Module 3: Hearing Aids: The Basics

Section: Hearing Aid Basics

Activity 3.1: Providing Families with an Overview of What a Hearing Aid Is, the Features of a Hearing Aid, and Possible Benefits from a Hearing Aid

A. Guide families in understanding basic concepts about the benefits of a hearing aid:

- Some children benefit more from hearing aids than others. Every child is different.
- Hearing aids are not like glasses in how they correct vision. Use of a hearing aid does not ensure hearing abilities similar to a child with typical hearing.
- Hearing aids may provide the ability to be aware of sounds, but they do not guarantee that a child will understand the sounds that he or she can hear.
- A child's hearing level with a hearing aid will impact his or her ability level to understand spoken language.
- A hearing aid must be specifically fitted to meet the audiological characteristics of each child.
- If a hearing aid is not used consistently, it will negatively affect spoken language development as the child will not have continual auditory access.

B. Guide families in understanding the various types of hearing aids available:

- The type of hearing aid typically recommended for babies and young children is a behind the ear (BTE) hearing aid. They come in different colors and sizes.

- There are some hearing aids that are not recommended for babies and young children. They are *in the ear*, *in the canal*, and *micro* hearing aids. These types of hearing aids become a safety issue due to their small size. In addition, these aids may lack flexibility in the available controls and settings required for a young child.

- Another type of hearing aid is a bone conduction hearing aid. This type of hearing aid is intended for children with atypical outer and middle ear structures but intact inner ear structures. The bone conduction hearing aid allows transmission of sounds to bypass the outer/middle ear. It is often attached to a headband. As a child matures, he or she may become a candidate for a bone-anchored hearing device. For more information about these devices, see:

  - Baha System (Cochlear)
  - How bone conduction hearing systems work (Oticon)
  - Bonebridge-bone conduction implant (MedEl)

C. Review the various parts of a hearing aid as described in the *Parts of a Hearing Aid* handout from Module 3

- Reinforce special features (e.g., battery door lock, volume control lock, FM accessibility).

- The battery door lock is important because it secures the hearing aid battery so the child cannot remove, lose, or swallow it.

- The volume control lock ensures the hearing aid is providing the right amount of amplification at all times.

- FM accessibility is either built in or is attached to a hearing aid to support connectivity to assistive listening devices to assist with listening in noisy environments.

D. Guide families in understanding what is important to know about earmolds:

- Earmolds anchor hearing aids to a child's ear.
- The earmold is instrumental in directing sound through the ear canal to the hearing mechanism. To attach the ear mold to the hearing aid, there is a special tubing that is connected to the tip of the hearing aid.
- Earmolds must be replaced regularly to maintain a tight fit as a child grows. When the earmold does not fit appropriately, sound leaks from the hearing aid and you will hear a whistling sound called "feedback." Earmolds need to be remade regularly to keep up with the growth of a child's ears. This may be every month or two for infants and every three to six months for toddlers.

E. Provide families with hands-on experiences to become comfortable with a hearing aid:

- Give the families the opportunity to touch/manage a hearing aid (either their child's or a model hearing aid if their child has not yet received his or her hearing aids).
- Provide the opportunity to open and close the locks, adjust the volume, and make sure the FM accessibility is on. Have them listen through a hearing aid with a stethoset. Try listening in various listening environments (e.g., different rooms in the house with loud music, TV blaring, tea kettle whistling).
- Have family members try on their child's earmold to get a feel for how their child feels when the mold is in and what feedback may sound like.

F. Discuss considerations related to the process of obtaining a hearing aid:

- Is the child eligible for any support in covering the cost of a hearing aid? If not, how will the family address handling the purchase of a hearing aid(s).
- Is there a hearing aid loaner bank available to the child/family to obtain loaner hearing aids until the family can arrange for purchase?
- Is the child's audiologist working with the family in obtaining a hearing aid(s), or can you be of assistance in navigating the process?

G. Discuss how a hearing aid is limited in its ability to amplify sound at a distance and in background:

- Discuss the possible benefits of a personal FM system, which provides sound at a constant hearing level to the child in challenging listening conditions.
- Click here for a simulation of what it sounds like to listen through an FM system.

- Have the family contact their audiologist to learn more about FM systems and whether an FM system is recommended for their child.

H. Considerations for families of a child with identified disabilities:

- How may a child's disability impact his or her benefit from a hearing aid(s)?

- Could a hearing aid possibly have a negative impact on some children with additional disabilities (e.g., having noise trigger or set off negative behaviors, having the aid physically bother the child). If so, please encourage the family to contact their child's audiologist to discuss this as soon as any such behaviors are noted.

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