Progressive Hearing Loss

Read this page if your child has a hearing loss that seems to be getting worse. He may have a progressive hearing loss.

What is progressive hearing loss?
A **progressive hearing loss** (pro-GRE-siv) is a hearing loss that gets worse over time. The change in hearing can happen over a few weeks, months, or even years. It can start as a mild loss and later become a moderate or severe hearing loss.

Or a child can have normal hearing as an infant and begin lose her hearing when she is 2 or 3 years old. This is called **delayed onset hearing loss**. Delayed onset hearing loss can happen when a child is born with a virus that no one finds out about until later. Other problems at birth can also caused a delayed onset hearing loss.

*Everyone was so upset when they found out*

> Relatives and teachers were also noticeably alarmed or overly concerned. That's when I realized, 'Uh-oh, something's wrong with me. The way people are reacting to it, it must be really bad.' I was ashamed of what was happening to me."

— Mark

Want to read more of Mark's story? Click here (http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/meet/deaf/mark.jsp).
Causes of progressive hearing loss
There is more than 1 cause. But you may not know what it is.

- **Genetic**
  Most progressive hearing losses are inherited. This means it was passed down through the family. Doctors know about some genes that might cause progressive hearing loss. But they are still looking for other genes. Read more about genetics ([http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/genetics/](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/genetics/)).

- **Illness**
  Hearing losses that happen because of diseases like meningitis are more likely to get worse over time.

- **Hearing loss from medicine**
  Some medicines used when a child is very sick can cause a hearing loss. Or they can cause a child with hearing loss to lose more hearing. The hearing loss can keep getting worse even after the child stops taking the medicine.

- **Hearing loss from loud noises**
  In adults, loud noises can cause progressive hearing loss. This kind of hearing loss is usually very slow. Loud noise does not usually cause progressive hearing loss in children.

- **Middle Ear Problems**
  If there is a middle ear infection, the hearing loss may get worse for a short time, but then get better (see fluctuating hearing loss). A leak of fluid from the inner ear to the middle ear can also cause progressive hearing loss. But this is rare.

How can I tell if my child has a progressive hearing loss?

1) Try to find out the cause of your child's hearing loss.

This helps because some kinds of hearing loss are more likely to get worse. Children who have unilateral hearing loss ([http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/types/unilateral.jsp](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/types/unilateral.jsp)) may be more likely to have progressive hearing loss. Some genetic problems cause progressive hearing loss.

2) Watch your child.

Once you know how much your child hears, you may be able to tell if she isn't hearing as well. Here are some signs that her hearing is changing:

- She seems to be saying "what?" a lot more.
- She doesn't seem to hear the dog barking anymore.
- She turns up the volume of the television.
- She suddenly doesn't want to wear her hearing aids. But before, she didn't seem to mind.
- She seems dizzy or has trouble keeping her balance. Sometimes children who are losing their hearing get dizzy.
- She may start to have problems in school because she isn't hearing as well as she was.
3) Take your child to an audiologist for a hearing test if you think there may be a change in hearing.

4) Call your doctor if there is a sudden change in hearing.

Some problems must be treated right away. Sometimes a doctor will ask you to go to the emergency room if he or she can't see you in the office right away. Losing your hearing suddenly is called sudden hearing loss (http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/glossary/?id=223).

Get help if your child has a progressive hearing loss
A progressive hearing loss can be confusing and scary. If your child's hearing loss is changing slowly, she may not even notice but may start to have more problems in school or with friends.

- Talk to your child about her fears. She may not want to accept that she is losing her hearing. Older children and teens can get depressed when they learn they are losing their hearing. A therapist may help your child talk about how she feels.
- Make sure her hearing aids are strong enough. You may have to get new hearing aids as her hearing loss changes.
- Keep track of how things are going in school. She may need new help at school. You may need to change her IEP (http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/learning/rights/iep.jsp).
- Some children lose so much of their hearing that they become candidates for a cochlear implant (http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/help/tech/ci/). Talk to your audiologist about it.
- If your child has a progressive hearing loss, it can be hard on the rest of the family too. You may feel just as scared and confused as your child. Talking to other parents may help. Or you may want to talk to a therapist about how you feel.

Read the answers to some common questions about progressive hearing loss on our FAQ page (http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/types/progressive/faq.jsp).

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You can find this page online at:
http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/types/progressive/