

Module 1: Early Identification: Newborn Infant Hearing Screening and Evaluation; The Importance of Ensuring Early Access to Language

Section: Communication and Language Milestones



Activity 1.8: Guiding Families in Becoming Aware of the Critical Role of Early Interactions in Communication and Language Development

A. Define *language* and *communication*:

- Language—A rule-governed set of arbitrary symbols that is socially shared among people within a culture or community (e.g., American Sign Language [ASL], English, Spanish). Using language, an individual can express complex ideas and feelings.
- Communication—Expressing and receiving information through any means possible (e.g., crying, laughing, facial expressions, gestures).

B. Discuss the following concepts related to language and communication:

- Language and communication are different, yet intertwined.
- Communication is not language.
- Language enables communication.

C. Discuss the importance of language being “accessible” to a child to learn that language. Include such concepts as:

- exploring with the family what makes language accessible to a child and what to consider in making language accessible for a child who cannot effectively hear that language to learn it;
 - the importance of exposing a deaf or hard of hearing child to visual language, as it is unknown if the child will be able to access and learn through spoken language;
 - the possibility of language delay if a child does not have accessible language and the importance of families learning how to provide accessible language to their child to avoid that delay;
 - how it is unknown if a child will have the potential to develop language milestones through listening (even with hearing aids and cochlear implants), but that it is known that the child can access language visually if he or she does not have any vision limitations; and
 - the critical window of opportunity when language develops between birth and 5 years of age and the associated importance of timely language acquisition.
- D. Review the similarities and differences between language development for deaf and hearing babies. Discuss the following concepts:
- All children (deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing) may demonstrate the ability to communicate and express themselves manually prior to vocally.
 - There are similar developmental milestones for both ASL and spoken language, and it is important to learn about and facilitate those milestones.
 - For spoken language milestones, it is important for families to understand their child's ability to access spoken language through his or her hearing aid or cochlear implant. Each deaf or hard of hearing child is different.
- E. Discuss considerations and strategies for hearing families related to learning American Sign Language, including:
- the benefit of looking to strategies used by deaf parents in facilitating the language acquisition of their deaf children as well as the importance of keeping expectations high. Mention documented evidence that children of deaf parents often have strong reading and writing skills because of strong early language foundations.

- evidence which supports that hearing parents can learn sign language to communicate effectively with their children, become language models, and avoid language delays in their child.
- the benefits of hearing parents enhancing their learning of ASL by interacting with native language models. Identify supports for families to meet members of the Deaf community, become involved in deaf mentor programs, and/or learn about other activities during which hearing families can meet deaf adults and children using ASL.

For an annotated list of evidence on this topic, see: [Early Intervention Network: Supporting Linguistic Competence for Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing](#).

F. For families of a child with identified disabilities, discuss the following:

- strategies and expectations to facilitate language and communication specific to the child's disability, and
- additional supports to enhance language and communication development, if warranted, such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), an augmentative communication system.

G. For families speaking a language other than English:

- Identify materials in other languages about language and communication milestones. If that is not possible, request a translator to transcribe the materials into the appropriate language for the families to use.
- Check out the Spanish version of [Setting Language in Motion](#) to use with families

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