COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AT A GLANCE

❖ **TALK/SIGN TO YOUR CHILD – USE SELF-TALK AND PARALLEL-TALK**

Talk/sign about what *you* are doing throughout the day (self-talk). Talk/sign about what *your child* is doing (parallel-talk). Speak/sign naturally and at a normal volume and/or pace. Speak in your native language. Providing Deaf/hard of hearing children with a solid language foundation (no matter what language it is), is essential.

❖ **PLAY AND SING**

Play is the number one way that children learn language, new skills and concepts, and acquire information about their world. Have fun, be silly, and enjoy each other's company. Singing is a great way to emphasize listening and language. Vary the rhythm, pitch, rate, and loudness or songs to give a wider listening experience. Add movements such as clapping, tapping, and stomping to emphasize the beat. Play freeze dance (stop and go with the music) to highlight when the music is on and when the music stops.

❖ **COMMENT RATHER THAN QUESTION**

Asking a child questions that test their knowledge in order to teach concepts (e.g., asking "What does a cow say?" to teach animal sounds, or asking "What colour is this?" to teach colours) is quite a natural thing for adults to do. However, it can place a lot of pressure on the child and is not the best teaching method. Instead, turn your questions into comments (e.g. "I see a cow. The cow says 'moo'.") as much as possible to keep the pressure off and the play flowing. This sets the stage for learning and fun!

❖ **REDUCE BACKGROUND NOISE**

Be aware of background noise in your environment. Turn off the TV/radio/music, shut doors or windows, put down rugs and add curtains to reduce competing noise. Tennis balls on chair and table legs can also help reduce noise.

❖ **THINK ABOUT POSITIONING**

Get down to your child's physical level. Get face to face and make eye contact, and establish joint attention. Keep your mouth visible, and facilitate speech reading by not standing in front of windows or other light sources. Make sure there is good lighting so your child can see you signing.

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❖ **GET CLOSER NOT LOUDER**

Raising your voice can distort the speech signal. Instead, get closer to your child when communicating with him. A distance of 1-3 feet is ideal, but you may need to be closer if you're in a very noisy environment. An FM system can help overcome the challenge of large distances.

❖ **HIGHLIGHT AUDITORY INFORMATION**

Use a listening posture (e.g. point to ear) and say "I heard that" in response to new/unexpected sounds. Draw your child's attention to environmental sounds (heater, fan, microwave, traffic). Walk over and explore the source of sounds with him. Use sound effects (e.g. animal sounds, vehicle sounds) to enhance stories, music time, and play time.

❖ **HIGHLIGHT VISUAL INFORMATION**

Make use of visual information such as signs, facial expressions, body language, real objects and pictures to supplement verbal information. Use sign language to support and supplement spoken language.

❖ **WATCH, WAIT AND RESPOND**

Observe the types of things that your child is interested in. Observe the different ways that he is communicating (e.g. eye gaze, gestures, signs, vocalizations, words). Wait for your child to take his turn, whether spoken or manual (by signing, pointing, looking at an object and then back to you), then respond.

❖ **IMITATE AND ADD**

Imitate your child's actions, signs, vocalizations and words. Add the next step for him. For example, if your child points at the car you can point and say "Car," "Big car" or use the sign for *car* and say "car". Simple language and sentence fragments are fine, but make sure your language is grammatically correct.

❖ **REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT**

Don't be afraid to use the same words and phrases many times over in your interactions with your child throughout the day. Your child will need to hear a word and/or see a sign many times in order to understand it and then be able use it. Repetition is essential to children's learning.