



Habilitation Outreach for
Professionals in Education

HOPE Note

Children Who Sign

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There are many parents who choose implantation for their children who sign. Speech and hearing professionals must ascertain the degree to which spoken language development is possible for a child with an implant who signs and maximize the potential of the devices for this purpose. The following HOPE Note outlines a rationale for encouraging auditory access while at the same time supporting sign communication.

Parent Choices

When faced with decisions about communication options for their young deaf children, a considerable number of parents choose sign language in any one of its various forms. Some will choose American Sign Language (ASL) because of a commitment to the community and culture of deafness. Others may choose a form of Signed English believing it to be the most practical approach to reaching their deaf child. Simultaneous Communication (talking and signing) is the outcome when signs are overlaid upon English grammar and paired with spoken English.

Children with Cochlear Implants

Simultaneous Communication (SC) may offer a child with an implant the best opportunity to pair audition with their established communication system. There

are several recommendations that teachers and speech language pathologists are encouraged to follow when using SC with an implant recipient:

- Use grammatically complete and correct spoken English. Even if every word is not signed, every word must be voiced in order to provide access to the rhythm and melody of English.
- Assist the child in moving across a continuum from visual learning to auditory learning.
- Provide many opportunities to listen only and to talk only. Routine events may afford the richest context for removing signs and allowing for successful listening and talking.
- Help the child see that different kinds of communication are appropriate in different settings. Make explicit the circumstances in which it is “a listening and talking time” versus “a signing time.”
- Include parents in the discussion of the relative roles of sign and spoken language to achieve the academic and social goals they have for their child. Enlist their support in setting communication guidelines for time spent outside of school.





Research on the Auditory and Speech Skills of Signing Implant Recipients

It is well documented that children who use sign make improvements with their cochlear implants although they do not perform as well on measures of speech perception and speech production as their auditory/oral peers. While progress in speech perception and speech intelligibility can be attributed to implant use, children who sign make only about half the gains that children using full time oral communication make (see Osberger reference). Rather than disappoint, this result should serve as the incentive to maximize the opportunities that a child who signs has to listen to and produce spoken language.

The Role of the Educational Interpreter

When a child who uses a sign language interpreter at school gets a cochlear implant, there is often confusion about the role of this professional in post implant habilitation. Educational interpreters should be considered part of the instructional team and should be active in facilitating the anticipated outcomes of implantation for the child. Experience suggests that after implantation and a period of listening exposure, a child demonstrates growing independence in mainstream classrooms and may shift attention from the interpreter to the teacher. Educational interpreters play a vital role in encouraging a child to use new listening (and talking) skills in the classroom and should recognize the need to allow experimentation with new auditory skills as a result of the cochlear implant.

Related Resources

Chute, P., & Nevins, M.E. (2006). *Supporting Communication with Sign in School Professionals Working with Children with Cochlear Implants*. San Diego: Plural Publications.

Clark, T., et al.(2003). *Children with Cochlear Implants Who Sign: Guidelines for Transitioning to Oral Education or a Mainstream Setting*. Boston Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children. Available at www.childrenshospital.org.

Cochlear Implant Education Center. (2002). *Cochlear Implants and Sign Language: Putting it All Together. Conference Proceedings*. Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, Gallaudet University, Washington D.C. Available at <http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/ciec/conference-proceedings.html>.

Nevins, M.E., & Garber, A.S. (2006). *Sign Language and the Cochlear Implant: The Real Story*. HOPE Online Library. Available at www.cochlear.com/HOPE.

Seal, B. (2003). *Interpreting for Students with Cochlear Implants. Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Views*.

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