk together, look at books, cook, go to the park, play together, and do general household jobs together. Your grandchild will benefit from fun and loving interactions from all their family and friends in all sorts of different situations.

COMMUNICATE

Watch what your son or daughter has learned about communicating with your grandchild. They will be able to help you build your skills as well. Ask if they'd be happy for you to go to some of your grandchild's appointments to learn more.

LEARN TOGETHER

If your grandchild and their family are learning Auslan (Australian Sign Language), see if you can join them in their lessons.

BE CONSISTENT

When it comes to supporting and caring for a child, it is important to be consistent. Take the lead from your son or daughter, even if you don't have exactly the same ideas about 'parenting' your grandchild.

LEARN ABOUT HEARING TECHNOLOGY

If your grandchild uses hearing aids or cochlear implants, learn how to use them, how to change the batteries, and how to test that they are working properly. They can be a bit fiddly but with some practice you'll soon be an expert. It is reassuring to the parents to know they can leave their daughter with you and you will be confident with his or her hearing aids.

RELAX, ENJOY AND CELEBRATE

There's no need to be overprotective. Your grandchild needs to develop independence and confidence. Accept your grandchild for the beautiful child they are and enjoy them. You will have a special and unique relationship with them!

And remember to celebrate their milestones. First smiles, first hearing aids, first teeth, first words are all exciting developments in the life of your grandchild.

YOUR OTHER GRANDCHILDREN'S NEEDS

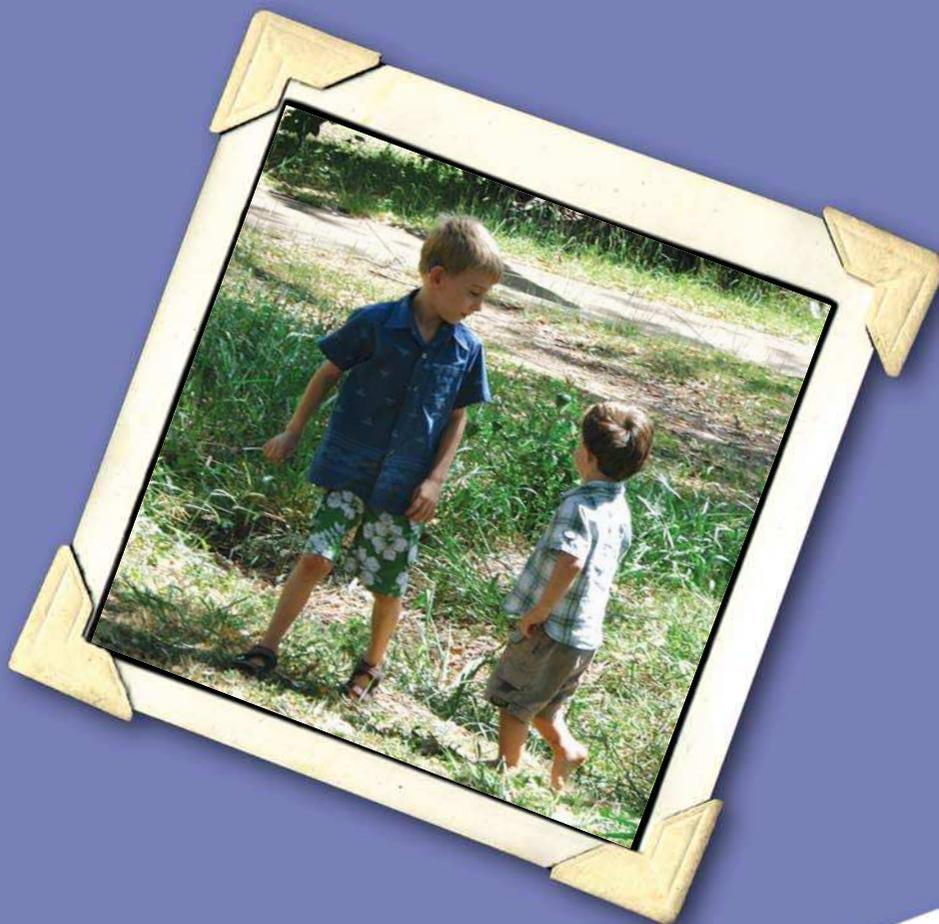
Make time for your other grandchildren. They'll need quality time with you too.

References:

Aussie Deaf Kids, n.d. Building blocks: a guide for grandparents whose granddaughter has been diagnosed with a hearing loss, viewed January 2008, http://www.aussiedeafkids.com/pdf/grandparents_girl.pdf.

The National Deaf Children's Society, 2007, 'You and your grandchild', viewed January 2008, <http://www.ndcs.org.uk/document.rm?id=2245>.

Accept your grandchild for the beautiful child they are and enjoy them.



An initiative of the State of Queensland
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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**