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Raising Confident Teens

Communication Strategies
for Parents and Teenagers



Hearing and listening practise is an important part of the hearing journey that can help your child get the most out of their implant. This can take on various areas of focus including music therapy, phone training, advocacy and the use of communication strategies.

Focusing on communication as an area of rehab can help with building listening skills, encourage self-advocacy, increase self-confidence and help foster healthy peer relationships.

If your child is at an age where they may have just started or are getting ready to start high school, we recommend going through this guide with them. There are four different exercises that you can do together to help build their communication skills in time for high school. These exercises are designed to facilitate open discussions with your child and are also a great way to encourage self-discovery.

There is no rush to finish these exercises, it is more important that your child understands each of the exercises and knows how to put the communication strategies into practice.

To help build conversational confidence, your child can also explore doing independent exercises to help build their listening and speaking skills.

Exercise 1: Understanding factors that influence conversation

Important note: The exercises below have been adapted for children aged 11 – 14 from audiologist and researcher, Susan Binzer’s HOPE seminars on communication strategies for adults¹. Before starting these exercises, it’s important to consider the age your child was implanted. If your child was implanted at a later age, their language and social communication skills may not be at level typically expected of this age group. Please speak to your hearing healthcare professional to discuss if the exercises below are suitable for your child.

Conversation starter:

Different factors that can influence understanding during conversation tend to fall into three main categories: **Speaker**, **Environment** and **Listener** and can be influenced by some common factors. The table below lists some common factors.

SPEAKER	ENVIRONMENT	LISTENER
<input type="checkbox"/> Accent	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual distractions	<input type="checkbox"/> Not interested in topic
<input type="checkbox"/> Looks away	<input type="checkbox"/> Auditory distractions e.g too much background noise	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional state e.g feeling ill or irritated
<input type="checkbox"/> Hand covering face, mannerisms or gestures	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor room acoustics e.g echo	<input type="checkbox"/> Speech processor positioning
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking too quickly or slowly	<input type="checkbox"/> Distance between the speaker and listener	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication style – See Exercise 2 for more information
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking too loudly or softly	<input type="checkbox"/> Visibility of the speaker	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-confidence
<input type="checkbox"/> Facial hair, facial expressions or exaggerating lip movements	<input type="checkbox"/> Lighting e.g dim or glaring	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivation to hear
<input type="checkbox"/> Chewing gum or food	<input type="checkbox"/> Availability of assistive listening devices e.g wireless accessories	<input type="checkbox"/> Speech reading ability

Reflect on each and determine what is within the control of the conversation participants. For example, start with the **Speaker** category.

- **Accent:** Not within the participant’s control. Mark X in the box.
- **Looking Away:** Within the participant’s control. Mark ✓ in the box.
- **Speaking too softly or loudly:** Within the participant’s control. Mark ✓ in the box.

We will revisit this checklist, so keep a copy once completed.

Exercise 2: Understanding communication styles

Conversation starter:

There is a large body of research looking at how a person's communication style can influence various outcomes. For the purposes of this guide, we will look at three different communication styles: **Observer**, **Leader** and **Diplomat**. The goal of this guide is to give your child the strategies and understanding to handle challenging communication situations confidently and independently.

Before getting started, it's important to consider how various factors can influence the communication style adopted in each situation. For example, relationship to the speaker, power balance, cultural expectations, environment and the topic of conversation². For your child to build up their advocacy skills, the first step is to understand their main communication style and the situations or contexts where it may vary.

The Observer

This communication style is adopted in situations where it's perceived as easier to take a step back. During conversation, your child may choose to withdraw due to concerns they will not be able to communicate well. Or, adopt a more observational role because they are worried that they might mishear and provide an inappropriate response.

An observational approach is not always negative. In some situations, stepping back and taking the time to listen can be very positive for fostering relationships.

However, it's important to recognise when to use a more directive or diplomatic communication style in order to take advantage of social, educational or future vocational opportunities.

The Leader

This communication style tends to adopt a more directive approach to help guide conversation. Leaders overcome concerns that they might mishear or provide an inappropriate response during conversation by ensuring that they are the primary communicator.

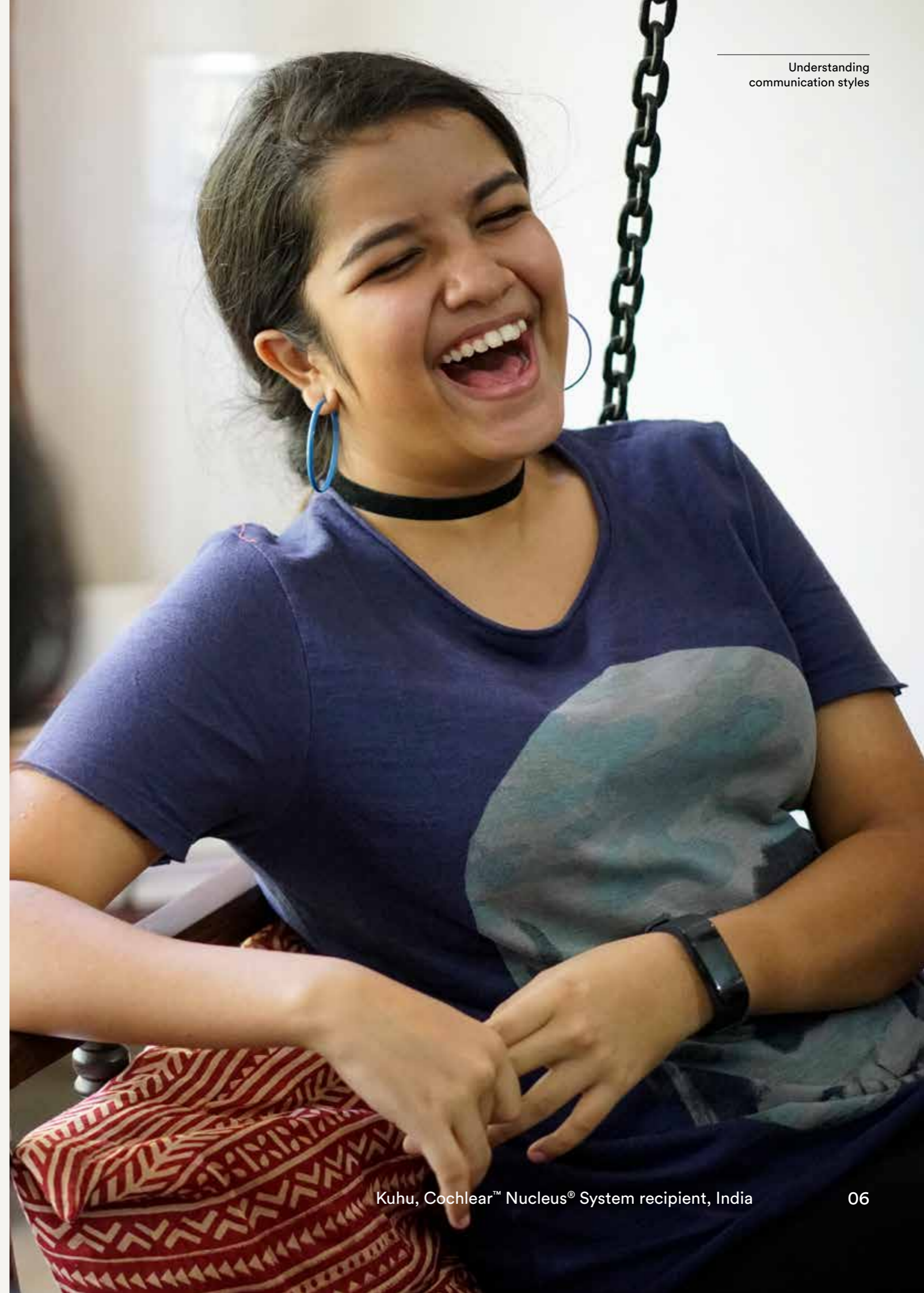
A positive aspect to this communication style, is that it allows your child to express their feelings and advocate for their needs. However, it's important to know when to adopt a more observational or diplomatic approach to facilitate a better outcome for both conversational partners.

The Diplomat

This communication style is well received by most conversational partners and can often result in more positive outcomes for both parties.

A diplomatic approach to conversations encourages equal participation between conversational partners and may make it easier for your child to express their feelings and advocate for their needs.

Depending on the situation, this communication style can also make it easier for your child to ask for help from communication partners to reduce breakdown in conversation.



Discussion Exercise:

For this discussion exercise, there are four steps that you can follow to help guide conversations with your child. Remember to be encouraging and be supportive of your child during this exercise. Reassure them that communication styles can evolve over time, vary according to different situations and that it can time and work, even for adults.

1 With your child, go through the three different communication styles. Ask your child to think about how they interact with others during conversations. Tell them to select the category that they think best suits their communication style and encourage them to elaborate i.e why do they think this is their style and can they give you examples to support this decision.

2 The next step is to determine if their communication style is the same with all conversational partners, or if they adapt their style based on who they are speaking with. Ask your child to think about situations where they are speaking with family, friends, teachers and strangers. Do they feel like their communication style changes based on the people that they are speaking with? Ask them to categorise their communication with different partners using the table below by placing a “✓” in the appropriate box:

	Family	Friends	Teachers	Strangers
Observer				
Leader				
Diplomat				

3 Go through the communication style your child has selected for each of the conversational partners and ask them why they use that style with that particular person.

It may help for you to do this exercise as well, and reflect on what communication style you adopt when speaking with family, friends, managers or strangers.

4 For this last step, talk about why it’s important to develop the skills to be able to confidently communicate their hearing needs. To start, ask your child to come up with some reasons and then you can add to any that they may have missed. Below are some suggestions to kick off your discussions:

- Everyone has times when they don’t understand.
- The way we communicate can influence the impression we make on others.
- Sometimes, people with normal hearing are unsure of how they can help.
- How being able to confidently communicate their needs with different conversational partners can help open up opportunities socially and educationally.
- How good communication can lead to healthy peer relationships.

Exercise 3: Understanding the six steps to improve communication

Conversation starter:

There are six steps or communication strategies that your child can adopt to help improve understanding during conversations. These are:

1. Answering the question: “How do I see myself?”
2. Explaining their cochlear implant
3. Stage-managing the environment
4. Identifying the current strategies used
5. Experimenting with new strategies
6. Phrasing for optimal results.

Adopting these strategies can help your child become their own best advocate and grow their confidence. In the discussion exercise below, we will give you tips on how to use these strategies and help your child adopt them in their daily life.

Introducing the 6 strategies to your child

Answer the question: “How do I see myself?”

- 1 If your child is comfortable doing so, ask them to consider how they identify their hearing loss. Specifically, do they identify with the terms “deaf”, “Deaf”, “hard-of-hearing”, “hearing impaired”, “hearing” or as having a “hearing loss?” Understanding how they self-identify will help them better communicate their needs to others.

Explain your hearing device

- 2 Work with your child to develop a one-to-two sentence description of the device/s that they use to help them hear. There may be situations where they are asked about their hearing loss. Being prepared may make it easier for your child to talk about how their hearing device helps them to hear.

Stage your environment

- 3 Ask your child to spend some time thinking about the various settings in which they experience the most difficulty communicating. Tell them to consider how they are positioned in each situation and what they can do to make it easier for them to communicate. For example, seating in the classroom, when they are speaking with their friends at lunch or when they are out to dinner with the family. Then, ask them to think about what accommodations they are willing to request in each situation (e.g., preferred seating in classrooms, choosing a table in a restaurant with a wall behind them). This exercise is designed to help your child recognise that the choices they make and their willingness to speak up can affect how well they can communicate in each environment.

Identify current strategies used

- 4 Ask your child to consider what they tend to do when they are struggling to hear during conversations. Most often, people with hearing loss rely on asking speakers to repeat as their primary strategy to repair communication breakdown. However, most often this request is posed indirectly; for example, by saying “Huh?”, “Beg your pardon?” or something similar. These strategies are non-specific and have been shown to be the least successful communication repair strategies, because speakers most often do nothing to change the manner in which they communicated the first time. We will go through more effective repair strategies in the next exercise.

Experiment with new strategies

- 5 Instead of asking someone to repeat, use very specific requests that asks the speaker to alter their communication. For example, ask your child to put some of the below into practice:
 - “Can you please lower your hand so that I can read your lips?”
 - “Can we move into the light so that I can see your face?”
 - “Can you please try saying the same thing in a different way?”

Some people with normal hearing can be unsure of how to respond when those with hearing loss do not understand. Remember, no one strategy works best for everyone. Encourage your child to try new strategies in different situations, starting with familiar conversational partners. Ask them to keep track of those that they have tried and make a note of those that work and those that don't.



Practise phrasing

6 This next strategy can be adopted by your child once they are comfortable with Strategy 5. Talk to your child about how to phrase their requests to better achieve the result they are after. Below are the five ingredients for a successful request:

- Use “I” statements and try not to blame others
- Make a specific request
- Explain why you are making the request
- Be courteous
- Express your gratitude

Strategy 5 uses the first two points, but once your child is comfortable, encourage them to start making more sophisticated requests incorporating the final three points. It is important to explain why the request is being made because a hearing person may not know what to do. For example, they may not know that a person with a cochlear implant might read lips. Teach your child not to assume that others understand their hearing loss. It’s important to be courteous so the speaker will feel good about a request. Being appreciative increases the chances that the speaker will remember how they can help and they will be more likely to help the next time. Below are some examples of phrases that incorporate all five points:

- Instead of “You need to speak up, it’s too noisy in here” try “My cochlear implant helps me understand a lot better, but I still have trouble in noise – would you mind moving to a quieter place in the room away from the speaker?”
- Instead of “Can you move your hand away from your face” try “Excuse me James, can you please lower your hand? Thank you, that makes it easier for me to lipread and follow what you are saying.”

Exercise 4: Understanding communication strategies

Conversation starter:

This exercise is good for the whole family, not just your child. There are four different strategies that you all can adopt to facilitate smoother conversation and reduce potential frustration on both sides. These strategies are:

1. Clear speech strategies
2. Anticipatory strategies
3. Repair strategies
4. Managing expectation strategies

Discussion Exercise:

Go through all of the strategies as a family. It's important that your child feels like they aren't carrying all the responsibility to facilitate effective conversation. Discuss how your child can adopt these strategies, how family members can support your child's efforts and also practise putting these strategies to use.

Clear speech strategies

1 Clear speech is when the speaker attempts to express every word and sentence in a precise, accurate and fully formed manner. Use of clear speech can improve hearing and understanding up to 20%. The best way to encourage clear speech from others, is to ask them to speak at a normal speed. In fact, asking someone to speak at a normal rate is preferable to asking them to speak more clearly so as not to suggest that their speech was previously sloppy.

As a family, talk about some key phrases that family members can adopt to help with clear speech techniques. For example, you can all start using the phrases below:

- When stating an opinion or making suggestions, start by saying "I think...."
- When changing a subject, you can try saying "Now I want to talk about something else..."

Anticipatory strategies

2 Preparation is key. Before your child enters a communication situation, ask them to prepare by considering who will be there and what might be said. Depending on the situation, it may help your child to:

- Read the lesson plans before a subject is discussed in class
- Watch the trailer of a movie before going to see it
- Ask someone the topic of conversation before entering it
- Review the names of party guests before arriving

Help your child to develop a list of anticipated vocabulary, names and dialogue for a particular situation. Then you and the family can help your child practise speech reading those words.

Repair strategies

3 Repair strategies are ways to help ‘fix’ breakdowns in conversation and communication understanding. It is most important for your child to familiarise themselves with these strategies and how to request them. However, it is also important that family members are aware of the part that they play in conversations and how they can help make communication easier.

Repair strategies for your child

- **Change environments**

The biggest enemies for those with hearing loss are poor lighting, background noise and poor acoustics. For example, teach your child to say, “I’m having trouble hearing you - are you ok if we move to the corner of the room?”

- **Face each other**

Teach your child to remind conversational partners to face them when communicating. This will give them access to important visual cues and keep the speech directed at them. For example, they can try saying “James, I lipread best when I can see your face straight on. Thank you.”

- **Speak at a normal level**

Educating others plays a big role in improving communication. If someone is yelling or speaking too loudly, speech can become distorted. Teach your child ways that they can ask conversational partners to speak at an optimal volume. For example, they can say “My implant makes speech loud enough for me. Thank you for trying to help me, but you can speak at a normal volume. It will be more helpful if you speak naturally.”

- **Repeat slower**

This is the single most effective strategy and quite similar to the one above. If a speaker is asked for a simple repetition, they will most likely repeat exactly the way they spoke the first time or speak louder and exaggerate their lip movements— neither of which is helpful. Instead, it’s better to ask that the speaker repeat more slowly.

- **Rephrase**

This is an effective, but underused, strategy. Often, when a speaker is asked to rephrase, they automatically choose words that are easier to hear and/or speechread. This is a more effective strategy than a repetition. You can teach your child to say “I didn’t follow what you said; could you please say that in a different way?”

- **Use key words**

Communication is more effective when the topic is known. It is easier to predict what will be said next when a topic or key word of a conversation has been stated. For example, your child can say, “I am not able to understand what you are saying. Can you tell me the subject please?”

- **Confirm what you have heard**

A great repair strategy that your child can adopt is to use clarification. When they use this confirmation strategy, it demonstrates that they are interested in what the speaker has to say and are trying to understand. Teach them to use this strategy when they have gotten a part of the conversation but are unsure of what was actually said. For example, they can start by saying, “Did you say....?”

Repair Strategies for family members

- **Shorten the sentence**

A simple, short sentence is much easier to understand than a long, detailed one. Shorter sentences allow the listener to jump in and confirm information before the speaker moves on to the next sentence. This is especially helpful on the telephone.

- **Get their attention**

When you are having dinner together as a family or in a group, it is important that you get the child with hearing loss’ attention. Calling their name, before you begin addressing them will mean they are facing you and can begin lipreading.

Managing expectations strategies

4 Often family members and friends have unrealistic expectations of what a cochlear implant can do for a person with hearing loss. Depending on the age of your child, include them in the conversation and discuss the ways that you can assist when communicating; which strategies work best and which do not work. This is especially important if there are other young children in the family. This may sound like a simple strategy, but open communication and being on the same page goes a long way toward optimising listening during conversations.

Exercise 5: Understanding how to apply communication strategies

Conversation starter:

Now that you and your child have an understanding of the key steps to improve communication and the different strategies they can adopt to optimise conversations, it's time to revisit the table in Exercise 1.

SPEAKER	ENVIRONMENT	LISTENER
<input type="checkbox"/> Accent	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual distractions	<input type="checkbox"/> Not interested in topic
<input type="checkbox"/> Looks away	<input type="checkbox"/> Auditory distractions e.g too much background noise	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional state e.g feeling ill or irritated
<input type="checkbox"/> Hand covering face, mannerisms or gestures	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor room acoustics e.g echo	<input type="checkbox"/> Speech processor positioning
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking too quickly or slowly	<input type="checkbox"/> Distance between the speaker and listener	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication style – See Exercise 2 for more information
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking too loudly or softly	<input type="checkbox"/> Visibility of the speaker	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-confidence
<input type="checkbox"/> Facial hair, facial expressions or exaggerating lip movements	<input type="checkbox"/> Lighting e.g dim or glaring	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivation to hear
<input type="checkbox"/> Chewing gum or food	<input type="checkbox"/> Availability of assistive listening devices e.g wireless accessories	<input type="checkbox"/> Speech reading ability

Discussion Exercise:

In the first exercise, we asked you to go through the table with your child. Specifically, we asked you to reflect on each of the factors and determine what is and what isn't within the control of the conversation participants.

For this last exercise, we are asking you to look at this table again. Work out with your child if they want to change where the "X" or "✓" has been placed.

Where you have put a "✓", discuss the different repair strategies you could use to address these issues and practise using the correct phrasing covered in Exercise 3.

Helpful resources

Hearing rehabilitation that focuses on identifying speech sounds, words and sentence comprehension can support conversation. It may help to introduce some of the below resources to your child and encourage them to do independent hearing rehab at home.

Cochlear Rehab Resources:


Adult Cochlear Implant Home-Based Auditory Training Program


Cochlear's home-based auditory manuals have been designed to provide hands-on material that are flexible and adaptable enough to cover a range of auditory abilities. Separate guides have been developed for those whose hearing loss occurred before or after spoken language was developed. Download guides at www.cochlear.com and click on Ongoing Care and Support/ Rehabilitation Resources/Resources for Teens and Adults.

Independent Rehab Resources:

Below are a list of third party websites and apps to help with music rehab and appreciation.

Apps

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1. Hearoes
 An interactive auditory training platform developed by audiologists and speech pathologists. Designed to help hearing impaired recipients gain confidence identifying speech and environmental sounds. Encourages 'play-based' learning to help with identifying words, vowel and consonant sounds and with sentence comprehension.

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2. i-Angel Sound
 An interactive auditory training program that lets you take control of your listening rehab independently at home. The program provides audio visual feedback.

Websites

- 1. Angel Sound™**
 An interactive auditory training and hearing program. You gain practice in discriminating and identifying sounds and speech components through a series of self-paced modules. The level of difficulty is automatically adjusted to match your developing listening skills.
www.angelsound.tigerspeech.com
- 2. ESL Lab**
 A series of short audio stories on a wide variety of topics. Your comprehension will be tested via a series of questions and told where you answered correctly and incorrectly. Includes listening exercises and vocabulary activities. This site is divided into 'easy', 'medium' and difficult content.
www.esl-lab.com

Cochlear Family

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Cochlear is dedicated to helping people with moderate to profound hearing loss experience a world full of hearing. As the global leader in implantable hearing solutions, we have helped more than 700,000 people of all ages to hear and connect with life's opportunities.

We aim to give people the best lifelong hearing experience and access to next generation technologies. We collaborate with leading clinical, research and support networks to advance hearing science and improve care.

That's why more people choose Cochlear than any other hearing implant company.

www.cochlear.com

References

1. Improving Understanding with Communication Strategies (What to do when you don't understand), Susan Binzer, November 2010, produced by Cochlear Ltd (FUN2041 ISS1 NOV10).
2. Jackson, D. D., Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J. B. (2014). Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes. United Kingdom: W. W. Norton, Incorporated.

Please seek advice from your health professional about treatments for hearing loss. Outcomes may vary, and your health professional will advise you about the factors which could affect your outcome. Always follow the directions for use. Not all products are available in all countries. Please contact your local Cochlear representative for product information.

Views expressed are those of the individual. Consult your health professional to determine if you are a candidate for Cochlear Technology.

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