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Meet Debbie

Debbie is 5 years old. She has been hard of hearing since she was born. She did [auditory verbal therapy](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/communicating/choices/av.jsp) when she was very young and now goes to kindergarten at her neighborhood school.

Finding out Debbie is hard of hearing

Our 5-year-old daughter Debbie is hard of hearing. We first found out Debbie was hard of hearing when she was 2. She was diagnosed with severe flat loss. The ENT made ear mold impressions the same day she was diagnosed, and she was fitted with a hearing aid in about 2 weeks.

Making a decision about how to communicate

We were grateful that we had no time to make decisions, and felt, you know, empowered by action. At first, The Auditory Verbal Center and library books were our main sources of information.

We weighed all our options and went to each of the schools for children with hearing loss in the city area. We decided that since Debbie has some hearing we were going to at least try to give her the chance of speaking. For us, it was an easy decision to use an [auditory verbal](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/communicating/choices/av.jsp) (oral) approach. The choices that were available weren't choices; they just didn't fit for our goals and Debbie's needs and capabilities.

Who helped us

We were living in a new city with few close friends and no family nearby. We decided to move closer to a supportive network.

We had a supportive and unbiased audiologist, otolaryngologist (ENT), and Early Intervention (EI) provider, which really helped in the decision-making process. Because I know for many people, it sounds like their ENT says, "Oh, this is what you should be doing for your child," and they are not given choices. At that point, you're just desperate for information. You're clueless.

I think that's what parents need: first they need to be given the options, then they need to be shown it in actuality. For example, if we could be shown what to expect and what not to expect the first year and at different ages. Like, if they go AV (auditory verbal), they could be in kindergarten speaking. And if they go total, they'll be in a total communication school. They may not be able to communicate with our relatives and may not be able to communicate with anyone but me and the children in her school.

Getting ready for kindergarten

Debbie just started kindergarten in a public school. We met with the speech therapist before she started school, and her teacher was inserviced regarding Debbie's special needs, so it was a smooth transition. There are 19 students in the class, so it's a small class with 1 teacher.

Debbie's teacher put a big sign language poster on display and when the class is working on the alphabet, she teaches them the sign language, even though Debbie herself does not use signs. Class is during the morning, and then Debbie is bused to an enrichment program after school. She uses an FM microphone in class that she's very comfortable with. We paid for the FM system. Debbie also uses an adjustable, programmable aid.

Working with teachers and others at school

She's very athletic and loves to be outside, and she loves gymnastics. She wears her hearing aid when she plays, although she has trouble with whistles from far off. I made up a "fact sheet" that I gave to the teachers and coaches to help them with Debbie's hearing. It started off with, "These are just a couple of things that will make listening and hearing less frustrated for Debbie..." We try to put everything in writing.

Getting special services

Debbie's [Individual Education Plan \(IEP\)](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/learning/rights/iep.jsp) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/learning/rights/iep.jsp>), written by her teachers and school specialists, says she is intelligible and has "age-appropriate articulation." Debbie receives speech therapy as needed and hearing therapy 45 minutes twice a week.

At first, it was a battle with the insurance company to have her speech therapy covered. The claims people couldn't understand how speech therapy could help someone with hearing loss. The auditory verbal therapy costs \$80 a session, and Debbie goes twice a week. After negotiating with my employer, the insurance company agreed to cover 80% of costs. Insurance was a key factor when we started looking for new jobs.

How Debbie feels about school

Debbie seems to love school, especially the bus. She's very tolerant with noise. We told the bus driver ahead of time about her hearing aid, because I didn't want her to get in trouble for not hearing in case she doesn't respond right away when she's being spoken to. On her first day of school, I was waiting with her for the bus and when it pulled up, she asked me, "Is that my bus?" When I said it was, she eagerly climbed on. She never even looked back...

It helps if she's ready for noise, like if the teacher prepares her for a fire drill, so she can set herself up. We try to ask specific questions about school...you know, I can't say "How's your day?" or anything. I think that's probably with most kids. If I pick something specific, then she'll talk about it.

Making friends

We are friends with other couples of children with hearing loss, but we choose not to go to support groups as much, because our experience with them has been unproductive (too much whining). At first, we admit, we weren't able to deal with anyone else's problems but our own, but now we are frequently referred to new parents of children with hearing loss struggling with the same decisions we had to make.

Debbie has a few friends. Sometimes she has trouble joining groups when they're doing activities, or starting conversations at school, although everyone understands her speech. I think it's because she can't hear everything that's going on, so that makes it harder to just jump in. Overall, she's a pretty social kid.

Problems with communication

Debbie becomes frustrated with communication only when she is tired. She does have trouble with following songs, but that's to be expected. Music classes and reading were very helpful for us. Debbie also has some difficulties with verb tenses and with sounds, like "ph" and "f", which may be developmental. She often says, "Spell this for me so I can write it down." Once she can say it right once, she usually says it right the second time.

Already, it seems like Debbie can decide whether she wants to listen or not. It's hard to tell if she's not hearing you or if she's not listening. It's very important to get her attention first before telling her to do something. Sometimes we use visual cues or talk louder, but usually we just treat her as a regular kid.

What we want for Debbie

We do desire normalcy for her. Although Debbie is deaf, she isn't "deaf" in the cultural sense of the word. We see her ability to communicate with others as more important than the ability to function in the mainstream, but we want both for her. Even though ASL is a beautiful language, we feel that not enough people know it, and we worry about her not being able to communicate in a strange place if ASL is her only form of communication.

We do worry about whether she will have difficulty finding a job once she's older and in college. We wonder whether being hearing impaired will be an issue. We do think some employers might feel it's definitely a point against her, but we also feel it is important for Debbie not to use her handicap as an excuse in the future. We refuse to consider her handicapped. We want her to be able to just do her thing and keep going.

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You can find this page online at:

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/meet/families/debbie.jsp>