

Let's Talk About...

Hearing loss is an invisible disability. Before babies learn to respond to words, we have call-and-response conversations with them. We repeat their sounds. While changing their diapers or feeding them, we chat about what we are doing. As we talk with them, they learn to understand language and how language is used.

By about the fifth month of pregnancy, an unborn baby can hear the same way an adult does. A baby born with a hearing loss is already developmentally delayed by the time of birth. After birth, any delay in finding that hearing loss puts normal development at risk. About 1 in every 250 children have enough hearing loss to make it difficult to develop normal speech and language. This can affect success in school and social skills.

Often hearing loss is not discovered until someone notices that the child is not talking normally. This may be later than two years of age. The sooner you find a hearing loss, the sooner treatment can begin. If your child begins treatment earlier in life, he or she will have fewer long-term effects.

According to Utah law, newborns must be screened for hearing loss before they leave the hospital. A test called Brainstem Auditory Evoked Response (BAER) can begin to tell you how your baby is hearing. The testing is done while the baby sleeps. This test does not give you complete information about hearing. If needed, other testing may include watching how your child responds to sounds in a sound-proof booth.

In addition to formal hearing testing, you should watch your child's responses to sound and speech development at home. This will

What can your baby hear?

help you know if your child needs help. The following list can help you tell if your child is developing normal responses to sound.

0-3 months

- Startled by sharp clap within 3-6 feet
- Can be awakened from sleep with sounds (without being touched).
- Cries at sudden, loud noises (door slamming, dog barking)
- Reassured by laughter and sounds of pleasure
- Calmed by voice, appears to listen
- May "coo" when being talked to
- Responds to your voice by making sounds
- Interested in contrasting sound (loud-soft, high-low, etc.)

Changes that can be seen include:

- Stops activity
- Awakes from sleep
- Speeds up or stops sucking
- Widens or blinks eyes
- Has a change in breathing or heart rate
- Raises eyebrows
- Makes faces

3-6 months

- Knows mother's voice
- Enjoys making noises (crying, lip noises, tongue clacking)
- Laughs, coos, and babbles for pleasure
- Begins to turn head toward sounds

- Responds to loving/angry tones of voice
- Begins to look for soft speech sounds
- May not be startled as in the earlier period

6-9 months

- Looks side to side to find source of sound—your baby must be able to hear in both ears
- Knows own name when others say it
- Searches for sounds that are at eye level and downward
- Plays pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo
- Imitates simple sounds
- Understands simple words (no-no, oh-oh)
- Pays attention to music or singing
- Knows names of family members even when person is not in sight

9-12 months

- Searches for sources of sound (bell or squeak toy)
- Can find a sound coming from behind self
- Enjoys hearing new words
- Imitates sound of cows, clocks, dogs, etc.
- Uses first meaningful word
- Babble sounds more like a conversation with some recognizable words
- Points to or looks at a familiar object when asked
- Can wave “bye-bye” when asked to
- Understands simple questions (“Where is mommy?”)

If you think your child may have a hearing loss, remember that no child is too young to be tested. The earlier we find a hearing loss, the sooner your child can begin the training to hear normally. The goal of finding a hearing loss early is to help your child develop his best communication and social skills.

If you have any questions about your child’s hearing, please talk with your child’s doctor or an audiologist at PCMC’s Speech/Language and Hearing Centers. Please contact the location closest to you for an appointment:

PCMC Rehab West
3845 West 4700 South #102
Taylorsville
964-4060

PCMC Rehab North
280 N. Main St.
Bountiful
292-8665

PCMC Rehab South
870 East 9400 South, #112
Sandy
571-1223

PCMC
100 North Medical Drive
Salt Lake City
588-3950

