

HOW DOES A BABY'S COMMUNICATION DEVELOP?

Babies begin to learn their native language by listening to their parents and caregivers talk, sing and play. Babies who cannot hear all of the sounds of speech may have a difficult time learning to speak and to understand what others say.

All children are unique and grow at their own rate of development. As children hear and learn, most will demonstrate certain listening and language behaviors at different ages and stages of development. If there are concerns about a child's speech and language development, talk to the child's doctor, ask for a hearing evaluation, or call the school district's Early Childhood Intervention office.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS OF HEARING LOSS?

TYPES OF HEARING LOSS

There are three main types of hearing loss: **conductive**, **sensorineural** and **mixed**.

Conductive Hearing Loss is caused by a problem with the outer or middle ear. A conductive hearing loss can be caused by such problems as: the absence of the opening to the ear canal, impacted wax in the outer ear, fluid or a mass in the middle ear, or damage to the middle ear bones (the ossicles). Often medical management can correct a **conductive** hearing loss.

Sensorineural Hearing Loss is caused by a problem in the inner portion of the ear (the cochlea) where the sensory cells and nerve endings are found. The 8th cranial nerve (the acoustic nerve), leading from the cochlea to the brainstem, can also be involved. There usually is no medical "cure" for a **sensorineural** hearing loss.

Mixed Hearing Loss results from a problem with both the outer/middle ear and the inner ear.

DEGREES OF HEARING LOSS

Hearing loss can range in degree from a **minimal** loss (similar to the experience of placing your fingers in your ears) to **profound** (in which little or no sounds or speech can be detected without powerful amplification). The general categories for the degrees of hearing loss are as follows:

Minimal
Mild
Moderate
Moderately-Severe
Severe
Profound

OTHER DESCRIPTIONS

The hearing in one ear can be very different from the hearing in the other ear not only in degree but also in type of hearing loss. Occasionally, one ear will be perfectly normal

and the other ear will have a significant hearing loss. This is called a **unilateral** hearing loss. Unilateral loss is very difficult to detect without a hearing evaluation.

Sometimes the hearing loss can **fluctuate**. This is particularly true of conductive hearing losses resulting from middle ear fluid. Sometimes the child's middle ear is clear and s/he hears well; at other times, the middle ear is filled with fluid and s/he does not hear well.

A known hearing loss can worsen over time. This type of hearing loss called **progressive**. It is also possible for a young child who was born with normal hearing to develop a significant hearing loss before 3 years of age.

A hearing loss can affect some sounds more than others. This can lead to confusion because the child appears to "hear everything" when, in fact, s/he is hearing only parts of what is said and not understanding the whole message. This can give parents the impression that the child has "selective hearing," or a feeling that a child can hear "when s/he wants to."

It is very important to closely monitor a child's hearing. Talk with a medical professional if there are any concerns.