



## Exploring Communication Opportunities: Listening and Spoken Language

- **Auditory Verbal Philosophy and Practice**
- **Auditory-Oral Education**

Families who have just found out that their child has a difference in hearing levels, which some people call *hearing loss, deaf, or hard of hearing*, often have many questions about how their child will learn to communicate. Becoming a successful communicator and learner is a journey for each child with a hearing difference and their family. Each family will have communication *choices, or opportunities*, to consider as *roads* to explore on this language journey. Each road on your journey of language and communication represents a different way you can share thoughts, ideas, experiences, and feelings with your child. Each provides unique ways to communicate with your child and nourish your child's brain with language.

One of the roads, or ways to communicate, that you can explore is *Listening and Spoken Language*.

### What is Listening and Spoken Language (LSL)?

- Communicating through *Listening and Spoken Language (LSL)* means that, with the help of high-quality hearing technology, children first learn to listen to and understand the language that other people use to talk to them. Children then learn to speak that language to express their own thoughts, feelings, and ideas.
- Children may learn to communicate using spoken English, the spoken language(s) used in their own home, or both.
- Listening and Spoken Language communication does not include the formal use of sign language or Cued Speech. However, the use of natural gestures that are part of the family's communication and culture are encouraged.
- Listening and Spoken Language professionals recognize that most young children who have hearing differences are able to benefit from consistently using high-quality hearing technology. While hearing aids or cochlear implants do not "correct" a child's hearing loss, they can provide many children with good auditory access to environmental sounds, voices, and the sounds of speech.
- *"It's all about the brain!"* We hear with our ears, but we listen and understand with our brain. Listening and Spoken Language practices support the development of the auditory and language centers of a young child's brain, especially during the very critical first three years of a child's life.
- There are two main educational philosophies that support children's development of listening and spoken language. They are *Auditory Verbal Philosophy and Practice (A-V)* and *Auditory-Oral Education (A-O)*. There are many similarities between the two practices and some significant differences, too.

## How are Auditory Verbal Philosophy and Practice and Auditory-Oral Education Similar?

Critical components of both *Auditory Verbal Practice (A-V)* and *Auditory-Oral Education (A-O)* include:

- Early identification of hearing loss and early fitting with appropriate hearing technology (hearing aids or cochlear implants), beginning in infancy, so that the child’s brain has auditory access to sounds and spoken language as much as possible.
- The child’s use of their hearing aids or cochlear implants during all waking hours every day as the foundation of learning to listen, understand, and use spoken language. It is critical for the child’s spoken language development that their hearing technology is carefully set to provide the child with the best possible auditory access to voices and the sounds of speech—that it is working well—and that it is worn consistently.
- Supporting the child’s hearing and listening at home and in the community during all their daily routines and activities. Families and caregivers provide their child with good listening and learning environments by reducing background noise, using strategies that allow children to hear sounds and spoken language more easily, and by providing interesting, meaningful, fun listening opportunities.
- Active involvement of family members in learning and using strategies to help their child learn to listen and talk during all the family’s daily routines and activities.
  - Talking with your child, singing, reading to your child, conversation “turn-taking”, interacting with “learning to listen” play sounds, “listen and do” games, modeling, rephrasing sentences, whispering, and pointing to your ear to listen are some of the strategies that families use with their young children.
- There are Audiologists, Speech Language Pathologists, and Teachers of the Deaf-Hard of Hearing who have had additional specialized training in supporting children’s listening and spoken language development. They may also hold certification from the [AG Bell Academy for Listening and Spoken Language](#) as a Listening and Spoken Language Specialist (LSLS Cert AVT or LSLS Cert AVEEd).

## How are Auditory Verbal Philosophy and Practice and Auditory-Oral Education Different?

Differences in *Auditory Verbal Practice (A-V)* and *Auditory-Oral Education (A-O)* include:

- **Differences in the use of speechreading as children learn to understand spoken language.**
  - In Auditory Verbal Practice (A-V), listening with high-quality hearing technology is emphasized as the primary way to learn to receive others’ communication and understand language. Speech develops over time as young children learn to listen to others and imitate them, as most young children with typical hearing do. Natural facial expressions are used. Very young children naturally watch

their parents' faces, but lip-reading, or speechreading, is not formally taught as a way for children to learn to understand spoken language and to talk.

- In Auditory-Oral Education, lip-reading, or speechreading, may be used in a more formal way along with listening to help the child learn to understand language and to talk. Children are often taught to watch the speaker's mouth and face and imitate mouth movements for speech.
- **Differences in the roles of the parents, teachers and/or therapists in supporting the child's listening and spoken language development.**
  - In Auditory Verbal Practice (A-V), parents and caregivers are considered the young child's first and most important "teachers". Auditory Verbal professionals guide and coach parents to become the main facilitators of their young child's listening and spoken language development. A-V Practice is highly individualized. Parents and A-V professionals often meet weekly in the home or in a clinic setting to share information, observe the child's development, practice strategies to support the child's listening and language development, and plan home activities together for the coming week. Families use Auditory Verbal strategies to support their child's development of listening, natural language, and early speech skills at home throughout all the family's daily activities.
  - In Auditory Oral Education, parents and caregivers also work with their early intervention provider to support their very young child's listening and language development at home. Toddlers and preschoolers may attend a special class or a special school with other young children with hearing differences. Teachers and therapists at the school often teach structured language lessons to children in small groups or therapy sessions. School staff communicate with family members, who help the child practice the language skills that were taught at school.
- **Differences in learning environments and school settings.**
  - In Auditory Verbal Practice, children with hearing differences are encouraged and supported to participate in community, childcare, or regular school learning environments along with typically hearing peers from early childhood on. A-V providers believe that interaction with other young children who are modeling age-appropriate language, social, and communication skills helps children with hearing differences expand their own spoken language skills as well as learn how to interact and communicate with peers in their community. Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Speech Language Pathologists, and Educational Audiologists may support the child's participation in preschool learning environments. The individual Auditory Verbal support sessions with the child, parent, and the A-V professional continue to be provided as well.
  - In Auditory-Oral Education, children may attend special small-group classes with other children who have hearing differences. These classes may be offered within a public school setting or in a private school setting for children with hearing differences. The class schedule varies. Toddler or preschool-aged children may attend class one to five times a week for a half-day in some school

programs. Some private schools may recommend toddlers and preschoolers come five days a week for full school days. Some programs offer both small group classes and supported experiences with typically-hearing children. Children typically receive instruction from Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Speech Language Pathologists. In this approach, providers believe that many children with hearing differences need small special classes and structured lessons to learn language and school readiness skills. A child will start to attend their neighborhood elementary school with same-aged peers when the family and education providers feel that the child is ready to learn in a regular school setting.

## **How Does Listening and Spoken Language Help Children Learn Early Literacy Skills for Reading?**

- When children who have hearing differences learn to communicate through listening and spoken language, they are building the auditory foundation of early literacy skills in their brains beginning in infancy. While using their hearing aids or cochlear implants, children learn what spoken English (or another spoken language) sounds like. They listen to stories being read to them and learn to tell their own imaginative stories to others. They learn vocabulary and how different kinds of sentences are formed. They learn to listen to speech sounds that are parts of words. As preschoolers, they learn how to change different speech sounds in words as they participate in rhyming games and make up silly words.
- When children start learning to identify printed letters and read words, they are learning how to connect the printed symbols form of a language to the spoken words, sentences, and speech sounds that they already know. This is the foundation of how young children who have typical hearing learn to read. For example, if a child already understands and uses spoken English to communicate, it will be easier for them to learn to read the printed form of English. If a child understands and speaks Spanish, it will be easier for them to learn to read the printed form of the Spanish language.
- Auditory discrimination, auditory comprehension, auditory memory, phonemic awareness, rhyming, alliteration, phonetics, sound-symbol association, etc. are all important components of early literacy. In a Listening and Spoken Language approach, the foundation for all these early literacy skills is the child's auditory brain development and learning to listen to meaningful language with their hearing technology.
- Providing all young children with opportunities to explore their world, listen to and tell stories, learn new words, and share ideas in conversations will help children learn to read and understand printed language.

## How Can You Learn More About Listening and Spoken Language?

As you start to explore Listening and Spoken Language as a communication opportunity for you and your child, there are many supportive Minnesota programs and people who can share more information and resources with you.

1. Many families find it helpful to connect with other parents and families of young children who have hearing differences to learn about different communication journeys.
  - [Parent Guides from MN Hands & Voices](#) share information and support with fellow Minnesota families of children with hearing differences. They can also help you connect with other families individually or through fun family activities provided virtually and/or in person in communities around Minnesota.
  - With your permission, your child's IFSP/IEP team members, including early intervention providers, Teacher of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing, and/or your child's audiologist may also be able to help connect you with other families of young children with hearing differences in your community.
2. You may find it helpful to connect with Deaf or Hard of Hearing adults who communicate through listening and spoken language and learn about their lived experiences. [Deaf/Hard of Hearing Guides from MN Hands & Voices](#) can help with connections, talk about their own life experiences, and share resources, too.
3. Your child's IFSP/IEP team members, early intervention providers, Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Speech Language Pathologists, and audiologists can also share information with you about Listening and Spoken Language and help support your child's communication development. (See the Special Note below.)
  - One very helpful resource person would be an IFSP/IEP team member or service provider who has specialized training and expertise in facilitating listening and spoken language development in young children with hearing differences.
4. There are many online information resources about Listening and Spoken Language for young children with hearing differences. A list of several selected websites you might explore has been included at the end of this document beginning on page 8.

### **A Special Note:**

If you are not yet connected with Minnesota Infant and Toddler Intervention Services or Preschool Special Education Services for young children and their families, you can learn more about how to [Get Help for Your Child](#) on the [Help Me Grow MN](#) website. In addition, education leaders from the MN Department of Education and the MN Low Incidence Projects have shared an introduction [Letter for Families of Young Children with Hearing Differences](#). The letter provides more information about Help Me Grow MN and services that are offered free of charge to all eligible children and families through local public school districts across Minnesota, regardless of family income or immigration status.

## Questions to Think About as You Consider Your Communication Journey Using Listening and Spoken Language

As you learn more about Listening and Spoken Language as a possible way to communicate with your child, it may be helpful for your family to consider what that might look like for you and your child. Below are a few questions you could think about—and talk about with supportive professionals and family members—as you begin to explore a communication journey using a Listening and Spoken Language road.

1. The primary goal of both Auditory-Verbal Philosophy and Practice and Auditory-Oral Education Listening and Spoken Language approaches is for the child to learn to communicate with others by listening and talking. It includes the use of natural gestures, but not the use of a formal sign language system or Cued Speech. Does that goal seem to fit with your own current communication goals for your child and family?
2. Do you have extended family members and/or friends in your community who can help you as you help your child learn to listen and use spoken language? What kinds of assistance would you like to have right now?
3. Auditory access to spoken language—being able hear the characteristics of voice and speech sounds as well as possible—is very important for children’s development of listening and spoken language. Early and consistent use of high-quality hearing technology is critical for providing that important auditory access to spoken language. Has your child been fitted with high-quality hearing technology that enables them to hear different voices and speech sounds?
  - If not yet, what additional information do you need that could help you understand more about your child’s hearing levels and possible hearing technology options?
  - If yes, is your child wearing their hearing technology during all waking hours?
  - Does your child receive regular audiological care and monitoring to make sure their hearing technology is working well for them?
4. Every child and family are unique. Families, medical and audiological care providers, education professionals, and family-to-family program staff can work together in different ways to help children. What information and supports would be most helpful for you and your family as you start out on a Listening and Spoken Language communication road?
5. As families support their children’s listening and spoken language development, they learn helpful strategies from professionals and other parents on how to make their home a good listening and spoken language learning environment for young children. Families try to use those strategies with their child during all their daily family routines and activities.
  - What are your thoughts and feelings about learning new strategies that might change how you typically do some things in your home?
  - How do you and other family members prefer to learn new things?

- Who might be your child’s primary caregiver(s) who will learn and use these strategies with your child first?
  - How might other family members or childcare providers help?
6. Children with hearing differences who learn and communicate using listening and spoken language typically attend regular school classes starting in kindergarten or early elementary grades, with educational supports provided. Children might attend a community preschool with typically-hearing peers before starting kindergarten (as in Auditory Verbal Practice). Some children may attend a separate preschool class specifically for children who are deaf or hard of hearing until parents and teachers determine the child is ready for participation in their neighborhood school (as in Auditory Oral Education). Some children may have developmental and learning challenges in addition to a hearing difference that will impact decisions about the most appropriate learning environment(s) to meet the child’s needs.
- What are your educational goals for your child?
  - What additional information about educational services would be helpful to you?

**Remember:**

- **Babies’ brains need lots of language nutrition.**  
Your child’s brain is ready and eager for you to share your love and the gift of language with them. You have started on a journey of learning and communication with your child. The journey may be familiar to you, or it may be unexpected. But, just by starting out and learning more, you are doing great things for your child and family!
- **There is help available for you and your family.**  
There are information resources that can help you learn about different ways to communicate with your child, and there are many caring people who can help you and your child on your journey.
- **Each family is unique.**  
There is no one "right" communication choice that is “the best” for all children and families. Each child is unique and needs different things. Parents and families are also different and have their own hopes and dreams for their child. They have their own family cultures, ideas, and preferences for how to communicate with their child. Some families choose one main way of communicating while other families make other choices. Your communication decisions for your child and family are respected and valued.
- **Be flexible.**  
As you learn more about hearing, hearing differences, hearing technology, your child’s development, and different opportunities to support your child’s language development and learning, your communication choices may change over time. Start your journey with what feels right for your child and family and be open to learning more over time. Together with fellow family members and supportive professionals, follow your child’s lead and watch how they grow and develop.

## Selected Online Information Resources About Listening and Spoken Language

### [Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf](https://www.agbell.org/) (https://www.agbell.org/)

- [For Families](https://www.agbell.org/Families) (https://www.agbell.org/Families)
- [Principles of Certified LSL Specialists](https://agbellacademy.org/certification/principles-of-lsl-specialists/), AGBell Academy for Listening and Spoken Language (https://agbellacademy.org/certification/principles-of-lsl-specialists/)

### [BEGINNINGS for Parents of Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing](https://ncbegin.org/)

(https://ncbegin.org/)

- [For Parents](https://ncbegin.org/for-parents/) (https://ncbegin.org/for-parents/)
  - [Communicating with Your Child: Auditory Verbal](https://ncbegin.org/verbal/) (https://ncbegin.org/verbal/)
  - [Video Samples of Auditory Verbal](https://ncbegin.org/videos/videos-auditory-verbal/) (https://ncbegin.org/videos/videos-auditory-verbal/)
  - [Communicating with your Child: Oral, Auditory-Oral](https://ncbegin.org/oral-auditory-oral/) (https://ncbegin.org/oral-auditory-oral/)
  - [Video Samples of Auditory Oral](https://ncbegin.org/videos/videos-auditory-oral/) (https://ncbegin.org/videos/videos-auditory-oral/)
- Resource: [Language and Communication Chart](https://ncbegin.org/reference-chart/) (https://ncbegin.org/reference-chart/)
- Resource: [Approaches to Communication brochure](https://ncbegin.org/product/communication-approaches-brochure/) (https://ncbegin.org/product/communication-approaches-brochure/)
- Resource: [Pathways to Language and Communication DVD](https://ncbegin.org/product/pathways-to-language-and-communication/) (https://ncbegin.org/product/pathways-to-language-and-communication/)
  - The Pathways DVD may be available to view by contacting MN Hands & Voices Parent Guides or your local school district early intervention program.

### [Hands & Voices Communication Considerations A-Z](https://www.handsandvoices.org/comcon/index.html)

(https://www.handsandvoices.org/comcon/index.html)

- [Auditory Oral Education](http://www.handsandvoices.org/comcon/articles/aud_oral_edu.htm) (http://www.handsandvoices.org/comcon/articles/aud\_oral\_edu.htm)
- [Auditory Verbal Therapy](http://www.handsandvoices.org/comcon/articles/aud_verbal_therapy.htm) (http://www.handsandvoices.org/comcon/articles/aud\_verbal\_therapy.htm)

### [Hearing First](https://www.hearingfirst.org/) (https://www.hearingfirst.org/)

- [Listening and Spoken Language](https://www.hearingfirst.org/lsl) (https://www.hearingfirst.org/lsl)
- [Learn and Connect; Learning Communities for Families and Professionals](https://www.hearingfirst.org/learn-and-connect) (https://www.hearingfirst.org/learn-and-connect)
- [Mission: Probable, Age-Appropriate Listening and Spoken Language Abilities for Children with Hearing Loss](https://learn.hearingfirst.org/mission_probable) (https://learn.hearingfirst.org/mission\_probable)
- [The Road to Literacy](https://www.hearingfirst.org/what-to-do/road-to-literacy) (https://www.hearingfirst.org/what-to-do/road-to-literacy)



**[My Baby's Hearing, Boys Town National Research Hospital](https://www.babyhearing.org/)**

(<https://www.babyhearing.org/>)

- [Language and Learning](https://www.babyhearing.org/language-learning) (<https://www.babyhearing.org/language-learning>)

**[OPTION Schools, Private Auditory-Oral school programs](https://optionlsl.org/)** (<https://optionlsl.org/>)

Selected Links:

- [Who We Are](https://optionlsl.org/who-we-are/) (<https://optionlsl.org/who-we-are/>)
- [Family Resources-Frequent Questions](https://optionlsl.org/research-and-resources/family-resources/) (<https://optionlsl.org/research-and-resources/family-resources/>)

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*The Communication Opportunities resource series was written in collaboration with representatives of the MN Low Incidence Projects, the MN Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing, MN Hands & Voices, and the MN Deaf Mentor Family Program. All the articles in the series can be found on the MN Low Incidence Projects-EHDI webpage*

*[Communication Opportunities](http://www.mnlowincidenceprojects.org/Projects/ehdi/ehdiCommunicationOpp.html)*

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