

Hearing Loss

Spotlight on: Toddlers



COMMUNICATION
ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Better Hearing & Speech Month

Some toddlers may have been born with hearing loss that has never been identified. Others may have acquired hearing loss later from ear infections, head injury, illness (such as chicken pox or flu), or other causes. Regardless of the reason, it is important to address hearing loss as soon as it is identified in toddlers—as this is a period of rapid language, speech, and brain development.

Impact on Development: Hearing is critical to language, speech, and cognitive development and can impact communication and learning. Areas of development that hearing loss may affect if early intervention does not occur can include:

- **Vocabulary**—Children with hearing loss may acquire words more slowly and may have trouble understanding abstract words and words with multiple meanings.
- **Sentence Structure**—Children may use shorter and simpler sentences than children without hearing loss and misunderstand/misuse verb tenses, noun pluralization, and possessives.
- **Sound production**—Children with hearing loss often cannot hear quiet speech sounds such as “s,” “sh,” “f,” “t,” and “k” and therefore may omit them when talking. This can make their speech more difficult to understand.

Ear Infections Aplenty: Ear infections may be a regular part of life for many toddlers—especially in children under 2. Sometimes children have fluid in their middle ear without an actual infection. When fluid is present for a long period of time, this can pose a risk to a child’s hearing. Some children will have no change in their hearing, while others may have short-term hearing loss that goes away once the fluid is gone. **However, when ear infections occur over and over again, permanent damage can occur—making timely treatment of ear infections critical.**

An added challenge: Cases of fluid in the middle ear without an infection pose a special problem because the usual ear infection symptoms of pain and fever often aren’t present. Weeks or months can go by before parents suspect a problem. During this time, the child may miss out on hearing speech and language that promotes their communication development.

Early Intervention Counts! The earlier that hearing loss is identified and intervention begins, the greater the chances are that children will develop language and other developmental milestones as expected. Intervention may include hearing amplification, such as hearing aids and cochlear implants (children can receive hearing aids at 4 weeks and cochlear implants at 12 months), signed language (such as American Sign Language), and other communication methods. **Receiving early intervention in a timely manner will enable toddlers to enter school ready to succeed.**



Audiologists can help!

Learn more at www.asha.org/public.



ASHA

American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association