Language Acquisition and Communication Access:

THE PROBLEMS FACING YOUNG CHILDREN
Parents are told that cochlear implant (CI) is what the child needs to learn how to speak and have language acquisition.

Parents are told that American Sign Language (ASL) would hinder a deaf child’s language acquisition.
How the medical field has an impact on what parents decide to do for their children positively

- Access to sounds
- Access to different modality of communications, although maybe not the best fit for the child
How the medical field has an impact on what parents decide to do for their children negatively

- Children become delayed linguistically due to lack of access to a language.
- Being delayed linguistically leads to lack of access to communication
- Lack of communication leads to struggles academically, socially, psychologically
What are the pros of CI at an early age

- Access to sounds
- Possible access to auditory language if other supports are provided (sign language, cued speech, speech therapy, family support)
What are the cons of CI at an early age

- If the child does not start with a language, any language, s/he becomes delayed with language development
- If there is not enough support in addition to CI, the child will have struggles with language.
- Bottom line- CI alone does not give the deaf child access to language acquisition
What makes CI successful or unsuccessful pertaining to language acquisition?

- CI is unsuccessful when there is a lack of language foundation.
- CI is successful when there is a language foundation and a team working together. A team includes parents, teacher of deaf, deaf role models, interpreters, speech pathologists, and educators.

*Note - This applies to hearing aids also.
Ways deaf children learn with their eyes

- With any child, hearing or deaf, 80 percent of learning occurs through the eyes.
- Frequent shift eye gaze leading to early vocabulary development.
- Visual attention being engaged and directed by parents and educators to contexts.
- Paying attention to environment and other’s expressions and body language.
Ways deaf/blind learn with their hands

- Touch Signals
- Pro Tactile
- Haptic Communication
- Back Channeling (BC) and Back-Back Channeling (BBC)
- Exploration of the environment s/he is in
Benefits of sign language for deaf and blind/deaf children

- Gives blind/deaf children access to communication and the world via touch
- Greater advantages in areas of cognitive benefits, metalinguistic awareness and enhanced executive functions such as problem solving, attention control, and task switching
- Language acquisition
- Healthier sense of self socio-emotionally, and psychologically
Do parents learn and use ASL?

- Only 25 percent of parents learn how to use ASL fluently.
- Parents are not to be blamed for not learning sign language. Some have difficulty. Some do learn sign but not as fluently.
- Resources such as web sites for learning ASL and apps on mobile phone are available to parents to learn.
Language, any language including ASL, is important and critical to a child’s development.

Having a language leads to better learning potential in a child, any child including deaf children.
What happens in early intervention, preschool, and school?

- It depends on the area, what the professionals are aware of, where they got their education (John Hopkins University vs Gallaudet), and their knowledge of Deaf culture.
Do Early Childhood Educators use a range of language access tools?

- Again, it depends on the area, what the professionals are aware of, where they got their education (John Hopkins University vs Gallaudet), and their knowledge of Deaf culture.
Will a family place a deaf child in a neighborhood school?

- It depends on the team they have for their child, what advice they are given, the level of contact, if any, they have with a deaf community, what knowledge they may have already possessed regarding deaf children, etc.
Will the local school district offer to send a child to deaf school or provide ASL in local classrooms?

- It depends on who works at the local school district, whether or not they have knowledge about deaf children and their needs, level of advocacy from parents and professionals, and if there is an awareness about ASL.
How can we help these children survive and thrive in the current educational system?

- Advocacy for early childhood language acquisition
- Build a team that includes deaf people
- Find ways to create more resources
- Spread awareness in the community that there are resources
We should advocate for bills like LEAD-K. What is LEAD-K?

- LEAD-K is a bill model called Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids
- The bill proposes to establish a task force of professionals to recommend framework to access the language milestones of Deaf and Hard of Children aged 0-5
- Collect valuable data to end the language deprivation epidemic among deaf and hard of hearing children
- Create resources for parents of Deaf and HH
Choices that parents and educators make relating to communication

- Often parents decide to focus on speech, lipreading, and cued speech without the supplement of sign language based on their first contact’s advice.
- As for educators, it really depends on what their knowledge is, what they’ve learned in college, and which college they attended.
Data showing the results of choices made-

- On handout provided
How lack of language acquisition and access harms a deaf child in ways other than academically:

- Affects learning potential
- Limited literacy and communication capability
- Future college opportunities
- Future career/employment opportunities
- Psychological issues
- Socio-emotional issues
What do you think we should advocate for?
And what should we, as disability advocates, do?
States in which LEAD-K has been passed

- 2015: California
- 2016: Kansas and Hawaii
- 2017: Oregon
- 2018: South Dakota, Georgia, Louisiana
- 2019: Indiana, Texas, Connecticut, Maine, & New Jersey