

Visiting and observing my child's classroom

Background

Regular visits to your child's classroom offer two benefits:

- You will get to know the child's teacher, who will likely be the person supporting your child in his or her daily tasks.
- You can determine the extent to which your child is engaged in class activities and is listening and hearing information. You can visit the classroom as a volunteer or sit quietly in the back.

Things to Notice

- 1. Acoustics in the room.** The ideal classroom will have characteristics that make hearing easier by reducing background noise and reverberations. During your visit, note the following:
 - Is at least two-thirds of the floor covered with carpet?
 - Do chairs on hard floor surfaces have tennis balls on their feet?
 - Do the windows close? Are there drapes over the windows?
 - Does the door to the hallway close?
 - Do the overhead lights use fluorescent bulbs? These can emit a "hum" most people can tune out, but can be very distracting to a child with a cochlear implant.
 - How loud is the sound of the heating/air conditioning system? Can the fan be turned down or off during the class if necessary?
 - What other equipment makes ambient noise in the classroom? This can include fish tanks, water bubblers, sinks, computers, or other pieces of machinery that "hum" or use automated fans to keep cool.
- 2. Position of the teacher.** Ask the teacher to identify the location in the room from where he or she teaches. Ideally, the teacher will be away from the noise of the hallway and will stand far enough away from the window to limit sound reverberation. Ask the teacher to ensure he or she faces the class while speaking so your child can hear and lip read more easily.
- 3. Position of your child.** Your child should receive preferential seating in the center of the room, one and one-half to three feet from the teacher. If seated in a circle, your child should not be seated directly next to the teacher, but should be the second child seated on either side of the teacher.
- 4. Amount of time spent doing work in small groups.** Many teachers break up the class into small groups to conduct lessons, but the noise generated throughout the classroom during these activities can be challenging for a child with a cochlear implant. See if there is a quieter section of the classroom where your child's small group can work so he or she is not distracted by the background noise from the other groups.

5. Teacher techniques. The teacher can facilitate the use of simple actions to support your child:

- During class discussions, repeat the questions asked by a classmate. If the classmate's back is toward your child, he or she may not hear what was said.
- Ensure everyone understands what was said by repeating announcements made over the loudspeaker, as they can be difficult to understand, and other students may continue talking while the announcement is being made.
- Give a cue or signal to the class when important announcements or instructions are about to be given. This alerts students that they need to stop talking and pay close attention to what the teacher is about to say.
- Implement a "no interrupting" rule. Every student should understand only one person at a time gets to speak.
- Have a posted schedule that can be used as an overview of the day's activities and signal transitions between activities.

Tips

- Accommodate the teacher's schedule as much as possible when scheduling a visit to the classroom.
- Take a notebook to record your observations, and discuss them privately with the teacher as soon as possible.
- Work with your child and his or her teachers to develop a signal your child can use to indicate he or she did not hear or understand what was said.
- Explain to the teacher that these accommodations will help all students in the class stay focused, not just your child.