

Parent-to-Parent Support

Meet the family:

Mom: Laura, hearing
Dad: Paul, hearing

Children: Jack, 17, hard of hearing, moderate hearing loss
Jennifer, 14, hearing
Josie, 12, hearing

Communication Method: Voice

Newborn Screening:
None available

Age at Diagnosis: 2+ years

Uses hearing aids

Dear Parent:

I am the mother of a son who is hard of hearing. When Jack was 2 years old, we noticed that his speech was hard to understand and that he often ignored us when he was intent on something like watching TV. The pediatrician said not to worry about it, so we let it go at first. When we finally got him to an audiologist, we were surprised to learn Jack had a mild to moderate loss in both ears — he was hard of hearing.

I remember feeling so confused. What was “hard of hearing” anyway? What was I supposed to do about it? Was I supposed to learn about sign language and deafness, or was this hard of hearing stuff completely different? On the one hand, Jack seemed perfectly OK. He obviously understood us when we were nearby. On the other hand, he often didn’t understand us in noisy situations. So, how were we supposed to deal with that?

Jack got hearing aids. We struggled to keep them on him. Two pairs of hearing aids went through the wash, and one hearing aid was run over by a car. (I highly recommend hearing aid insurance.) Eventually he got used to them. My husband and I took sign language classes and hired a sign language tutor “just in case” Jack’s hearing loss became worse—we learned that several people on my husband’s side had a progressive hearing loss.

Over the years, our main struggle has been to help the school and our friends understand what “hard of hearing” means. It means Jack needs some accommodations to get the same information other people get. It means he hears well in some situations and not others. It means he is not ignoring you—he really can’t hear you. We have had to be assertive, especially with school, to see that Jack gets the accommodations he needs.

Now that Jack is 17, I don’t worry as much about how his hearing loss affects his life. He has learned to advocate for himself most of the time. He doesn’t always hear everything at school, but he gets good grades, enjoys life, and has wonderful friends. He has been hired by good employers because he has a charming personality and is a good worker, not to mention smart (the unbiased opinion of a mother).

I would recommend to parents of children who are hard of hearing that they talk with other parents who have kids in a similar situation. Being hard of hearing is truly different, it seems to me, than being deaf or having typical hearing. Meeting adults who are hard of hearing has also been very helpful. Getting acquainted with sign language and Deaf culture has also been beneficial to us, even though Jack doesn’t use much sign language.

Given his family history, it is possible Jack’s hearing loss will progress. However, I feel confident he has the tools—a good heart, mind and personality—to deal with whatever lies ahead. While I’ve been worrying, he’s been cheerily plowing ahead, succeeding at who he was meant to be — a wonderful child who happens to have a hearing loss. Like me, you will probably worry a lot more than your child will about the hearing loss. Your child will very likely astound you, just as Jack has amazed me.

I wish you the very best.

Laura

7.05

For information about how to connect with a family like this, please contact the Family Support Connection at 1-866-DHOH-KID, or 651-265-2435 in the Twin Cities. Or, you can email fsc@lifetrackresources.org.