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## Parents Talk about Mainstreaming

**Read this page to find out what other parents say about sending their children to mainstream schools.**

Click on the links to read the story below. Then, [tell us your story](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/contact.jsp) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/contact.jsp>). And come back soon. We'll be adding more quotes from parents!

Some names have been changed for privacy.

### **Is your child ready for the mainstream?**

#### **How does your child handle problems?**

"[Being ready for a mainstream school] may come down to personality. Whether a kid is ever totally "ready" as far as skills I rather doubt. But are they the sort of kid who regards setbacks as challenges?"

— Lorna



### **Following your child's lead**

#### **He wants to stay in public school.**

"Sometimes I think we should force him to attend (at least try) other options now that he is hard of hearing enough to qualify for [deaf schools]. But we're letting him lead us. If the public school becomes too much, we may step in more forcefully. For now, we're doing it his way and making sure he has the services he needs in the public school."

— Jill

#### **We weren't afraid to try different things.**

"For the first 5 years of our older deaf son's education, we flip-flopped him between the Cued Speech classroom and the Total Communication classroom. Then, as he progressed, we decided on a setting that would best help him achieve the next set of our goals for him."

— Evelyn

**She did well because she WANTED to be mainstreamed.**

"The biggest factor, by far, for her success was her own determination to stay in [the mainstream] setting. That developed within the first 2 weeks."

— Lorna

**We followed his lead.**

"When we placed our son in the mainstream setting in Oklahoma, it was because he was not learning anything in the deaf ed classroom. He was coming home telling us that deaf kids are boring, and could he please go to school with hearing kids who had things to talk about."

— Evelyn

**Is your child's school ready for him?**

**His school needed to see him as his own person.**

"I think the most important criteria for a public school placement is a willingness for all parties to look at the child involved - not just a "laundry list" of skills.

"When we were stationed in Oklahoma, it took quite a fight to have our son mainstreamed with an interpreter. All because that school district's list of skills [required for mainstreaming] included the ability to function without an interpreter as a necessary skill to be placed in a regular classroom."

— Evelyn

**Sometimes it's more trouble than it's worth.**

"From my experiences, and those of several parents from other districts, getting the "regular" schools to understand a hard-of-hearing kid's needs is a herculean task. They deal with many different disabilities and issues. A kid who is "only" hard of hearing can so easily slip right through every crack in the system."

— Jill

**Making friends**

**We helped him "break the ice" with the other students.**

"One of the first things we did when we decided to mainstream my oldest son was to talk to the students in the class about hearing loss and what to do to communicate with him. My son's interpreter grew up in the deaf community, so she talked to the kids about ASL. The itinerant teacher came in and talked about hearing loss.

"We asked our son ahead of time if he wanted to participate. He chose to take off his hearing aid and show it to the kids. I have to say, it was a real ice breaker. After that, the kids weren't shy about tapping him on the shoulder or learning fingerspelling or some signs."

— Karen

**Making friends became harder as she got older.**

"Elementary school was really easy in terms of acceptance. Our daughter had lots of friends and invitations to birthday parties despite the fact that she was the only deaf student in our neighborhood school.

"In middle school that all began to change. We know that middle school is a difficult time for many students whether they are hearing, deaf or someone with other special needs. Some of the challenges we see are: no one wants to be different or be associated with someone different; the school is larger and blends students from several "feeder" elementary schools so the majority of the students are "new" to one another; the teachers are responsible for more students so it's easier to fall through the cracks; and the guidance counselors and administrators are not familiar with deafness."

— Janis

**Mainstream schools can help your child grow in different ways**

**Deaf schools should challenge their students more.**

"If residential and regional programs could really challenge deaf students, mainstreaming could be done just for the reasons we did it - to learn to use an interpreter and take those classes which a small deaf school can't provide, such as college-prep science and upper-level math. Deaf students wouldn't be left with the impression that Hearing is More."

— Lorna

**Mainstreaming prepared her for other challenges.**

"She wasn't sure about [going to a mainstream school] in high school. But we felt she needed to do it to learn how to use an interpreter in class, a skill that would greatly expand her college options. We started with just 1 class, so it didn't have to be an all or nothing kind of thing. She LOVED it once she tried it."

— Lorna

**She felt more responsible for herself in the mainstream.**

"Another big reason for loving public school was that the residential school for the deaf was very concerned about each and every student and made sure they did their homework and paid attention in class. Public school had the attitude that your grade is your business (appropriate for high school, I think). She really appreciated this sense of freedom and being responsible for herself."

— Lorna

**She felt cheated when she found out the public school was more challenging.**

"It would be wonderful if deaf students could get all the challenge they need within programs for deaf children. My daughter was ANGRY when she discovered that public school classes were (usually) more challenging. For a couple of years there, all things deaf were inferior, in her mind. This was, I think, the biggest crisis of her teen years."

— Lorna

## **Tips for parents**

### **Advice to parents from a former mainstreamed student**

1. Never doubted your child and always believe your child can achieve in anything.
2. Make sure your child has the opportunity to participate in various activities in the school, community and other functions.
3. Attempt to always include your child in family discussions and functions -- referring to communication.
4. When the child is of age to understand things and make decisions, always include the child in these processes or encourage your child to go about it on his/her own with you nearby if necessary. (ie, doctor's appointments, shopping, picking out high school classes, etc. Of course, encourage your child to learn how to request for an interpreter at a doctor's appointment! Just a great way to gear your child towards independent living skills.)
5. Seek technologies for the home, like a TTY or amplified telephones. (Check and see if your state has a distribution program that provides these telephone devices for free and if your child qualifies: flash/vibrating/auditory alarm clock, doorbell/telephone/fire alarm signaler, etc (another approach towards independent living skills).

— **Kim Davis**

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*You can find this page online at:*

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/meet/parents/mainstream.jsp>