

We Nurture With Our Voice

Auditory Imprinting

Just as ducklings bond with (or imprint upon) the first thing they see, children also bond with their parents, although less with sight and more with sound – that is, by **hearing and listening to their parents' voices**.



The parent-child bond occurs naturally for most families, so the process is usually taken for granted, including the impact of hearing parents' voices. However, when children have a hearing loss, their families face a unique challenge: there is some important catching up to do, but families can still nurture that essential parent-child bond by helping babies hear their parents' voice.

Here is a family-friendly suggestion: support bonding with "auditory imprinting" by talking and singing to your child as much as possible, so that your voice is a constant reassurance. Additionally, as you talk and sing, mention your memories of different sounds in your life, and start building "sound memories" with your child. (Be sure you are close; be sure it is quiet around you.)

1. **Refresh your own auditory memories.** Think back to important sounds: a loved one's voice, a favorite song, sounds of nature (ocean waves, rain on a window), a church bell, a clock ticking. These memories are unique to you alone.
2. **Name a feeling associated with those sounds.** What words describe your emotions regarding those memories? Peaceful, nostalgic, lonely, loved, uncertain, safe, confused, confident...? We all unconsciously relate emotions to sounds, but we usually don't describe those emotions out loud. However, it's an easy habit to develop.
3. **Share the sound memory and the related feeling with your child.** Take time each day to say, "When I hear _____, I feel _____" or "When I heard _____, I remember feeling _____." The memory has a story behind it; share that with your child, too. Hearing you describe emotional responses will help your child share personally important memories with you, as well as understand what emotions are and their importance in our lives.
4. **Build new sound/feeling memories with your child.** Notice the sounds of the day: "When I hear our dog bark, I am happy he is part of our family." "When I hear mommy's car pull in the driveway, I feel grateful." "When I hear you laugh, it warms my heart." And eventually, "When you hear that sound, what do you feel?"

Children with hearing loss need abundant listening practice. "Auditory imprinting" helps children hear the most important sound of all: the love in a parent's voice.