Early Intervention for Children Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing: Knowing Your Options as a Parent

Early intervention is key in preventing hearing loss from having a major impact on a child's development. Parents should know that early intervention for children who are deaf and hard-of-hearing is not one-size-fits-all—and the type of services a child receives depends on both the individual needs of the child and the wishes of the family.

The communication approaches parents decide to use with their deaf or hard-of-hearing child help guide their early intervention services. Communication methods may include:

- **Listening and spoken language (also referred to as auditory-verbal):** In this approach, an infant or young child is fitted with hearing instruments such as a hearing aid or cochlear implant. The focus is on developing spoken language through listening and talking in the home and school, and among peers. This approach does not encourage speechreading or other visual supports.

- **Auditory-oral:** This approach trains children fitted with hearing assistive technology to use their hearing abilities to communicate using spoken language. Signs are not used in an auditory-oral approach; however, speechreading and natural gestures that are used in typical conversation may be used.

- **Cued speech or cued language:** This visual communication system uses handshapes in different locations around the mouth to make speech sounds look different from each other and help a child who is deaf or hard of hearing with speechreading. It is not a language itself, but a system that can support listening and spoken language.

- **Sign Language (e.g., American Sign Language [ASL]):** An infant or young child develops language through vision, which leads to use of a manually signed language in the home and school, and among peers. Signed languages have their own grammatical structures that are different from those of spoken languages. Experts in sign language can work with children and their families to learn ASL.

- **English-based signing approaches:** These approaches use signs to represent the English language in a manual/visual form, but they are not true languages. They may also be used with speech to support and clarify spoken English.

- **Bilingual bimodal:** This approach encourages the acquisition and use of both signed and spoken languages, developing each as a separate language. This approach may be used to support reading and writing a spoken language as well.

Whatever the approach, it is important that children are exposed to as much language as possible from birth—and that families have early access to professionals with specialized education and training in the desired language or communication method. Learn more at www.asha.org/public.