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by VAANI's in-house Consultants

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a voice for deaf children



Deaf Children's Foundation

## Introduction

This issue of Lakshana - catalyst for transformation is based on the theme of early stimulation for deaf babies. Stimulation is the action of external agents (stimuli) which evokes a response from one or more of our 5 basic senses - touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell. Deaf babies may not be able to use the sense of hearing but they can see, taste, smell and feel. We can stimulate them for language development through the stimulation of these four senses.

We hope the information provided in this information leaflet will be useful for families and care-givers who would like to improve communication with deaf babies. Early development of language would help these children to gain better language comprehension, communication skills, intellectual development and mental health.



Deaf children at the local primary school in Masar, Meghalaya

## Importance of early stimulation for language development

Most brain development occurs in the first two years, so stimulation is crucial for the child in this period. By moving her mouth or limbs, cooing, babbling or smiling, your baby is sharing experiences with you and looking for a response. Deafness is no barrier to this type of communication. With a deaf baby you need to do all the things you would with a hearing baby and a bit more.

When an infant is born, the only part of the brain that is very developed is the part that controls kicking, sleeping, rooting, crying and feeding. Right after birth, the brain starts developing and begins to transmit information based on various life experiences. Stimulation through the senses of touch, hearing, seeing, smelling, and tasting is crucial at this stage of life. We need to give babies different experiences so each of their senses is used. We must watch to see what interests them and provide activities to fit these interests. The earlier we can stimulate them the sooner they will be able to acquire and retain a particular language. The development of an infant's brain is essential to the life-long learning process and this can be achieved through proper sensory stimulation. All newborns should be screened for deafness or hearing loss before they leave the hospital or within the first month of life. Very early discovery of a child's hearing loss or deafness provides parents with an opportunity to learn about communication options. Parents can then start their child's language learning process during this important stage of development.

### Introducing the deaf baby to language

Deaf children should be introduced to language as early as possible. The earlier the child is exposed to language, the sooner s/he begins to acquire language and communication skills. Research suggests that the first six months are most crucial

for a child's development of language skills. A child's language development is measured in milestones, whether he or she is deaf or hearing. A hearing child will use repetitive syllables such as "ma, ma" or "da, da" within the first six months of life; however, if your child is deaf, nonverbal communication, such as pointing, is used to portray those syllables. Just as a hearing child expands on his or her vocabulary, a deaf child will initially learn to communicate through sign language, with both types of children learning the foundations and rules of language development.

Conversing, even nonverbally, helps a baby's brain grasp the concept of communication. Signing provides an intermediate linguistic level that bridges the gap between understanding language and mastering talking. It helps the baby progress towards verbal dialogue before starting to speak effectively. This is also useful for babies, who may, in the future, not be able to acquire fluent speech. Not only does it help them communicate effectively, it also helps them develop normally, since language is essential to mental development.

## Some ideas for language stimulation for babies

### 1. Some ideas for language stimulation for babies

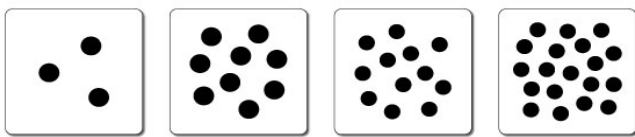
The auditory portion of the brain of deaf babies is not wired for hearing at all. Instead, it responds to visual stimuli. Visual learning strategies are an integral component when your deaf child is learning language development. For this reason, this issue of Lakshana pays special attention to the stimulation of this particular sense.

Using visual learning and repetitive techniques help to develop a language pattern, whether verbal or nonverbal. A deaf baby sees more than he or she hears.

These tips help to communicate through your baby's eyes:

Example: flashing these visual stimulation cards with bright picture of fruits, colors, animals, nature, etc. to a baby helps visual maturation and right brain development. The best distance to place the card is 8 to 12 inches from your baby's eyes.

Phase 1 – (0 to 3 Months)



Phase 2 – 4 to 6 months



Phase 3 – 6 months and above



**Stimulating the other three senses:**

## 2. Taste

A baby's sense of taste develops properly towards the end of the first year. It is important to introduce different tastes to stimulate this sense, in combination with the sense of smell and touch. While smell, touch and taste are basically 'left-brain' senses, stimulating these senses helps in building pathways to the right side of the brain. The right-brain senses are language acquisition, memory, musical aptitude, intuition and mathematics which are basic skills that a baby needs to acquire as s/he grows.

## 3. Smell

Spending time with the baby to help in distinguishing the smells of fruit, food, soap and perfume is similar to stimulating the baby's sense of feeling. Besides helping the baby to make use of the right-side of the brain, this is an activity that brings about a lot of bonding between the baby and the caregiver.

## 4. Stimulating the sense of Feeling

Caregivers should show their feelings by cuddling and touching the baby often. Hearing mothers with deaf babies should augment their normal communication with more facial expression, more gestures and more animation. Touch is an important mode of communication with deaf babies as it gets their visual attention. It can be a means of compensating for the loss of hearing at this age. Textures such as sand, water, leaves and even clothing materials are wonderful stimuli.

### Points for a caregiver to remember:

- Baby stimulation activities must develop the abilities to see, focus and follow specific moving objects and distinguish faces
- Communicating with a baby with hearing loss is almost the same as with a baby who hears normally.
- Your deaf baby can't hear what you say but your feelings show on your face and body. They tell your baby that you love him/her and are there to take care of him/her.
- Talking teaches your baby to look at your face to communicate. That will help him/her as s/he learns to read lips and/or speak.
- Even if you use sign language, your baby will need to watch your face.
- Try to figure out what your baby's trying to tell you. This lets your baby know you care.
- It is also very important to give reinforcement (praise) to your deaf child: you should respond quickly to your child's speech/ sign attempts and verbal /non verbal requests by your actions and/or verbal responses.



## Sundeep's Story

Sundeep Kothari works with VAANI, Deaf Children's Foundation as an Assistant Trainer and Deaf Role Model. VAANI is proud to project him as an ideal role model for young deaf children – articulate, gentle, educated and talented. Sundeep works comfortably with parents and children and his presence is an inspiration to participants at VAANI workshops. Sundeep lost his hearing when he was around one year old, due to wrong medicines given by a doctor for his high fever. His parents only realized that he had lost his hearing when he wouldn't respond to any sound or to their calls.

It worried his parents a lot because they did not know what to do with their deaf child. They went to various doctors with the hope of curing his deafness, but no one could help. Sundeep was admitted to a regular school in Ranchi where he was the only deaf child. A few days of undergoing the traumatic experience of being punished and scolded by the teacher and being bullied by other children got Sundeep so scared that he refused to attend school at all.

Sundeep moved to Kolkata with his mother when he was six years old. He was initially admitted to a special school but his parents were not satisfied with his progress in speech and his studies. His parents took him to Chennai to get him checked by an ENT Specialist. He told them that Sundeep was a healthy child, and it was only his hearing loss that had affected his speech. He advised them to get him a set of hearing aids and admit him to The Oral School for Deaf Children in Kolkata. This is where Sundeep learnt American Sign Language, took his speech training and completed his secondary education from the National Open School. Sundeep has been wearing his hearing aids the whole day since he was six years old.



*Sundeep, with his wife, Payal, and his daughter Medha*

Before he took admission into The Oral School for Deaf Children, his mother spoke to him only in Hindi, but she underwent a course in English as per his teacher's advice. She also would regularly observe the interaction between him and his teacher. She persisted in her efforts to make sure Sundeep learnt well and applied his knowledge better. His father made sure that he told Sundeep the names of roads, and keep him informed of bus routes whenever they travelled together. His father also taught him how to make electricity bill payments and bank transactions while he was still a teenager. This has gone a long way in making Sundeep independent and confident. His parents are like friends to Sundeep, and that has made a world of difference to his personality.

Sundeep got married to a hearing impaired girl called Payal and they have a two year old hearing daughter. Their daughter understands both her parents really well and is a natural signer even at her young age.