

# chapter 2:

## hearing loss, health and development

### GETTING THE FACTS

Understanding exactly what your child's diagnosis is and what it means to their overall health and development is an important first step in planning how to support your child in the future.

Queensland Health has a guideline of recommended medical and developmental assessments for young children who have a hearing loss. The guideline has a particular focus on a child's overall health and development, and the possible cause of their hearing loss.

The assessment processes will usually involve a combination of:

- talking with you to develop an understanding of your child and family, including your pregnancy history, birth details and family health history
- doing a physical examination of your child
- doing specific tests (e.g. blood tests, urine tests, x-rays), and
- observing your child's skills as they develop over time.

Some tests are recommended for all children, while other tests are only recommended for some children. The tests that might be suggested for your child will depend on the type of hearing loss your child has; whether other people in your family have a hearing loss; or whether your child has other health concerns.

### ASSESSMENTS RECOMMENDED FOR ALL CHILDREN

It is recommended that all children are offered appointments to see the following professionals and services:

- Audiologist
- Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist (ENT)
- Australian Hearing
- Paediatrician
- Geneticist
- Ophthalmologist

If you are not offered these assessments, it's recommended that you talk to your primary doctor (usually ENT or paediatrician) at your next appointment.

### ASSESSMENTS RECOMMENDED FOR SOME CHILDREN

Some children will be advised to have other tests or see other specialists. Some of these are listed below. It is suggested that you talk to your ENT or paediatrician about whether or not the following tests are relevant for your child.

#### MRI Scan

An MRI scan shows the structure of soft tissues such as the brain and the hearing nerve, and identifies whether they have developed normally. An MRI scan can sometimes help to explain the reason for a child's hearing loss. It is also done when a child is being assessed for a cochlear implant.

#### CT Scan

A CT scan shows the structure of the bony parts of the ear and whether they have developed normally. Like an MRI scan, a CT scan can sometimes help to explain the reason for a child's hearing loss, and is also done when a child is being assessed for a cochlear implant.

#### Renal ultrasound

A very small number of children who have a hearing loss can also have problems with their kidneys. A renal ultrasound creates images of the kidneys to help identify if they have developed normally.

#### Electrocardiogram (ECG)

A very small number of children who have a hearing loss can also have problems with their heart. An ECG provides a recording of the rhythm and electrical activity of the heart.

## THE BENEFITS OF ASSESSMENTS

Undertaking these assessments will give you the best chance to understand:

- your child's hearing loss
- your child's abilities and strengths that will support their communication and overall development
- any developmental or health needs which may require specific support, and
- which of these issues are likely to stay the same, and which might change over time.

Having a clear understanding of your child's hearing loss will be very valuable as you make decisions about:

- your child's communication development
- which early intervention service you might use
- whether your child might benefit from support with other areas of their health or development
- hearing technology that might be useful for your child
- medical and surgical treatment options that might be available, and
- your broader family situation and needs.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY INTERVENTION

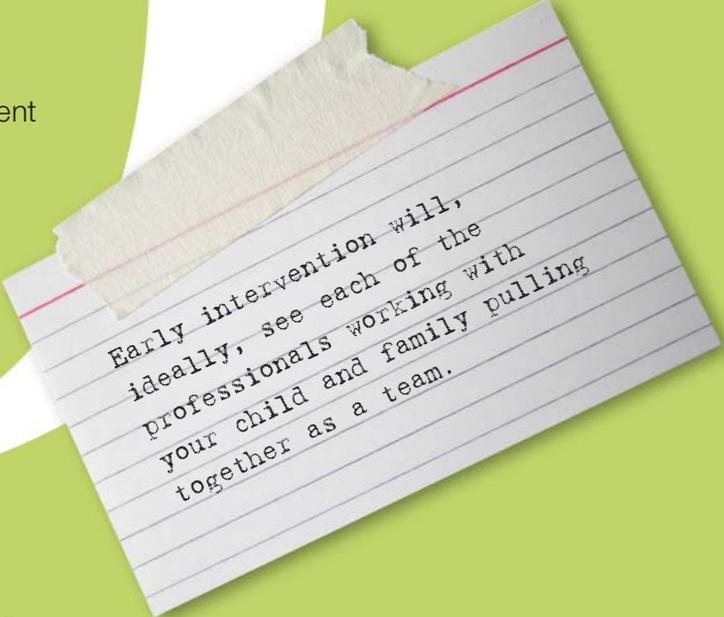
As well as organising the medical assessments your child may need, you will need to choose an early intervention service for your child. Research shows that when a baby is born with a hearing loss, starting intervention before 6 months of age gives them the best chance of doing well in their communication development. It also lessens the risk of delays in their development.

'Early intervention' is the system of coordinated services that helps a child's development and supports families during the critical early childhood years from birth to school entry. Early intervention programs for children who have a hearing loss not only have a strong focus on communication development but they also support the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical growth and development of your child and the broader needs of your family.

Early intervention will, ideally, see each of the professionals working with your child and family pulling together as a team. This is called a 'multidisciplinary approach.' Your family and child are core members of this team from the beginning and it's important that you're central in deciding what happens, as well as in co-ordinating how and when things happen.

## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT ASSESSMENTS...

- What assessments have we already completed and which ones are still to be organised?
- Do we understand what each assessment is for? If not, who can we ask?
- Can we coordinate so that a couple of assessments can be done at once rather than multiple appointments on different days?



Early intervention will, ideally, see each of the professionals working with your child and family pulling together as a team.

## **ACCESSING EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES**

Most early intervention services are offered by government or non-government special early childhood education units or centres around the state. They vary and may include one-to-one appointments and therapy, playgroups, parent education groups, and parent support groups.

Where and how these services are delivered will depend on the type of service being offered, where you live, the types of programs the organisation is running, and the available technology. Some examples include:

- Centre-based services
- Telephone services
- Video-teleconferencing
- Internet / web based therapy
- Home visits
- Outreach services

The contact details for the early intervention services available to Queensland children are at the back of this book. You will also find a checklist for choosing an early intervention service in this kit. This checklist will help you consider some of the important issues in deciding on a service for your child. Take this checklist along when you visit services to make sure you've covered all the bases. Extra copies of the checklist are available from your Family Support Facilitator or on the Healthy Hearing Program website [www.health.qld.gov.au/hearing](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/hearing).

### **QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN LOOKING FOR EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES...**

- Who provides early intervention services in my area?
- What services can I access outside my local area?
- What information do I need to bring with me when I visit early intervention services for the first time?
- Would I prefer to contact services myself or organise for another service (QHLFSS or Australian Hearing) to refer me to the early intervention service?
- Does the Early Intervention Checklist prepare me for my visits to the different services?



## QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR BABY...

- Have I reduced background noise and positioned myself so that my child sees me?
- What games can I play with my baby that involve lots of talking, touching and eye contact?
- What are the times of day when my baby is most active and will respond well to playing and interacting?
- Who else can become involved in these interactions (siblings, grandparents, friends)?

### Other parents say:

- There are many ways to interact, communicate and play with your child. Have fun exploring the little games you may come up with that you can enjoy together.
- Do everything you feel you want to do. Be guided by what your child responds well to.
- Meet with other parents of deaf children and learn what things they are doing and enjoying.
- There's no right or wrong as long as you're spending as much time loving and being with your child as possible.
- Get your partner, your other children and your relatives to spend lots of time with your baby as well.