

We are pleased to have been asked to write a letter of introduction for the guide for parents of children newly diagnosed with hearing loss. We truly hope that this publication, a joint effort of interested service providers and parents of children with hearing loss, will be most helpful to you and your family.

All parents shoulder the awesome responsibility of having to make difficult, sometimes life-altering decisions for their children. As you become more familiar with your child's hearing loss and the many options available to you, you may at times feel confused, uncertain, even hesitant. Indeed, the choices you will be required to make concerning your child's education, teaching methods and, ultimately, the form(s) of communication used by your child and yourselves, may seem overwhelming. We cannot tell you that the experience will be an easy one, but it can offer blessings beyond your wildest imagination, and you and your family will not be alone on your journey.

We have found that some of the best advice comes from other parents of children with hearing loss, other family members of deaf, and of course, from deaf and hard of hearing adults and children themselves. Many well-intentioned people may offer you advice; be selective in which advice to follow and which to dismiss; above all, follow whatever feels right for you and your family. You will be determining how your child will interact with the world as well as how you will interact with your child for a lifetime.

We encourage you to meet and interact with as many other families and individuals affected by hearing loss as possible and to learn from their successes and their stories. Information will be your best tool. Once you are informed, be willing to fight for your child's needs. The payoff can be incredible. Follow your heart.

Your child's diagnosis has very likely brought sadness and grief to you and your family. These emotions are perfectly normal and healthy, and we encourage you to accept and work through your feelings at your own pace. In time, sadness and grief will subside, and you will find that you are able to tackle the challenges ahead. Yes, there are many challenges to come... and many rewards.

Children with hearing loss are limited only by imagination. All the joys of being children, of playing with other children, of wondering at butterflies and stars, of achieving their dreams...all things are possible. And this does not end with childhood. One need only look at the countless examples of independent, well-adjusted, well-educated, responsible and mature deaf and hard of hearing adults to see that this is true. Do not let others define limits on what your child can achieve. You will be your child's strongest advocate.

We wish you and your family a bright and awesome future.

Linda Erickson and Cheri Scott