



**HANDS &
VOICES™
MINNESOTA**

**Supporting families with
children who are deaf &
hard of hearing**



FOCUS

7 Holiday Celebration Tips for Children Who Are Deaf Hard of Hearing

The stretch from Thanksgiving to New Year's is full of delicious meals, annual traditions, and loud celebrations. It is a time of year that most families look forward to. But with all the commotion, it is easy for children who are deaf and hard of hearing to feel sidelined as they watch everyone around them take part in the festivities. Even with hearing assistive technologies like hearing aids or cochlear implants, it's incredibly hard to follow conversations when there's too much ambient noise.

But with these 7 strategies, you can help your child feel more fully integrated in this year's holiday celebrations.

1. Involve Them in the Planning

The most important tip is to involve your child throughout the planning process.



Advanced planning provide your child with a sense of ownership. They will be more attentive throughout dinner – Your child will become an active “host” instead of a passive “participant.”

2. Focus on Family Traditions

Are there special decorations,

recipes, games, or songs that appear every year? If so, discuss what makes these traditions so special to your child. If your family does not have any annual traditions, this year's a great time to create some. Whether you are inventing, refining or even ditching annual holiday traditions – the benefit to your child is the same. Each discussion presents another opportunity to learn new words and develop stronger language and listening skills.

3. Involve Them in the Cooking

Whenever possible, you should encourage your child to help with all the cooking. That is because regardless of religion, celebration or holiday, the meal is usually the centerpiece of the occasion.

4. Assign Seats Strategically

Another great tip is to map out seating arrangements strategically (for the meal). Consider seating your child next to someone who can keep them engaged throughout the meal. The designated companion can also repeat tidbits that your child misses – whether it is an interesting story or the end of a joke.

5. Leverage Technology

Many children who are deaf and hard of hearing rely on hearing assistive technologies like hearing aids and cochlear implants. If your child does, it is important that their devices are in good working order, charged, and ready to go for the holiday season.



6. Choose the Right Music

Generally, you should keep background music to a minimum. Otherwise, you are simply adding more ambient noise at a time when your kid may already be struggling to hear what's happening around them.

7. Encourage Family Buy-In

One final tip is to let all your guests know about the time and effort that your child invested to make this year's celebration so successful.

How Will You Celebrate This Holiday Season?

If your child is like most kids, they are focused on all the gifts. This is only natural. But 10 or more years from now, all those presents will be forgotten. What your kid will remember from their childhood days are the togetherness that come with the holidays.

These strategies will help strengthen those bonds. And if all goes well, your child will develop fond memories worth sharing with their own children many years from now.

Article from CCHAT Center Sacramento, 11100 Coloma Road, Rancho Cordova, CA, 95670, US, <http://www.cchatsacramento.org>

Deaf Experience

with Beth Leipholtz

I've been muddling through certain things lately, struggling to find the right words. I feel...Behind, I guess.

It's silly, and I know it. But so many people I know who had babies around the same time as Coop are now onto their second child. And the first, the same age as Coop, sometimes even younger...they're talking. They're making sentences. Expressing themselves verbally. Being understood.

When you have a child that is not on a linear path for whatever reason, you tend to forget what linear even IS. Especially when it's your first child, because to you, this is normal. This is what you know. This is where your child is. This is where you meet them.

And I think more than anything, 2020 intensified that. We existed in our little bubble, rarely around other kids Cooper's age. And now that bubble is expanding again, which is great.

But it's also really damn hard. It's landing in reality after being shielded from it.

It's this internal struggle because I love my friends. I love their kids. I love that they're learning on their linear path. But I can't help the literal tears that well up when I hear them talk, and hear Cooper's



babbles in comparison. I know he's 10+ months behind other kids when it comes to hearing. I know he is learning two languages. I know his progress will be slower. I know he is so smart and comprehends so much. I know all these things logically.



But I also know the world as a whole won't meet him where he is. The world won't know two languages. The world won't understand HIS pronunciation of words. And that is terrifying.

What it comes down to is that what I know doesn't matter because logic doesn't take root in your heart. Love and pain and comparison and fear and reality live there. Not logic.

Ever since moving past Cooper's diagnosis and accepting it, I've been waiting for it to get hard. And it hasn't been. It's been challenging logistically, but not so much emotionally.

So I guess this is it — this is where it gets hard. That's the note I'm ending this on, because it's where I am. And if the world can meet me where I am, there's hope that it can meet Coop where he is, too.

*Beth Leipholtz is a photographer, designer, and writer.
Website: spiritandsoulphoto.com*

*Article from HVHQ Raising a Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child
;Meet Me Where I Am July 14, 2021*

In Your Corner

with Laura Godfrey

I am excited to share with you that the planned merger between Lifetrack and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSS) was completed as of July 1, and our services are stronger than ever. While the name includes a specific religion, LSS itself has no religious affiliation. We answer the call by providing a wide variety of care and services to people in need regardless of age, race, culture or religious affiliation. Lifetrack had been a non-profit collective since 1948 offering support for families with a wide range of services. MNH&V joined Lifetrack over 15 years ago and was pleased to be able to be a part of the organization that also held the Deaf Mentor Family Program, with whom we collaborate to support families with children who are deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing.

Lifetrack entered into a management services agreement with LSS in January 2019. Since then, Lifetrack services have undergone substantial changes to strengthen the organization and maintain and grow services needed in our community.

On July 1, Lifetrack began service delivery as Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota. LSS is one of Minnesota's largest statewide social service nonprofits, supporting 100,000 individuals in 300 communities

each year in all 87 counties of Minnesota. LSS shares Lifetrack's value system of service to families and individuals and helping them reach their full potential. Being a program within a large organization allows us to grow in our service to families with children who are deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing.

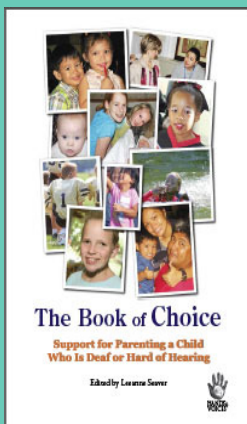
So what does this mean for our MNH&V families? Aside from seeing the LSS logo on our print materials you might not notice much difference. But for us it means we have additional support and resources behind the scenes that allow us put forth even more of our time and energy into programs and innovations that ultimately support you, the families. We are honored to be welcomed into LSS and look forward to continue to serve our families in an even greater capacity.

Laura Godfrey started as a Parent Guide with MN Hands & Voices 15 years ago. She recently left her position as Director of MNHV. She resides in the metro with her family.

The Book of Choice is a wonderful expression of what we know to be true: parents sharing directly with other parents of children who are deaf or hard

of hearing bring an essential kind of hope, inspiration and empowerment.

For a copy go to <https://www.handsandvoices.org/resources/products.htm#boc>



I am MNHV

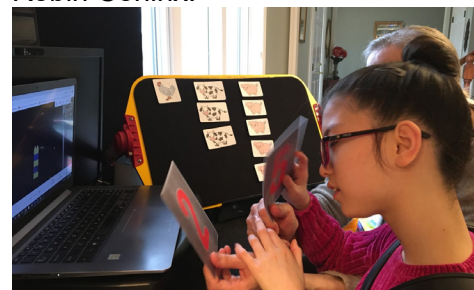
with Carrie Reber Zeman

Educational advocacy does not come naturally to me. I am an introvert and a peacemaker; I don't like making waves. Parenting my first three children through their school careers came easily. They are neurotypical and took to school like ducklings to water.

My youngest daughter, Joy, has been my special education. I knew when I adopted her that she had cerebral palsy. When she was nine, I learned that Joy also lives with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) and hearing loss, educationally qualifying as DeafBlind.

The addition of a full-time DeafBlind Intervener taught Joy the concept of communication and she made deep inroads against the limitations of CVI. Joy's IEP team had known me since preschool and the two-way sharing between home and school meant everyone in Joy's life was on the same page.

Joy's move to Middle School at 6th grade was starkly different. I quickly grasped that the new school was a poor fit. My previous educational advocacy skills extended no further than tweaking her IEP. An Internet search led me to the Minnesota Hands and Voices ASTra Guide Robin Coninx.



Robin listened with uncommon understanding. Then she offered to mail me a free copy of Educational Advocacy for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: The Hands & Voices Guidebook. Educational Advocacy, along with Robin's coaching, she helped me map out and advocate for a different school setting for Joy. The process was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. But by the time Joy came home for Distance Learning, her IEP team had a plan to transition Joy to a new classroom in a different building better suited to her needs as a learner with Cortical Visual Impairment.

Joy is 14 years old and in 8th grade. Joy spent her 7th grade year at home, interfacing with her new school team via the Internet. During that span, Joy has moved from a functional IEP to an academic one. How? Educational Advocacy supplied the information and inspiration I needed to advocate for appropriate classroom settings. In them, Joy has shown us that she knows how to read print, can do math, her auditory comprehension is near grade-level, and can use eye-gaze to access AAC.

Joy is now learning in environments with appropriate adaptations for her complex needs and is exceeding every expectation projected for her. Best of all, she loves learning. Every child deserves this! Request a copy of [Educational Advocacy for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: The Hands & Voices Guidebook](#) today.

Transition

The Minnesota Employment Center (MEC) for People Who are Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing provides comprehensive employment and job placement services which enable people to achieve their career goals, increase their self-sufficiency, and lead self-determined lives in the community. MEC serves the Twin Cities metro area and Greater Minnesota.

Job Placement

MEC assists individuals to overcome barriers to employment, find jobs well-matched to their skills and interests with these services:

- Pre-employment evaluations/assessments
- Career planning/goal-setting
- Teaching networking/ job-searching skills
- Finding suitable job leads/connecting employers with skilled candidates
- Developing resumes/cover letters
- Completing job applications
- Conducting mock interviews
- Public transportation training
- Job Coaching

People using MEC's customized employment and job placement services work in a variety of companies, including retail stores, child care centers, restaurants, manufacturing businesses, offices, and hospitality venues.

For more information, contact
Mnemploymentcenter.org
 651-265-2337 (V)
 651-243-3047 (VP)

MNH&V Transition Talk with Mercedes Nelson

MNHV asked Mercedes, age 18, and her mother Judy a series of questions about Mercedes' experiences transitioning to adulthood.

Mercedes lives with her family in Central Minnesota. When she is not working at Fleet Farm or volunteering at her local church you just might find her bowling, fishing, swimming or heading to the movies with a few of her friends.

Mercedes was identified with a bilateral moderate to severe hearing difference. She wears hearing aids and her preferred mode of communication is speech. Mercedes identifies as hard of hearing. MNHV asked her what she liked most about being DHH. Mercedes said, "I can shut off my hearing aids if I don't want to listen!" She prefers to not to be called "disabled" as it makes her feel less than others or not as valued.

While in school, Mercedes advocated for herself that she preferred not to wear the FM system around her neck.

FM systems are wireless assistive hearing devices that enhance the use of hearing aids, cochlear implants and also assist people who are hard of hearing but do not wear hearing aids, in particular over distance and in noisy environments. They enable sound to be picked up closer to a speaker, sound source or connected directly to the sound source and transmitted to the individual providing greater clarity of speech/sound and a reduction in background noise.

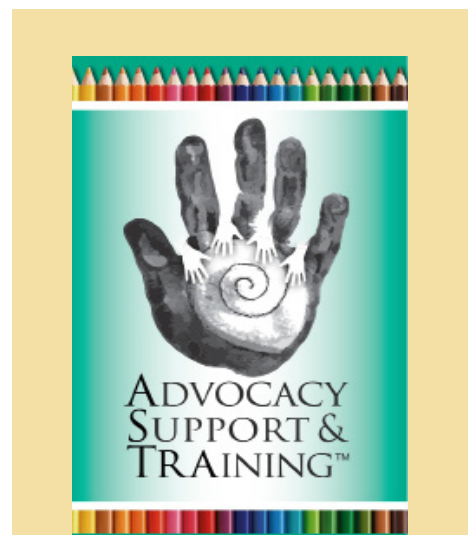
Mercedes' advice to parents raising kids with a hearing difference is to listen to their children and to be there for them so they can learn how to advocate for themselves.

Her advice for those in the education system is to be patient, listen to their deaf, deafblind and deaf hard of hearing students. If their students aren't communicating with them, encourage them to do so. Find a way to help them communicate.



Mercedes is most proud of her independence. She has a job and a car. Her goal is to continue saving income so she can live independently, have a better social connection with peers and purchase a nice big truck.

Judy is proud of Mercedes continuing her education and working towards her independence.



The H&V Guidebook is the essential book for families, advocates, and professionals who support the education of children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Contact either of the MN ASTra Advocates for your copy today;
 Shannon Hohrman
shannon.hohrman@lssmn.org
 Robin Coninx
robin.coninx@lssmn.org

MNHV Online Family Events are Like Distant Learning, But Way More Fun!



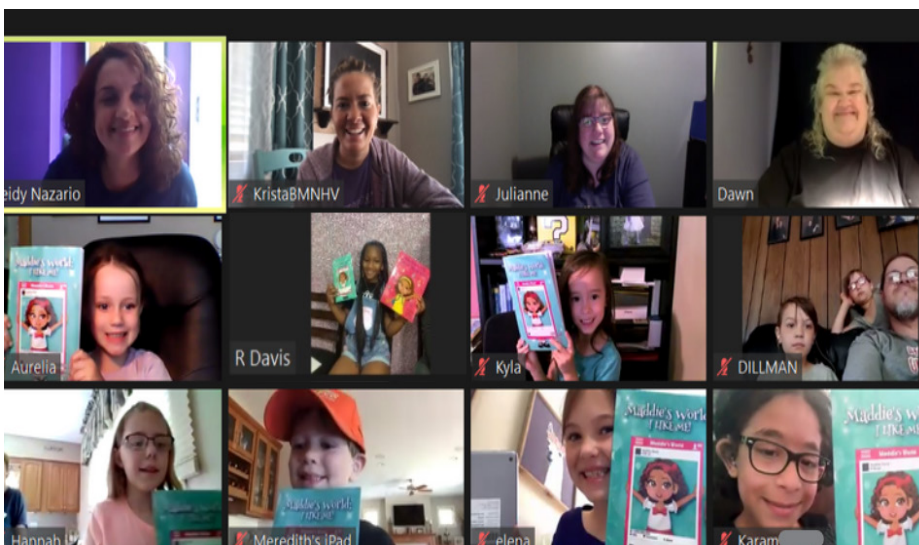
“Ice Cream Social”

In July, we made ice-cream in a jar. Afterwards Amy Perron presented about the STAR Program! A System of Technology to Achieve Results (STAR) is located in MN and their mission is to help all Minnesotans with disabilities gain access to and acquire the assistive technology they need to live, learn, work and play.

“Reading & Finger Puppet

On Saturday June 26th, DHH Guide Janie Barlow and Parent Guide Suzanne Iwainat hosted a successful event!

They read the book, “Ranvir Cannot Hear”. The kiddos sure enjoyed their puppet fingers and the story.



Maddie’s World: I like me!

Thanks to our DHH Guide Supervisor Heidi Nazario and Parent Guide Krista Blood for creating this event, and to Deaf Mentor Julianne Kinney for co-hosting a very engaged and chatty event!

The kids sure had a blast and even the seven year old author, Maddie Davis, showed up to say hi and joined the discussion.

Find a current list of MNHV Online Family Events online, for more information and registration visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/o/minnesota-hands-amp-voices-at-lifetrack-9882223703>

Latino Cultures

with Elena Miranda

Incluyendo a nuestros hijos con diferencias auditivas en las festividades

Es bien sabido que los Latinos somos alegres, amigueros y nuestra familia esta compuesta normalmente no solo por nuestros familiares cercanos, sino incluimos a otros miembros de la familia.

Se acercan las festividades decembrinas y es importante tomar en cuenta a nuestro (s) hijo con diferencias de audición como a cualquier otro miembro de la familia. ¿Usted sabe cuál es el mejor lugar en la mesa para que hijo(a) se sienta incluido y no pierda detalles de la conversación durante la cena? ¿Usted sabe que si hay un ambiente muy ruidoso durante las fiestas su hijo escuchará menos de lo que regularmente escucha?

Estos son solo algunos consejos básicos que pueden ayudar a su hijo(a) con la comunicación durante las cenas festivas:

- Hable con antelación con su hijo para que sepa que celebran y que esperar de la reunión familiar.
- Hable previamente con los invitados para que estén

conscientes, sean pacientes y hablen uno a la vez en la medida que sea posible.

- Asígnele el lugar estratégico en la mesa para que su niño(a) pueda ver a todos en la mesa si esto es posible.
- Si su hijo ha desarrollado la escritura prepare y ponga en su lugar papel y lápiz para que escriba algo que le sea difícil comunicar.
- Si su hijo se comunica de manera no verbal, ayude a sus invitados a no tener miedo o prejuicios para intentar comunicarse con su hijo(a). Tome esta oportunidad para educar a sus Invitados u otros miembros de la familia. La intención cuenta mucho y su hijo(a) se sentirá incluido.
- Pero sobre todo apóyelo(a) a abogar por si mismo, nadie mejor que el(ella) sabe lo que necesita, lo que no entendió o de lo que se perdió en la comunicación.

Por supuesto que todo depende de la edad del niño, de su nivel de audición y de las destrezas de comunicación entre padres e hijos.

Hay un ingrediente infalible, que nunca falla en ninguna circunstancia “el amor, el respeto y el apoyo incondicional por su hijo(a)”.

Including our children with hearing differences during the holidays

It is known that Latinos are happy, friendly, and family is not only of our closest relatives, but also includes all family members.

As the holidays approach take into consideration our children with a hearing difference. What are the best places at the table for your child to feel included and to catch the conversation over dinner? Do you know that if there is a noisy environment during the celebration your child will hear less than he/she regularly does?

Here are a few basic tips that can help your child with communication during holiday dinners:

- Talk with your child ahead of time so he/she knows what to expect.
- Speak with guests beforehand so they are mindful, patient and speak one at the time as much as possible.
- Give your child a strategic place at the table so that they can see as much as possible and not miss anything.
- If your child communicates non-verbally, help your guests not to be fearful or prejudiced into trying to communicate with your child. Take this opportunity to educate your guests. Intentions count and your child will feel included.
- Overall, support them to advocate for themselves.

It all depends on the child's age, hearing level, and parent-child communication skills.

There is an infallible ingredient that never fails under any circumstance “unconditional love, respect and support for your child”. Happy Holidays!





During the Holidays, at family gatherings, being included is not always easy. When everyone is talking I often struggle to keep up with the reading lips on people especially in group conversations.

What has helped is that we would play games that I can be included in, to enjoy as family. I have started using games that would be fun but challenging for the family to participate in like "Hearing Things." For this you must wear headphones with loud weird noises to block out the environment sounds. Have the person speak a short sentence and the person with headphones must read their lips and get it right under one minute. It is quite entertaining for me to watch and still be included. I can always improve my skills and be able to understand their lips better. It brings so much laughter as a family! There is one other game we also played called "Mega Lipreading." It has a plastic magnifying glass that you can see through. You put it by your lips, and speak with no voice to let them guess what you are saying. It is a funny way to play as some people will move their lips so big when trying to talk. It was a good example to show that it shouldn't be done that way but still brings a lot of laughter for an enjoyable time.

Kelsey is profoundly Deaf and uses American Sign Language. She uses Sign Exact English if needed as she grew up with SEE first then learned ASL in middle school. She uses an ASL interpreter and preferred seating as accommodations. Kelsey enjoys going to new places to explore and spending time with family.

- SPOTLIGHT -



When Becky's first grandchild was born hard of hearing, things changed. She searched the internet to find a book about a child with hearing aids but they were hard to find. Most of the books had animals with hearing aids in them!

So, she decided to write her own book for Kena and that's how "Super Kena – A Girl Made Fierce with Hearing Aids" came about! It's meant to empower children like Kena but also other "differently-abled" children who get teased and only want to fit in.



The book touches on children with glasses, with diabetes, who stutter, who have a peanut allergy, with asthma, and who are in wheelchairs. Together they use their unique super powers to make a difference in the world by spreading understanding and acceptance . . . one classroom at a time.

Becky has been an administrative assistant for a local non-profit for the last 20 years along with being a farm wife. She and her husband Dan farm small grains and sugar beets in northern Minnesota. They have three grown children: a teacher, a doctor, and a farmer. They live with their two dogs and enjoy visits from their two grandchildren. <https://www.superkena.com/shop/>



Statewide ASTra Advocate Robin Coninix and DHH Guide Shelby Geldon co-presented at Camp Onomia. They presented on the MNHV Parent Guide program, the DHH Guide program and ASTra information with the eleven parents in the audience.

For information on Camp Onomia go to <https://www.camponomia.org/>



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NEWSLETTER

Minnesota Hands & Voices FOCUS Newsletter

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H&V Virtual Waiting Room

Visit the H&V HQ Virtual Waiting Room at <https://handsandvoices.org/virtual-waiting-room/index.html> This site was created for families with children who have been referred to or are in the care of an audiologist and are receiving those services through technology or “telehealth.” Instead of sitting in a waiting room at a clinic, some families are in their homes or use a remote location waiting to connect with an audiologist through the internet. This connection provides a safer more convenient way to get important quality services. What families may lack is some of the information and resources that often are built into an in-person waiting room experience. And that is what we are recreating here:



What You Will Find:

- A video played about the importance of the next steps when your child is referred for more testing after a screening.
- A guidebook for parents about audiology, telehealth and tele-audiology options.
- Questions to ask your audiologist, understanding your child’s audiogram, help making decisions with communication and more.
- Connections to family-to-family support from trained parent leaders.
- Explanations of help offered by a variety of professionals in addition to your child’s audiologist.
- Resources to promote health and well-being for you and your child.
- A form to complete to connect with a Hands & Voices trained parent who can answer your questions and direct you to additional resources.