

Supporting Families: The Family Connections Program

Sound Beginnings at Utah State University

Brittany Stucki, B.S. (M.Ed. Candidate) | Nicole Jacobson, M.S. CCC-SLP, LSL Cert. AVEEd

PARENT SEMINAR

Parent Education

Parents and families often experience difficulty understanding, adjusting, and coping with the different challenges that hearing loss can bring and may not know what circumstances to anticipate or what outcomes to strive for as their children continue to develop. Parents may also seek education and guidance that would empower them to make informed decisions for their children's audiological, developmental, and educational needs.

In the Sound Beginnings Family Connections Program, parents are engaged in monthly educational seminars provided by the listening and spoken language interdisciplinary team. Topics of these monthly seminars are based upon teaching fundamental skills related to the listening and spoken language approach.



Sound Beginnings at Utah State University responds to parents' needs to connect with each other and to receive helpful information from supportive professionals.

Parent Support

Service Providers

Promote increased understanding between families and providers.

Educate parents on evidence based practices to facilitate parents' informed decisions.

Collaborate with parents regarding child's progress in home and school.

Parents

Express empathy and support for other families with similar experiences.

Give hope to others by sharing successes with their own families and children.

Problem solve with supportive parents to navigate common life challenges.

FAMILY CONNECTIONS PROGRAM

WHO

Families of Children who are deaf/hard of hearing, Professionals using a Listening & Spoken Language (LSL) approach

WHAT

Parent Educational Seminar/Support Group Discussion, Children's Activities, Children's Presentation for Parents

WHEN

Once a month for 2 hours

WHERE

Sound Beginnings Program at Utah State University

WHY

Connect families with other families and professionals, Educate parents with LSL-related topics

PARENT TESTIMONIALS

"The biggest thing for me has been **realizing that I'm not alone**. When you have that **connection with other families** and parents, you find **allies** who are experiencing the same thing. You have a safe place to go. You can ask questions without feeling afraid, and you get sound advice from other parents who are going through the same thing. There's a **mutual understanding** of what you're going through as a family and what your child is experiencing due to their hearing loss."

"I enjoy these events because we are able to **seek further insights from professional educators** on how to best advocate for our children's needs. I also enjoy the opportunities to engage with other families who deal with similar hardships by exploring different perspectives that may also benefit and help empower my family. It's a **safe haven** for all who attend that want to learn, grow, and better understand what resources are available to them.

To be honest, we become family!"

"The reiteration of **language strategies** and ways to **improve the spoken language for a child** with hearing loss has been huge. Some of the behavior things we have learned from seminar has been really helpful, too. We sometimes forget that with a disability comes some behavior challenges. **Learning how to approach and manage the behavior challenges** in a positive way has been some of the most **helpful information** to me."

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

Group Building

While parents attend the educational seminar, children who are deaf/hard of hearing establish growing friendships with other children by attending the program activities. Their siblings are encouraged to have full participation in each monthly activity. Children who participate in the activities are 18 months through six years old. They are divided into various groups according to age.

Each children's group is led by teachers of the deaf, graduate students in the listening and spoken language training program, as well as trained volunteers. These group leaders present themed activities that encourage the warm interactive engagement and deepening ties of all participants.

Sibling Inclusion

Including siblings of the children with hearing loss supports family-centered care. Children enrolled in the Sound Beginnings program excitedly engage their siblings in the Family Connection activities, which supports their family relationships. The siblings also form their own fond ties with the Sound Beginnings staff, who gain valuable insights into the home cultures. This perspective enriches the staff's ability to provide ongoing intervention with focus on each family throughout the year.



Parents have indicated an important secondary benefit of including these siblings in the children's activities. Lack of other childcare options would have otherwise prevented many families' attendance.

Children's Presentation for Parents

At the conclusion of the children's activities, parents are invited to join as the audience for the children's showcase presentation. Each children's group performs their prepared acts that highlight each child and includes song, dance, and/or spoken parts. Children and parents are equally delighted to experience the show.