



Minimizing Background Noise

Skill Being Taught: Awareness of Sounds—Increasing parents' and service providers' awareness of background noises that make it hard for a child to hear speech.

Facts

1. The world is a noisy place! Sounds come from all directions, both inside and outside your home.
2. A child who is developing listening skills has difficulty hearing speech sounds and words when there are other noises in the room.
3. Household appliances make a variety of noises that typically go unnoticed by family members who do not have hearing problems.
4. Naturally occurring sounds are sometimes interpreted as loud, distracting, or even painful by a child who has a new cochlear implant or has just had her implant remapped.
5. Sounds made by things like televisions, videogames, music players, vacuum cleaners, and blenders can be very disruptive to a child's ability to pay attention when someone is talking to her.
6. A quiet environment is very important when a child who has a cochlear implant is learning how to listen.

What outcomes do we want?

The goals are (1) for parents and other caregivers to become aware of the variety of sounds that occur in settings where they typically interact with a child who has a cochlear implant, and (2) to limit background noises that make it hard for the child to hear speech sounds.

What do we need to do?

Before you begin to interact with your child in any daily routine, take a moment to check out the sounds in the setting where you'll be talking with your child.

Step #1: Take notice of noisy household appliances or devices and, if possible, turn them off before you begin (e.g., stop the dishwasher if you'll be working at the kitchen table, turn off the TV, ask your child's brother or sister to use headphones while playing a computer game in the next room).

Step #2: When choosing a location to interact with your child, select a place that is away from things that make noise but cannot be turned off (e.g., an air conditioner, a heater that cycles on and off, a portable fan, an open window near a busy street, a fish tank with a noisy pump).

Step #3: Keep other background noises to a minimum so your child will be able to focus on the most important sound of all—your voice!

Step #4: Should an unexpected or unplanned sound occur during the time you are interacting with your child, make a point of calling her attention to it. Give her a gestural or tactile cue to "Listen!" and then, comment on what happened. For example, if the sound of the automatic garage door opening means that Mommy is home, say, "Listen to the garage door. Mommy's home!" If an alarm clock ringing means it is time for her sister to wake up, say, "Do you hear the alarm clock? It's time for sister to get up!"