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Unilateral Hearing Loss

If you think your child is having trouble hearing, take him to an audiologist to get his hearing tested. It may be a unilateral hearing loss. Then get help early. With early help, your child will succeed.

What is unilateral hearing loss?

Unilateral (yoo-nih-LAT-er-al) hearing loss affects only 1 ear. People with unilateral hearing loss can hear normally in 1 ear, but have trouble hearing out of the other ear. The amount of hearing loss is different for different people. It can be mild, moderate, severe, or profound.

What causes unilateral hearing loss

There is more than 1 possible cause.

Some children are born with a unilateral hearing loss. For them, the hearing loss is passed down in the family, or **genetic**. Or it might be because of problems with the pregnancy or when the child was born.

Some people get a unilateral hearing loss later on in life. The cause is usually an illness (like [meningitis](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/glossary/?id=150) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/glossary/?id=150>) or mumps) or a bad ear infection. It could also be caused by loud noise, like loud music or jackhammers.

Signs of unilateral hearing loss

People with unilateral hearing loss can hear well in most situations. This is because 1 ear is normal. But sometimes there are problems. If your child has unilateral hearing loss, he might have trouble:

- Figuring out where sounds are coming from. This is called **localization**.
- Understanding what people say when there is other noise at the same time. Like other people talking, buzzing from lights, or TV or music.
 - This is worse when the "good ear" is close to the other noise
- Paying attention in class
- Following directions in class
- Learning new things

If your child has trouble with some of these things, he might have a unilateral hearing loss. Take him to an [audiologist](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/glossary/?id=19) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/glossary/?id=19>) as soon as possible for a hearing test. Also, take him to an [otolaryngologist](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/glossary/?id=169) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/glossary/?id=169>).

How to help your child

If your child has unilateral hearing loss, the good news is that there are simple things you can do to help him.

Hearing aids

(<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/help/tech/hearingaids/>)

Sometimes a hearing aid worn on the ear with hearing loss can help. It depends on the amount and kind of hearing loss. Ask your child's audiologist about a hearing aid. The audiologist will figure out if it would help your child.

FM system

(<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/help/tech/ald/#fm>)

An FM system can help your child hear better in noisy places, like the classroom or a restaurant. A child might wear a hearing aid and use an FM system, too.

In the classroom

Most children with unilateral hearing loss do very well in school. But they might need extra help. Get your child the help he needs as soon as possible. That way, he will not fall behind in school. Children with unilateral hearing loss that do not get help sometimes fall behind or even fail a grade. But children that do get help can succeed in school as much as hearing children. Here are some simple things you can do to help your child do well in school:

- **Make sure his teachers know about the hearing loss.**
 - Your child's teachers should let him sit wherever he can hear the best.
 - Have your child sit no more than 5 or 6 feet away.
 - Ask the teacher to make sure your child's "good ear" is close to the teacher. This will help him hear the lessons and directions.
- **Have your child sit as far as possible from noisy places.**
Like the hall, the playground and the street.
- **Have your child sit away from things like air conditioners, pencil sharpeners, and heaters.**
Quiet noises might bother your child, even if they wouldn't bother someone with normal hearing. This could make it harder for your child to learn.
- **Ask the school to get rid of things that stop sound from traveling well in the classroom.**
Like tennis balls under desks, or carpeting on the floor.
- **Ask the teachers to teach your child with things he can see.**
Your child may learn better that way.
 - Teachers can write key vocabulary words on the blackboard.
 - Teachers can also use things like overhead projectors and videos to help your child learn better.
- **Ask the teachers to make sure that your child understands the lessons and directions before moving on to something else.**

- **Ask the teacher for lessons before class.**
Sometimes your child can read ahead in the lesson book. That way, he will understand more when the teacher talks about the lesson in class.

Outside the classroom

- **Teach your child to be extra-careful in dangerous situations.**
He might have trouble figuring out where sounds are coming from.
 - Teach him to look carefully both ways before crossing the street.
 - Put rear-view mirrors on his bike. Teach him to look out for cars driving behind him.
- **Protect your child's "good ear."**
 - Use earplugs to protect your child's hearing from very loud noises (like lawnmowers, power tools, and loud music).
 - Take your child to the doctor to have his hearing tested often. The doctor will tell you how often to do this.
 - Ear infections can hurt your child's hearing. If your child gets an ear infection, take him to the doctor right away. The doctor can give your child medicine to treat the ear infection before it hurts his hearing.

Learn more about unilateral hearing loss

- Read the Boys Town National Research Hospital's [information on unilateral hearing loss](http://www.boystownhospital.org/parents/info/unilateral.asp) (<http://www.boystownhospital.org/parents/info/unilateral.asp>).
- Read about [how to help school-age children with unilateral hearing loss](http://www.unl.edu/secd/pedaud/library/manage_guidelines.html) (http://www.unl.edu/secd/pedaud/library/manage_guidelines.html).

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You can find this page online at:

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/hearingloss/types/unilateral.jsp>