



Ears Are Doorway to the Brain

Carol Flexer, Ph.D.: As professionals and parents, we need to have conversations about the family's desired outcome. How does the family want this all to turn out, right? How does the family want the child and the outcome to look when the child is 3, 5 years, 14, 20 years old...What's the long term goal?

We need to recognize that 95% of children with hearing loss are born to hearing, speaking families. So the goal of most families is going to be listening and spoken language, because that's who the family is. So these recommendations, these "tips" for growing that child's brain are based on the family's desired outcome of listening and spoken language. If that's where you want to end up, these are some tips to help along that journey, right? These are some things we really have to do, in order to optimize the probability of that outcome.

Now, "outcome" and "desired..." "...where you want to end up..." I'd like to use a geographic analogy. So, for example: If the desired outcome is to end up in Seattle, Washington, there's a certain constellation of roads designed to get us there. On the other hand, if the desired outcome is to end up in Miami Beach, Florida, there's a different set of roads desired to get us there. So, we need to know where we want to end up. Where do we want to end up? We don't just say, "Look at all these lovely roads we have! Why don't you try them out and see what they're like?" "And no matter what roads you take, you'll somehow end up in Seattle." That isn't the case. You need to know where you want to go.

Beware of "mission drift." And what I mean by "mission drift" is trying all these different roads, but not being strategic in where you actually want to end up. "So let's take this road, this goes to Rhode Island." "Well, this one goes to Miami." "This one goes to San Diego!" "This one ends up in New York!" "This one goes to Denver!" And they all could be lovely roads...but where do you want to end up? And what does it take to end up in that place? So that's what we're talking about.

One way I'd like to think about hearing loss is a "doorway problem." See, people think you hear with the ears, but in fact, we hear with the brain. And the ears are the way into the brain. The ears can be thought of as the "doorway" to the brain - the pathway through which auditory information reaches the brain. When someone says, "Well, your

7/2016

child needs auditory access,” what we mean is we have to get information – auditory information – from the talker...through the environment...through the doorway into the brain. Hearing loss of any type and degree interferes with the doorway of getting sound to the auditory brain centers.

And what do we mean by “sound?” We mean information. Auditory information. Language auditory information, knowledge. So when we talk about “tips for families,” what we mean is...How do we strategically 1) want to know where we want to end up, and 2) understand that we have to get through the doorway into the brain, and 3) understand that the whole purpose of hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems, bone-anchored devices...The whole purpose is to get through the doorway – with auditory information – into the brain.