

Parent *pages*



Resources for Christian Parents in the 21st Century

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Protecting Your Child's Hearing

As a parent and a former teacher, I strongly suspect that the word "huh?" is the most often word spoken by children today. It is hard to know if frequent requests to repeat a question indicate loss of hearing or selective hearing, but it remains true that our children are exposed to an almost constant barrage of noise. We live in noisy world, and we search in vain for peace and quiet.

When I was growing up, the noise did not follow me around. My radio and stereo were in my room. Now we go everywhere with MP3 players, phones that play music and movies, hand-held games, and DVD players in the car. When do the ears of our children get a rest?

Constant noise=gradual damage

Damage to your ears can happen in an instant through dangerous noise levels or injury, but most of our children are at greater risk of damage that happens over a long time of exposure to higher-than-normal sound levels. This is referred to as noise-induced hearing loss. This is the kind of damage we need to prevent.

When I was pregnant with my children, it was recommended to play music for them. I remember each child reacting to differ-



ent kinds of music. They were born into a delivery room with music and listened to lullaby CDs to put them to sleep. They typically heard music during most of their day and even their toys made noise.

Now my children have MP3 players and computer games that keep them surrounded in noise. It is a lot of exposure over a long period of time. While it would never be recommended to deny your children music, it is a good idea to take a look

at the noise-exposure amounts and volume levels your children's ears encounter each day and to make some safe adjustments.

Our children want to participate in new technology ... it's important to teach them how to limit exposure to noise.

More and more headphones

The American Academy of Otolaryngology reports that upwards of 3 million children have impaired hearing. Research indicates that as much as 15 percent of eighth-graders and 26 percent of high-school seniors have measurable hearing loss. With the advent of so many portable music devices, these statistics will only rise.

Years ago, hearing loss was a concern for people who played in rock bands or worked in factories. Listening to music, however, piped directly into the ears at loud volumes, can cause hearing loss for any teenager. Even for elementary age children, the National Hearing Conservation Association reports that the average daily noise level is 90 decibels (90 dB=city traffic, 60 dB=normal conversation).

A Growing Christian Makes the Best Parent!

The consequences

Besides the obvious, hearing loss can contribute to childhood difficulties even before it becomes serious enough for hearing aids. Children with measurable hearing loss have difficulty learning and may develop behavior problems.

Besides not being able to accurately hear directions and teaching, they also have difficulty with language and social-skills development. This is especially true for the children for whom the hearing losses go undetected. Many children can hear well when they are looking at the person talking, but some have trouble understanding speech because of background noise.

In such a figure-ground hearing issue children are unable to distinguish the primary sound from the other noises in the background. In other words, the sound of the teacher's voice is indistinguishable from the sound of a classmate in the back of the room coughing. Other children simply learn to "tune out" noise and suffer from not being able to maintain attention to the sounds they need to hear.

Here are the decibel levels of some common childhood activities that can contribute to noise-induced hearing loss:

- △ Headphones on maximum: 120.
- △ Shouting in ear: 110.
- △ Firecrackers: 140.
- △ Car stereos on maximum: 154.
- △ Video arcade: 100.
- △ Computer games: 135.
- △ Movie theaters: 90.

Even the noise from toys can pose a risk as they were not designed to be played close to the ear.

What you can do

It is time to take notice and put into action some simple steps to protect the hearing of our children:

■ Rethink the toys on the Christmas list. Could a silent toy be substituted? Could the sound be disabled or the volume turned down?

■ Check the toys already in use. Could the sound be turned off or down? One option is to cover the speaker holes with tape

to deaden the sound.

■ Encourage your child to wear ear-plugs in loud areas.

■ Watch for ear infections and seek medical care. Ask for a hearing screening with each well-child check-up.

■ Set rules about volume on games, computers, and personal music systems.

A good guide is half volume. It is also a good idea to upgrade the earbuds that typically come with these devices.

Look for earphones that fit outside the ear and can help eliminate outside noises.

■ Send children outside to play with noisy toys.

■ Carpet play areas to absorb sound.

■ Turn off, or turn down, computer game sounds.

■ Teach and practice good hearing safety. Encourage children to use quiet voices and remind them to never put anything inside their ears.

■ Build quiet play activities into the daily schedule. Reading does not cause hearing loss!

■ See a professional if your child complains of ringing in the ears, an early sign of hearing loss.

■ Listen for indistinct speech and mumbling, and watch to see if your child is aware of what is going on or has trouble paying attention as these may be signs of hearing loss.

A great Web site to visit is www.listentoyourbuds.org. It is constructed with children in mind and has great activities for children to encourage them to learn more about protecting their hearing. There also are excellent resources for teachers and parents.

"He who has ears, let him hear."

MATT. 11:15

In much of Jesus' teaching, hearing was

synonymous with understanding. We see how important hearing is in our world. While there are many ways to help people with non-preventable hearing loss, we are all in agreement that the best option for our children is to prevent hearing loss, if at all possible.

God has blessed us with much technology that makes our lives more entertaining. Our children want to participate in this technology. It is important that we take their best interests

into consideration and teach them how to limit their exposure to noise, how to revel in quiet, and how to prevent damage to the hearing abilities that God gave them.



For Discussion:

- ▶ How would your child's world change if his or her hearing was damaged?
- ▶ Make a list of the noises in your home for a day. Are there any you can eliminate?
- ▶ How many minutes of quiet are included in an average day for your child?
- ▶ How does your child respond to quiet?

For Further Study:

- ▶ www.listentoyourbuds.org
Information for parents, children, and educators. Includes games for children to learn about hearing and protection.
- ▶ www.lhh.org
This site includes the factual information and research quoted in this newsletter.
- ▶ <http://tinyurl.com?61cgrc>
How to set volume limits on an iPod.

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