

Have you Heard? A Listening Project
Episode #21 – Hearing Loss & Kids
Hosts: Audra Hudson and Alle Rhames

(0:03) Audra: Hello and welcome to “Have you Heard? A Listening Project.” On this podcast we’re going to share tips, stories and practical advice to help people with hearing loss stay connected. If you or a loved one have a hearing loss, suspect that you may have hearing loss or if you know anyone with a hearing loss this is the podcast for you. On today’s episode we’ll be talking about the effects of hearing loss in children and teens as well of some of best practices for supporting young people who have hearing loss. We’re so excited to have you join us today, I’m Audra one of your hosts and today I’m joined by my good friend Alle. We both work together at OEI as hearing health advocates (Alle...hi there, it’s great to be here with you Audra) So excited to have you here with me today Alle (Alle...yes) So welcome to everybody who’s on this episode with us and I hope you get a lot of it (Alle...yes, me too) So, I really been looking forward to doing this episode specifically with you Alle because I know that we’re both moms of littles so this topic just really, you know, it hits close to home for both of us. My son Virgil is 5 and remind me, how old are your kids again Alle?

(1:11) Alle: I can’t believe it but I have a three-year-old and I have a one-year-old which it’s just mind blowing.

(1:17) Audra: They grow so fast and those are fun ages, terrifying ages but fun when they’re that little. So, I think as moms especially when our kids are little there’s so much that we’re constantly thinking about and worrying about as we’re trying to raise these little tiny humans but one thing that may not always be in the forefront of our minds as parents is our kids hearing.

(1:40) Alle: I so agree with that because so much of parenting is when they’re little it’s just really keeping them alive and I also think (Audra...for real) Right? And I also think that when it comes to hearing loss we really tend to usually think of adults or maybe seniors but just because it’s more common for adults and seniors to have hearing loss it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t happen to children as well.

(2:01) Audra: Exactly. And I totally empathize with like just trying to keep them alive I feel like that’s your main job when they’re little it’s to keep them from killing themselves. And you’re right it’s really easy to overlook how common hearing loss is in kids. There are a lot of different studies out there but one of the most common studies done by the CDC shows that roughly 15% of children ages 6 to

19 have some degree of hearing loss. So, currently hearing loss, you know, it's a significant issue for kids because it affects so slightly more of them than asthma does and just under the number of kids who struggle with obesity. So, for most kids, you know, getting a hearing screening after they're born is normal. Most parents are going to do that initial hearing screening after the kids are born but for a lot of parents that may be the last time, they actually check their kids hearing unless they notice any issues. Have you ever gotten your kids hearing checked after that initial newborn check?

(2:58) Alle: Okay, so I have to say that because I'm so paranoid about my own hearing loss and I know that my hearing loss is genetic I actually do have the pediatrician check their hearing very simple test but they do (Audra...right) check their hearing when I go in for their appointments because I just am, you know, so nervous about the genetic (Audra...mhmm) history in my family. What about you?

(3:20) Audra: Well, actually, I just recently got my kid's hearing tested because he kept saying, you know "mommy, I can't hear you mommy, I can't hear you" and I thought well, let me go. So, I know a really wonderful audiologist, shout out to doctor Walden in Ocala, you're amazing. But we went there they did the hearing test for him and it was really cute you know; the test was fine. My son has perfectly normal hearing but at the end Doctor Walden says, well Virgil, I have good news and bad news. The good news is you have perfect hearing, the bad news is, is we're going to have to come up with a reason as to why you're not listening so we can tell your mama and it was just, it was just really, really cute. But, you know, because he kept saying "I can't hear you" I wanted to check and I think at the reality is, is he's just 5 and so, he's just, you know, naturally not always listening.

(4:08) Alle: Right, right. Well, I think it's awesome that you made a point to be intentional about checking your child's hearing and I think it's especially important to do it when they're young because hearing loss can come from so many different places. The sooner you catch it really is better for the long-term outcome. A lot of us expect to lose our hearing as we get older but when it comes (Audra...mhmm) to hearing loss in children, there's different factors involved. So, like for, sometimes it can be genetic like I was talking about and then sometimes they're born with it and sometimes it can occur just for a host of other reasons.

(4:39) Audra: Well, what are some of those reasons Alle?

(4:41) Alle: Okay, so well hearing loss can be caused by a couple of different things and one of them is called otitis media and it's basically a middle ear infection and it happens to a lot of young kids because the tubes that connect the middle ear to the nose aren't fully formed and fluid then can build up behind the

eardrum and that can cause an infection which can then lead to hearing loss, isn't that nuts? (Audra...oh my gosh, yeah that's crazy) Sometimes illnesses can cause hearing loss diseases like meningitis, encephalitis, measles, chicken pox even the flu (Audra...oh my gosh) Right. And then as well, of course, is head injuries, medications, noise exposure those can all be causes of hearing loss for kids. And another thing that I thought was really interesting and didn't actually know is that diabetes especially type 2 diabetes is one of the biggest risk factors in hearing loss. According to the American Diabetes Association hearing loss is twice as common in people with diabetes than it is in others and I didn't know that (Audra...okay, yeah me either, that's the first time I'm hearing that) Right. So, they think of the reason for that is the high blood glucose levels possibly damaging the blood vessels (Audra...ohhh) that supply the oxygen and the nutrients to the inner ear.

(5:54) Audra: Oh what, you know, when you, when you phrase it like that, that actually makes a lot of sense and I can see how that could be part of the problem. So, I'm really glad you brought all that especially about the diabetes because that's something that I, it never occurred to me could be a contributing factor. So, you know, as our, as parents it's our job and our focus to really just try to protect our kids. So, I feel like more knowledge we have the better we are able to protect our children in general and specifically when it comes to their hearing health. So, hearing all these different causes, I mean, even down to the flu it's actually good because it seems a little overwhelming but I think it's good because if my kid ever, you know, has that or God forbid, he has meningitis that just gives me one more thing to make sure that I check so that we can stay on top of his hearing health. For me, I'm a huge stickler for reducing noise exposure when it comes to my son. My husband, he has a motorcycle and a lot of times, you know, he's out there working on it or, you know, he's just got it turned on to in blow the pipes out or whatever and of course, Virgil wants to be out there because he wants to be with papa. But when he's out there, the first thing that I bought was headphones because I wanted to make sure, you know, I don't want him exposed to all the noise of this giant motorcycle. So, I got him, you know, ear protection and then when he's using his tablet, which of course, all kids love, I don't allow him to use headphones with his tablet because he loves it when things are loud, like his motto is, the more noise the better. So, I would be super concerned with letting him have headphones on a regular basis because I think it would just be a lot harder to monitor his noise level if he's got headphones on.

(7:33) Alle: I appreciate you saying that actually because I am considering getting headphones for my 3-year-old so I will take that into consideration. But yeah, I would imagine it's probably easier to monitor noise levels for a 5-year-old rather than it would be to monitor for a 15-year-old who's probably listening (Audra... right) to music on a regular basis.

(7:52) Audra: Oh, for sure. And you know what? I'm guilty too because some music just sounds better when it's loud, right? I'm so guilty like when I'm in the car, if it's 90s hip-hop day and DMX is on like, I will turn it up because it just sounds good when it's loud because at 15, you're not really thinking about hearing health, you're just trying to listen to your jam (Alle...yeah) But it's something to think about and something to be cautious about because we really do have to protect our hearing. So, I saw a really great rule of thumb or listening with headphones in an article and it was called the 80/90 rule. Basically, they recommend that people who use headphones do so at 80% of the maximum volume for no more than 90 minutes per day.

(8:36) Alle: Okay, that's a great rule and it seems like it's one that should be easy to follow at least in theory.

(8:41) Audra: In theory, at least it's easy to remember. We're actually going to take a quick break to hear a word from our sponsor and we'll be back soon.

*** Commercial.... My mom and I used to talk on the phone every day but lately she can't hear me when I call. I have to repeat myself over and over, it's so frustrating but I know it's even more frustrating for mom. Thankfully we got her a CapTel Captioned Telephone, it's just like the captions you see on TV but only for phone calls. Now, if she can't hear what I say, she can read the captions. Our local CapTel Outreach person took care of everything, it was so easy. We're back to talking every day and it means the world to me and to my mom. If someone you know can't hear over the phone, we can help you get a CapTel phone at no cost. Visit oeius.org for details.

(9:37) Alle: And, welcome back! So, okay, now that we know some of the different causes of hearing loss in kids, what are some of the effects that can come as the result of hearing loss, Audra?

(9:48) Well, there, you know, one of the ways that hearing loss can impact kids especially when they're very young like ours are, is in their cognitive development. Hearing loss can cause a delay in their communication skills and the way that they process speech and language. It can also cause learning difficulties and really impact their overall academic performance. And the more profound their hearing loss the more help they're going to need when it comes to academics. When kids have hearing loss vocabulary is just going to be more difficult for them because it's a lot easier to understand concrete words like cat or tree or jump. But when you're talking about more abstract words like before or equal to those are going to be more difficult for them to understand which is

going to really impact how they read, their ability to practice language, arts and even math especially when it comes to word problems.

(10:41) Alle: Right. So, it will also affect speech development because the hearing loss will actually distort their understanding of words and it's difficult to say them correctly if you can't hear them being said to you correctly.

(10:53) Audra: Exactly. So much of their auditory processing, which is essential to kids reading ability, happens between the ages of 5 to 7. So, if they're unable to hear correctly and then unable to understand what's being said to them it has a huge impact on their academic life. So, part of the difficulty will also be due to how traditional learning takes place. So, for teachers talking maybe with their back to the board are, I'm sorry, with their back to the class while they write on the chalkboard or maybe they're walking between desks while they're talking or bending down to help a student. Or if there's kids around your child, you know, kind of talking in the background, all of these things make hearing much more difficult for a child who has a hearing loss and it really can result in just a lot of frustration.

(11:39) Alle: Right. So, these are a lot of things that a lot of people don't even really consider but it is so important.

(11:45) Audra: It's vital. So, in a previous life, I used to be a Supplemental Educational Services Tutoring Coordinator which is a really fancy way of saying I ran a non-profit program for tutoring elementary school age children (Alle...wow) Yeah, it was, it was fun. I really enjoyed it but one thing, you know, kind of knowing what I know now, I wonder how many of those kids who were underperforming on their standardized tests and really struggling in school, I wonder how many of them had an undiagnosed hearing loss. So, understanding that and being a homeschooling mom now at this point in my life, I just want to encourage every parent listening to this episode that if your kids are struggling academically, you might also want to see about getting their hearing checked because if it's playing any part you want to know about it as early as possible. And it's not just academics that are going to be affected by a hearing loss it's their emotional and social development too, right Alle?

(12:41) Alle: Absolutely. Okay, so my background is actually in counseling and (Audra...mhmm) We know that hearing loss at any age can come with a lot of emotions, a lot of frustrations and it's almost amplified especially (Audra...right) in teens because well, we all know that being a teenager is difficult in general (Audra...oh my gosh, yeah) Right, so adding a hearing loss makes it even more that. One of the biggest frustrations for those with hearing loss is the struggle to understand. Because even if you technically heard someone say something you

may not have understood (Audra...mhmm) So therefore for a teen who develops hearing loss in middle or high school, they suddenly have to develop a new way of understanding and the learning curve can be steep (Audra...yeah) So, yeah, it might feel really strange or embarrassing for them to try and read lips especially at that age or to ask friends to repeat themselves (Audra...mhmm) And they may not want to be the only kid in their class who has to wear hearing aids (Audra...right) Or sit in the front row or be singled out in any way because let's face it other kids can be mean and (Audra...yeah they can) Yeah, your sense of self, yeah, your sense of self it's still developing at that age so it can be a lot to process. So, emotionally, that is a lot to handle.

(13:47) Audra: Yeah, and I think all of us can remember back to being in middle school and high school and how like everything just, it's so overwhelming so than to have a hearing loss on top of that it can just be a lot, you know, but the good thing is, the good news is there are a lot of positive things that parents can do to support their kids especially these days. There's so much technology out there for your children if they have a hearing loss. So, you can go back to several of our episodes even back to season one where we discuss a lot of different resources such amplifiers, captioning telephones, amplified telephones, captions on TV, you know, captions that you can use for Zoom just to name a couple of things. But I think the best thing that we as parents can do for our kids when they have a hearing loss is really just to normalize hearing loss and build resistance for them (Alle...yeah) Yeah, like that's something that we can always do. So, you want to make sure your child knows that they are not the only kid out there with hearing loss and they're not even the only person out there with hearing loss, it's very, very common. You want to encourage them to learn how to advocate for themselves because that's going to help them, you know, gain that confidence to speak up when they don't understand something or when they have to, you know, say can you please face me so that I can, you know, read your lips a little bit. You want to get them to be able to advocate for themselves. You want to encourage them and remind them that there is nothing to be embarrassed about at all. You see people with glasses all the time, I'm one of them, hearing aids are no different and you definitely also maybe want to encourage them to find groups either online or in person so that they can kind of meet with other kids who also have a hearing loss. And one important thing, I just want to remind parents and encourage them to tell their kids is that the people who love them and the kids who were really their friends are not going to mind going that extra mile. They are not going to feel bad about having to repeat themselves. They are not going to mind making direct eye contact for you to lip read. Basically, you know, good people and real friends will do those extra steps because they love you and they care about you and anybody else that's not going to put the effort into communicating with you, just you know, don't worry about them (Alle...right) Worry about the people who are actually your friends (Alle...huge point) Yeah,

make sure that you guys remember that so, that's actually, man that was quick, that's all the time we have for today. So, we're going to go ahead and wrap this episode up. If you're new to our podcast please be sure to check out all of our past episodes. We've explored so many different topics related to hearing loss and they're all very interesting. If you want to make sure that you don't miss them and to make sure that you don't miss out on new episodes go ahead and subscribe to this podcast now. Thank you so much to everybody who joined us today and thank you so much for your awesome insights, Alle, they were really great

(16:29) Alle: Oh my gosh, you're welcome. I'm so happy to have been able to been a part of this, this topic. It's a really, really important topic for me personally so, thank you so much.

(16:39) Audra: Absolutely, glad to have you. For more information and all things hearing health related be sure to visit us at oeius.org that's oeius.org. I'm Audra (and I'm Alle) And we want to thank all of our listeners for joining us today on the Have you Heard? Podcast. So, remember stay safe and stay connected.

Copyright© 2022 by OEI. Guests of the podcast and resources mentioned are for the interest of our audience only. There are no marketing agreements or incentives involved.