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# Breaking the News:

Informational and Adjustment Counseling  
for Audiologists

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# Prior to 1990's

- Age of Identification:
    - 2 to 2 ½ years for severe to profound hearing loss
    - 2 ½ to 5 years for mild or unilateral losses
  - Reasons for Identification
    - Parental concern regarding
      - Auditory responses
      - Delayed or lack of speech
      - Poor school performance
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## 2000's

- Age of Identification:
    - First few months of life
  - Reasons for Identification
    - Newborn hearing screening
    - Tracking and follow-up by EHDI system
    - Increased awareness and involvement of Medical Home
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# 1990's

- Parents and families:
    - Concerned
    - Accepting
    - Dependent on audiologist for information
    - Often relieved
    - Bonded with child
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## 2000's

- Parents and families:
    - No basis for suspecting hearing loss
    - Still bonding with the infant
    - Lots of information:
      - Some good, some bad
      - Audiologist must help the family filter the information
    - (1-3-**6**)
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- “These changes in the timing of early screening for hearing loss, information access, and subsequent accelerated service provision require an expanded set of counseling skills by audiologists”
    - *Guidelines for Audiologists Providing Informational and Adjustment Counseling to Families of Infants and Young Children Birth to 5 Years of Age, ASHA, 2008*
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“The ultimate goal of these clinical interactions is to support the development of informed, independent, and empowered families” .....*ASHA Guidelines*

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# Terminology

- Informational Counseling: *Imparting information to families about a broad range of topics throughout childhood*
    - *Information to promote understanding regarding hearing and hearing loss, intervention to minimize the effect of the hearing loss on their child's communication and psychosocial development, e.g. amplification, education and communication choices, funding options, if any and next steps.*
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# Terminology

- Adjustment to Hearing Loss Counseling: *The support provided by audiologists to families as they learn of their child's hearing loss and to recognize, acknowledge, and understand the realities of having a child with hearing loss.*
    - *Addressing the emotional impact of their child having a hearing loss*
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# Terminology

- Family Focused service provision attempts to balance a system-and technology- driven approach and recognizes that not all families can or will follow through with recommended benchmarks.
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# Terminology

- Family Focused:

“The desires and needs of the family must be acknowledged and supported, and given equally high priority as any public or institutional policy, keeping in mind that families are their children’s primary decision makers and change agents.....EHDI systems must honor racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity of families.”

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# Terminology

- Unbiased:
    - Information provided to families is delivered in a straightforward manner without filters or hidden agendas
    - DOES NOT imply that audiologists cannot or should not offer their expert opinions to families
    - Implies that only families are in the position to decide what outcomes they want for their children.
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# Family Stresses

- Depression:
    - Common stress related response for parents
    - Mothers more likely to experience than fathers
  - Overprotection and overindulgence:
    - Overdependent children
    - Compromised developmental progress
  - Grieving
    - Common response to hearing loss
    - A complex response that may be triggered at multiple stages in the child's life
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# Informational Counseling

- Newborn Hearing Screening:
    - Audiologists (or someone carefully trained by an audiologist) should be the professionals who communicate with parents when a baby does not pass screening.
    - Recommendations for further testing must be presented in a positive manner that emphasizes their importance
    - Information must be presented to parents confidentially, in a family focused manner free of technical jargon
    - Parents given the opportunity and encouraged to ask questions
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# Informational Counseling

## ■ Confirmation of Hearing Loss

- ❑ An audiologist is responsible for describing the hearing loss and its implications to the family
  - ❑ Initially, best to describe audiometric results to the family in functional terms
  - ❑ Parents questions and comments must guide the quantity of information and the level of detail provided
  - ❑ LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN, talk, LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN, talk, LISTEN, talk, LISTEN ETC.
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# Informational Counseling

- Intervention and Habilitation:
    - “Audiologists are responsible for providing families with unbiased information, recommendations, and appropriate educational and communication options based on family decisions and informed choices. As such, audiologists are responsible *to* families, not *for* families.” .....*ASHA Guidelines*
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# Adjustment Counseling

- Newborn Hearing Screening:
    - WE are the professionals the parents NEVER hoped to meet!
    - We must LISTEN to fears and concerns expressed by families
    - We must support whatever decision the family makes regarding the screening process.
    - We must recognize that our manner of delivering screening results may interfere with parent-child bonding
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# Adjustment Counseling

- Confirmation of Hearing Loss:
    - MUST recognize the following:
      - The family's fragility during the EHDI process
      - The impact of diagnosis of hearing loss on the entire family, including extended family
      - The family will need to identify and seek the assistance of supports outside the audiological community
      - The family's strength and special needs within the context of their cultural and value system
      - The need for continuing emotional support of the family
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## Communication Skills

- **TALK LESS**
  - **LISTEN MORE**
  - **LISTEN ACTIVELY**
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# Adjustment Counseling

- Early Intervention

- Consider the family's readiness to proceed
  - Coping skills
  - Support structures
  - Resources
  - Challenges
- Facilitate knowledge of options and opportunities
- Family to family support critical at this stage!



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# Adjustment Counseling

- Beyond Infancy:
    - Parents often form a deep bond with their first audiologist
    - Families often experience complex feelings through the grieving process at transitions throughout the active years of parenting
    - Emotional support needs change, but do not necessarily diminish, as the child ages
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“Counseling in audiology has historically employed a medical model with an emphasis on providing content/informational counseling, and rarely providing emotional support”...*ASHA Guidelines*

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...achieving benchmarks (i.e. positive language outcomes) in early detection is facilitated when *family counseling* and *emotional support* are actively infused into audiologic care with a systems-driven paradigm” ...*ASHA guidelines*

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# Copies of the ASHA Guidelines:

- ASHA Table in the Exhibit Area
  - On-line at:  
[www.asha.org/policy](http://www.asha.org/policy)
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