

Arranging a classroom for a child with a cochlear implant

Hearing is hard work for children with cochlear implants, and the classroom can be a very challenging environment in which to hear.

Eleven simple changes in the classroom will support children with cochlear implants as they listen. The changes fall into five categories:

- Improving acoustics
- Reducing background noise
- Optimizing seating
- Creating a visual classroom
- Enforcing classroom rules

The changes are organized by category below. Use this information to alter any room for your child and to assist his or her teacher in making proper changes to the classroom for your child.

Improve the acoustics in your classroom

1. **Put carpets, rugs, or mats on floors.** If possible, at least two-thirds of the floor should be covered with rugs, mats, or other creative sound-dampening objects. Reducing the amount of uncovered hard surfaces in the classroom will reduce echoing and make hearing easier.
2. **Use window coverings.** Glass panes are hard surfaces that bounce sound and make hearing more challenging, so check to see if the teacher has curtains, blinds, or panels on windows to improve the acoustics in the classroom.
3. **Cover the walls.** Use of acoustic tiles, panels, or even large felt or cloth wall coverings will lessen the echo in your child's classroom; they can also be used for posting artwork and classroom messages.

Reduce background noise

4. **Remove bubbling fish tanks or water features in the classroom.** Fish tanks create ambient noise that detracts from the sound of the teacher's voice and the other important sounds in the classroom. Also ask the teacher not to give important directions while the sink is in use.
5. **Cut tennis balls in half to cover all chair feet.** The scrape of chairs being pulled back or pushed forward is noisy. Tennis balls or padding on the bottom of all classroom chairs can help reduce noise.
6. **Keep doors and windows closed.** Hallways, playgrounds, and cafeterias are noisy areas in schools. Ask the teacher to close the doors and windows of your child's classroom to reduce outside noise.

- 7. Minimize background conversations.** Ask your child’s teacher to be mindful of noise made by other teachers or aides in the classroom who may be preparing for another lesson.

Optimize seating

- 8. Seat the child in the room with his or her implanted side closest to the teacher.** Ensure your child is seated close to the teacher, where the teacher’s voice can reach him or her unimpeded while allowing flexibility to move closer to the person who is speaking.

Create a visual classroom

- 9. Use visual materials to reinforce the verbal language.** Photographs, drawings, and written messages on overheads or chalkboards are useful tools for communicating with a child with a cochlear implant.

Create classroom rules to support hearing

- 10. Create a “one voice” rule in the classroom and enforce one speaker at a time.**
Overlapping voices distort or obscure important messages for a child with a cochlear implant.
- 11. Devise a quick way to get the class’s attention when the classroom gets noisy.** Establish that the teacher has a signal will quiet the room immediately. For example, the teacher may flash the lights. He or she may also say “One, two, three, eyes on me,” at which time the students will reply “One, two, eyes on you!” and immediately become quiet.