

Promoting Language Development to Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing Within the Foster Care System

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Abstract

In 2019 it was reported approximately 651,505 children experienced neglect or abuse in their home setting within the United States (The Children's Defense Fund, 2021). 251,359 of those victims entered the foster care system, increasing the total number to a staggering 423,997 children withdrawn from their homes at the time of research (The Children's Defense Fund, 2021). What these statistics fail to reveal are the number of children within the foster care system who have hearing loss. Children with disabilities are approximately 1.8 times more likely to experience child neglect and abuse (Hibbard & Desch, 2007) than their typically developing peers. Therefore, we can assume that there is a noteworthy number of children who are deaf or hard of hearing within the foster care system. Why do these numbers matter? These statistics are important to recognize because there is evidence supporting that children who are deaf or hard of hearing have an increased likelihood of delays in language development. Children develop language through their environment, and it is important that we can support foster caregivers with techniques and materials to encourage language development. This poster explores how speech-language pathologists can successfully promote language development for children who are deaf or hard of hearing in the foster care system by supporting the foster caregiver. Interviews with families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing who have been fostered or adopted will be shared to describe their experiences with speech and language professionals.

Foster Care

Foster Care Statistics

- **423,997 reported cases of children in the foster care system.**
- **32% are within relative homes.**
- **46% are within nonrelative homes.**
- **6% are within institutions.**
- **4% are within group homes.**

Foster Care Statistics obtained from Child Welfare Gateway, 2021.

- Most children who are placed within the foster care system have experienced some form of complex trauma, or experience developmentally traumatic events within the caregiving system. This trauma can be inflicted through sexual, emotional, or physical abuse; neglect; loss; and/or witnessing domestic and community violence (Gabowitz, ZUCKER, & Cook, 2008). Complex trauma can negatively impact a child's social, emotional, and physical developments. Children who received foster care services in the past have consistently scored lower than children who have no received foster care services (Buehler, Orme, Post, & Patterson, 2000).
- Children with disabilities are at a higher risk of being maltreated than their typically developing peers (Wissink, Van Vugt, Moonen, Stams, & Hendriks, 2015).
 - 31% represented children with a disability who also experienced maltreatment.
 - 9% represented typically developing children who experienced maltreatment (Sullivan & Knutson, 2000).
- Hearing Loss is the most common birth defect reported.
 - 3 in every 1,000 births.
 - It can be assumed that children who are deaf or hard of hearing most likely experience higher risks of maltreatment than their typically developing peers (Durity & Oxman, 2006).

Hearing Loss

Children with hearing loss who do not receive early intervention services are going to need more support during language intervention.

- 70% of reported cases of child maltreatment are reported to school officials for school-aged children (Lomas & Johnson, 2012). How does this affect children who are deaf or hard of hearing specifically?
- Early Intervention (birth – 3yr) is considered best practice for hearing loss.
 - Sensitive Period – “a span of time during brain development when a function or capacity is most easily acquired and after which is difficult or impossible to achieve normal functioning...” (Putnam, 2006).
 - Children with sensorineural hearing loss can achieve similar language abilities to their hearing peers if intervention is implemented by six months of age (Enlow, Egeland, Blood, Wright, & Wright, 2012).
- The average age of a child in foster care is between six and eight-years-old (Child Welfare Gateway, 2021).
 - A critical language development period may have passed prior to onset of foster care services.
 - Children enrolled in EI prior to eleven months old acquired stronger vocabulary and verbal reasoning skills than their peers who did not (Moeller, 2000).

Caregiver Involvement

“The early provision of intervention services may provide families the support they need to become actively involved in promoting the child's linguistic development” (Moeller, 2000).

- Caregiver involvement has a major impact on a child's language development.
 - Children with limited family support demonstrated significantly poorer language outcomes than peers with active families (Moeller, 2000).
 - Children who suffered maltreatment often experienced late identification and enrollment in language services (Moeller, 2000).
 - Children with uninvolved families consistently fell below the average range for obtained language scores.
 - The ideal outcomes for children who are deaf or hard of hearing are attained when families are involved in the intervention process (Moeller, 2000).

The Interviews

Goal: assist speech-language pathologists and other early interventionists identify proactive strategies to support foster caregivers and their children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

These interviews highlight the necessity of caregiver involvement in language development. Speech-language pathologists and other early interventionists can relay information and suggest techniques to implement in the foster home setting.

Family Interview Questions:

1. How aware were you or what did you know about your child's speech and language abilities prior to them entering your home? What intervention services did/does your child receive?
2. What did your child's hearing journey look like? How old were they when they received hearing devices?
3. What are some techniques that you learned from a speech or language professional that you implement in your daily routines (if any)?
4. What is the most valuable or beneficial piece of knowledge your language professional has provided?
5. What do you think language professionals should know to help better support other parents/caregivers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing either in the adoption or foster care setting during their early language development years?

How We Can Better Support Foster Caregivers?

- Provide opportunities for families to get involved in their child's therapy services.
- Provide a safe space for caregivers to report concerns and progress.
- Teach and provide information to caregivers on how to advocate for their foster child.
- Invite foster caregivers to participate in planning therapy treatments for their child.
- Be patient with caregivers as they navigate unfamiliar territories such as language intervention.

QR Codes for Interview Clips and Resources

