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Congratulations! The birth of a baby is a wonderful reason for celebration. If you are reading this, you are also very likely the parent of a newly identified deaf or hard of hearing child. There are many resources and a great deal of support out there for you and your entire family. I, too, have been where you are today.

Our story began in 2004, when we were anxiously awaiting the arrival of our baby. Immediately following the delivery, I heard my husband ask the doctor, "Is it a boy or a girl?" She replied "A BOY!" Our entire family rejoiced. We now had a daughter and a son. That day was full of excitement and joy. The following day we received news that would forever change our entire family's life.

On the second day of our son's life, a nurse walked into our hospital room, sat in a chair, and told us that our baby had been referred to get a follow-up on a newborn hearing screening. We would need to come back in one week for a second screening. I asked what does that mean, and how could that be? The pediatrician assured us that there could be fluid in the ears and not to worry. But how can two parents not worry about their newborn baby?

While we were at home waiting for our son's follow-up appointment, we had days where we knew that the test was wrong and that surely, the next test would show typical hearing. But we also had other days where we cried, and we were scared and worried. When we returned for his follow-up hearing test, our son was three weeks old, and his results were the same. The nurse then set up an appointment for the auditory/brainstem response (ABR) test a week later. During the ABR, our son would occasionally fidget, so I thought to myself, *Oh, he hears*. After one and a half hours of testing, the audiologist sat down with us and gently informed us that our baby boy does indeed have a bilateral moderate to severe hearing loss. Although we had had a few weeks to get used to the idea that our son might not hear, we were still in shock. The audiologist explained sensorineural hearing loss and our son's hearing level, and yet we still felt lost. We wished that we had more information to take home in our hands and a way to reach out to other parents of a deaf child. How many other families have Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) children in my city/state? Where are they? Where do we get more information? These are all thoughts that we had at the time. Along the way, I have met many other families of Deaf or Hard of Hearing children who felt the same way; once they arrived home they wished they had more resources and the contact information of someone who had 'been there' in their hands. Fortunately, there are many valuable resources for your family! The National Science Foundation Science of Learning Center on Visual Language and Visual Learning (VL2) has developed this set of research-based resources and links to information for you, your family, and your child.

The baby I mention above is now nine years old! As I write this, I am amazed at how fast time flies. He has a deaf brother who is three years old and a hearing sister who is twenty-two years old. I am grateful for and celebrate all three of my children just the way they are: perfect.

We have met so many incredible people who have supported our family and shared their story and suggestions along the way. Some of their suggestions fit our family while others did not. And that is ok.

There is so much support that will surround your family too. Some of it you will need to reach out for, but it's out there. Our deaf sons have done everything that our hearing daughter has done: play on community soccer/baseball teams, dance, ride bikes, have a ton of friends, tell great jokes, swim, fight with their siblings, sing in chorus, participate in Scouts, bring me flowers from our garden, tell me they love me, read, have play dates/sleepovers, etc.



Letters | VL2 Parent Information Package | www.VL2parentspackage.org

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Each and every step of the way is a new branch in the tree of raising a deaf or hard of hearing child and just like with life, you are never finished learning all there is to know about raising a happy, successful, independent, deaf or hard of hearing child. Your son or daughter can do anything with your support!

I have often been asked what advice I think is most valuable to give to a new parent of a deaf or hard of hearing child, and I always mention education. Educate yourself.

You will receive a lot of suggestions and opinions from family, friends, different professionals, parents of DHH children, DHH adults, and even strangers. Think about each suggestion very carefully. Will it work for your child and your family? It might! And it might not.

There are many ways to educate yourself, and here are just a few.

- * Meet DHH adults & families with DHH children (who use a variety of means to communicate).
- * Attend conferences / workshops / panels / webinars.
- * Know your rights and your child's rights. And remember, YOU are your child's best advocate.
- * Ask your Early Start teacher for resources to explore & opportunities to meet other families.
- * Join parent groups in your City/State (online, e-news, face to face, etc.).
- * Attend public events for DHH families, Deaf adults, etc.
- * Join a variety of online groups. (There are so many!)
- * Read books written by DHH adults, parents and professionals.
- * Join as many Statewide/National Organizations as you can. Many of them offer a free membership to parents of newly-identified Deaf or Hard of Hearing children.

The list could go on and on...the key is to *explore*.

Get out there and do and touch as much as you can. At the end of the day you, your child and entire family will truly be blessed and benefit from all of these experiences. And most importantly, remember, your child is a child first. Play, laugh, and have fun together. Will it be easy? Not always! Worth it? Totally! I look forward to the next opportunity to learn with peer parents like you. Welcome!

Cora Shahid, parent to three children, two are Deaf

Parent Mentor – Parent Links <http://www.myparentlinks.com/>

