

eHealth

For children to learn how to listen and talk they need to be able to hear the sounds around them and to do this they need help from their parents. Parents need to make sure their hearing aids are working every day and they need to put them on their child. This can be challenging as parents are often unfamiliar with hearing aids and it is common for them to struggle with the day-to-day demands, and this can interfere with their child's access to sound.

Professionals can help parents overcome challenges, and together they can make sure children are hearing the sounds around them. Learning new habits is a process and opportunities for parents to access education and support from home can help. Remote education and support can be flexible, and visits can be more frequent to help parents learn how to integrate new routines into their daily lives.

Getting Started with Hearing Aids is a six-week program designed to help parents and professionals work together to address hearing aid management challenges so that children have consistent access to sound.

Our research has shown that parents who received this program in addition to their typical services had more knowledge,

and confidence about hearing aid management,

and had better routines to check the function of their child's hearing aids, than parents that received only typical hearing aid services.

The program includes a series of video tutorials to support foundational knowledge and skill learning, and weekly phone calls to coach and support parents as they develop routines and learn how to overcome barriers. The videos can be watched as often as needed and can be shared with other caregivers.

The coaching phone calls take 10 to 15 minutes and provide an opportunity to guide parents in identifying and addressing their challenges based on what they want to work on so that they can effectively manage their child's hearing aids. During the calls, the clinician can also ask the parent about the videos they watched that week and address their questions. During the final week it is helpful to explore any challenges they anticipate to determine if additional support is needed.

During the coaching phone calls ask open-ended questions. Open ended questions engage the parent in the process and help the clinician to have a better understanding of what the parent is experiencing. For example, ask the parent to tell you about how they are coming along.

“Sure, so I was paying more attention last week to how things were going wearing her hearing aids and I noticed that as our morning got started in getting the kids ready for school and having their breakfast and getting them dressed and off on the bus, it wasn’t until that I was putting her down for her nap that I realized that she did not have her hearing aids on for the whole morning.”

Open-ended questions also help the clinician understand the challenge the parent is experiencing.

“So, we have a dog in the house, and you warned us to make sure that the hearing aids were not around the dog so that he did not damage them and so we have tried to put them in a spot on the shelves so it is a little higher up so it is not going to be in the dog’s way and I think I am just not seeing them.”

“Well, I felt really frustrated. I really wanted her to wear her hearing aids and wanted that to happen, and I felt really guilty because it wasn’t until I was putting her down for her nap that I realized that we hadn’t done that.”

Parents often express emotions about what they are going through with their child’s diagnosis and with managing the hearing aids. Responding to emotions parents express helps them feel heard and understood. Talking about how the parent is feeling reduces the power of the emotion and this helps the parent focus on overcoming the challenge.

Help parents develop an action plan to address their challenge. SMART goals can help parents break down problem-solving into manageable steps.

The goal should be specific. In this example, the mother is having trouble remembering to put the hearing aids on in the morning, so she is setting a goal to help her see the hearing aids first thing in the morning so that she remembers to put them on her child.

“Thinking about our routine and one of the first things that I do when she wakes up is change her diaper. So, I thought about putting at the changing table. That’s one of the ideas I have come up with.”

The goal should be measurable and something the parent feels they can do. This includes exploring with the parent any challenges they think could get in the way of their ability to do the plan.

“Well, the only thing that might make it more challenging or be a challenge to it is that in our evening routine my husband is helping me put the kids down for bed and sometimes we trade who does what for the kids, and so sometimes he is putting the baby down at night so, he might put the hearing aids somewhere other than the changing table. So, may be having him put them in the same place I would put them would be helpful so that the next time I get her up to



change her, I know where they are at. I think he'd be very open to placing them in a different location just so that we can both know where they are at and are safe from the dog."

It is important for the goal and the plan to be relevant to the parent. It needs to be something they want to work on and a problem that is a priority that they want to address.

The plan should include a specific timeframe for the parent to try the new steps and then have a pre-determined time to talk about how it went.

"I can talk to him tonight after work, let him know we are going to put them in a new place, so that we both know where they are at, and we can have a better idea of remembering when to put them in."

"So, it sounds like we've created a goal for you over the next week to find a different spot, the changing table, to put the hearing aids and then hopefully that will help make the hearing aids more part of the routine and catch your attention more in the mornings when there is so much going on, and then also have your husband informed about this change in plan and see if he can help out too. Does that sound right? Great! So, would it be ok if next week during our call time if I checked in on this goal and then we can talk about it, if it was successful, if there needs to be some more changes and things like that just to see how we are doing? Ok, perfect!"

It is helpful to send parents a reminder email or text before your scheduled call. Include the date

and time of the call,

and a link to the videos the parents are assigned to watch before the call.

The Getting Started with Hearing Aids program can provide parents and clinicians a structure for supporting success with hearing aid management. This partnership is a critical link to helping children hear the sounds around them as they learn to listen and talk.