

# Supporting Medical Homes & Community Partners to Connect Families of Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing to Services

## SOUND BEGINNINGS AT UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

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### The Urgent Need

#### It Takes a Village

Though a majority of parents desire spoken language outcomes for their young children who are deaf/hard of hearing (DHH), they often do not intuitively know what services they need to engage with. Unfortunately, medical homes and community agencies sometimes do not fully understand their role in connecting families to pediatric audiological care and listening and spoken language (LSL) specialists and programs that are required to attain optimal spoken language outcomes. They also may not grasp that infants and young children with hearing loss require immediate access to sound and specialized services in order to facilitate brain development according to natural developmental timelines. Therefore, pediatric audiologists and LSL providers need to support medical and community partners so they can refer families to services with urgent timeliness.



#### What They Need To Know

Medical and community partners should understand:

##### Audiology Factors

Continual hearing monitoring is required beyond newborn hearing screenings to identify a child's new or progressive hearing loss.

Because audiological protocols vary, pediatric audiologists are needed for infants and children.

A child's decreased response to sound or a speech/language delay indicates a referral to a pediatric audiologist.

##### Early Intervention (EI) Factors

Any suspected hearing loss or speech/language delay indicates an urgent referral to early intervention services.

Because of the specialized focus on audition, LSL providers are needed for children who are DHH.

With timely access to sound and effective LSL services, most children with any severity of hearing loss can achieve typical language outcomes.

### The Response

#### Connecting with the Medical Community

Medical providers are trained on when to refer families to pediatric audiologists and early intervention services as well as on current LSL-based research and foundational concepts.

#### Connecting with Community Resources

Community partners are likewise trained on when to refer families to services as well as on how to support language-building interactions between parents and children.

#### Virtual Story Times

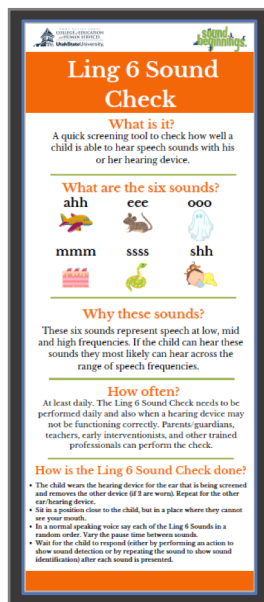
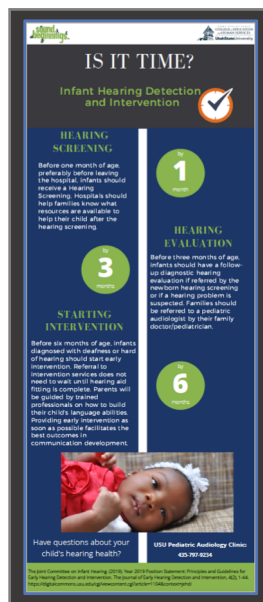
Families participate in English and Spanish virtual story times that focus on training LSL strategies. Some sessions are also shared with a local library for wider public reach.

#### Social Media Groups

Resources are posted to social media groups to raise awareness of services available and to facilitate inter-family connections as they acquire LSL-based information and skills.

#### Infograms

Flyers with LSL-based information are electronically shared to parents, medical providers, and community outreach programs.



### Ongoing Concerns

#### The impact of COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic greatly challenged the working connection of community services for families. Regular access to medical care, including audiology, was interrupted. Similarly, many educational and intervention services periodically transitioned from in-person to remote delivery, often resulting in decreased service time. These shifts in medical, educational, and intervention services placed even more responsibility on parents of children with hearing loss to directly oversee and facilitate their children's developmental and educational progress. Many of these parents expressed overwhelm at orienting to new service delivery platforms and schedules while managing their disrupted family routines and looming financial strains. Though they suddenly found more family time together from unexpected quarantines, several expressed that their over-taxed capacities challenged a focus on their children's myriad needs. These parents benefit from service providers who carefully consider each family's capacity in negotiating intervention targets.

It is probable that due to disruptions in medical care and other community services during the pandemic, that some children's hearing loss have gone undetected and/or underserved. This underscores the urgent need to educate the public at large regarding when to refer families to a pediatric audiologist and to LSL-based early intervention services in order to allay avoidable developmental delays in spoken language outcomes.

#### A Special Thanks

Sound Beginnings at Utah State University gratefully acknowledges the Oberkotter Foundation for their support of our program in serving families of young children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing.