



## Developing New Routines

Developing new routines can be hard, even when it is something you think is important and want to do.

For example, maybe you wanted to start a new exercise routine, or had a plan to begin eating more healthy foods, but then had trouble being consistent. When this happens, you can feel frustrated or guilty, and yet it can still be hard to add this new routine to your life.

To help your child learn how to listen and talk you need to fit new routines into your daily life. You need to make sure the hearing aids are working every day by doing a listening check; you need to put the hearing aids on your child each morning, have your child wear the hearing aids during all waking hours with a goal of 10 or more hours per day, and you need to use language strategies during the day when you are talking with your child. For example, using self-talk and parallel talk to narrate what is happening as you interact with your child.

This can be a lot to remember. It can also feel overwhelming and even awkward as you gain confidence in fitting these new elements into the rhythm of your daily life. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to set yourself up for success in developing these new routines.

The first step is to identify your underlying values or purpose. The new routine you develop should be linked to these values in some way. Where do you want to be? What is your ultimate aim? What is important or meaningful to you? Think about the things you care about that are relevant to your child's communication.

Being clear about the driving forces behind your desire to change your behaviors to include new routines, can help to orient you in times of confusion or stress. For example, when you find yourself frustrated with your child's tantrums, the value of helping her learn to communicate can serve as an anchor as you navigate stressful situations.

Next, take a moment to assess your current situation. It is helpful to have a solid understanding of your circumstances before brainstorming solutions. So, ask yourself, what existing habits do you want to change, what would you like to be different, or what behavior is causing issues in the home. Is it forgetting to put the hearing aids on your child? Is it your child removing the hearing aids? Is it remembering to use listening and language strategies throughout the day?

Identify the specific behavior or behaviors you would like to work on. This will help you focus on the routines that need your attention. For example, maybe you want to work on reading to



your child at least 20 minutes per day, or maybe you want to increase the number of hours your child wears his hearing aids.

Paying attention to situational factors that are interfering with routines you are trying to develop, can provide some insight into how to change behaviors that are getting in the way of your new routine. In particular, pay attention to which events come before the problem behavior, what triggers the behavior, and what happens after the problem behavior.

Various factors can interfere with developing new routines, such as being distracted, feeling overwhelmed, and being busy. For example, you may forget to check how the hearing aids are functioning in the morning because you are busy getting everyone ready for the day. Or, your child keeps removing his hearing aids and you stop putting them on him. Or in the course of the day you forget to use language strategies that help your child learn to listen. Noticing these environmental factors can be useful for problem solving as you encounter these barriers.

Once you have a sense of the problem you are dealing with, you can set goals for yourself and your family. When we set impressive goals, but they are difficult to achieve, the barriers to action increase and that makes it less likely that we will follow through and make progress.

Following the guidelines of SMART goals can increase our chances of success. SMART goals are: 1) specific; 2) measurable, 3) achievable, 4) relevant, and 5) time-bound.

Specific means the goal is concrete. Rather than aiming to make sure the hearing aids are working; a specific goal would be to check the hearing aid function before breakfast three out of seven mornings.

Measurable means that there is a way to track progress. That is, you should have some method that indicates whether you are getting better at your goal. Based on the previous example, you can increase your success rate from three to six mornings a week, and the improvement is quantifiable.

Achievable refers to setting realistic goals. Although it is tempting to start with a big, inspiring project, success is typically fostered by starting with smaller goals that are linked to the ultimate goal. Another aspect to consider is that the goal should be achievable by you. If your ability to meet your goal depends on someone else, it takes away your autonomy and power to effect change. For instance, if doing daily hearing device checks is the ultimate goal, and currently you only check function once a week, then starting with a more achievable goal of three mornings a week will improve chances of initial success and maintenance of progress.

Relevant means that goals should be personally meaningful. If accomplishing the goal is not important to you, then it is hard to be motivated to work on changing behavior. Sometimes, the personal relevance is not immediately obvious, so take a few minutes to ask yourself, "Why



does this goal matter to me? How would accomplishing this goal help me or my child?” When we connect with the purpose or value of a difficult task, it increases the likelihood that we will follow through on set goals.

The final criterion is time-bound, which stresses the utility of deadlines. For each goal you set, pick a realistic timeframe in which you can accomplish the goal and hold yourself accountable or ask someone to check in with you when the deadline rolls around.

Once you have outlined your goals, identify barriers or things that might make achieving these goals difficult for you. Be honest with yourself as you go through this process.

Is it forgetfulness? Is it fear of hurting your child? Is it discomfort related to the stigma of hearing loss? Is it a busy schedule? Spend some time identifying factors that are getting in the way.

Now that you have clarified what behaviors you want to work on, the direction you want to move toward, that is, your values and goals, and the obstacles standing in your way, you can start to do some problem solving to devise the easiest way to tackle those obstacles. Two main ways to do so are changing what happens before the behavior, these are called antecedents, and changing what happens immediately after the behavior, these are called consequences. This is where the knowledge you have gained from observing and considering your challenges will be handy.

If being distracted increases your chances of forgetting, something as simple as scheduling a reminder on your phone could be a way to set yourself up for better remembering.

Change consequences by rewarding helpful behaviors. For instance, praise your partner for checking hearing aid function in the morning. Creating a reward system for accomplishing goals can create some incentive. As a caveat, although a reward system may be a useful way to initiate a new routine, ultimately, linking new behaviors with your values will be most sustainable in the long-term.

Another possible barrier is our own emotions, typically in the form of discomfort. It may be uncomfortable to put hearing aids on your child because it makes her look different from her peers, which leads to concerns about her being treated differently. Getting entangled with these worries takes us away from our valued path – the one that prioritizes what is important (for example, helping your child hear better and develop language skills), rather than what is most comfortable. Rather than being pushed around by these thoughts and feelings, practice noticing when they show up, seeing them for what they are - worries rather than reality, and moving in the direction of your values in spite of them. It can be hard to experience discomfort, especially when it concerns your child. This is where your values become most relevant.



Ask yourself why are you choosing to work on this goal and what the purpose of your effort is. If you find that the goals you have set are too difficult, even after immense effort, it could be that they are. It is OK to reformulate your goals and make them more achievable. In the area of developing new routines and habits, making slow and steady progress is more important than starting with a fast pace that you cannot maintain.

There are four daily routines you need to pay attention to. First make sure the hearing aids are functioning appropriately every morning. Second, put the hearing aids on your child when they get up. Third, make sure your child is wearing their hearing aids when they are awake, and fourth, use language strategies throughout the day when you are talking with your child.

There are four routines you need to do at least weekly. First check the physical condition of your child's hearing aids and earmolds. Second, check the fit of the earmold in your child's ear, they should fit snugly. Third, clean your child's hearing aids and earmolds to make sure sound is not blocked. Fourth, use a dry-aid kit to help remove moisture from the hearing aids. If you live in a humid climate you may want to do this daily.

Talk to your audiologist about any challenges you are experiencing, your questions and your concerns. Ask about new goals as your child develops. It may also be helpful to know how you can meet other parents of children who have hearing loss and how to teach your child to advocate for their hearing needs.