

Explaining a cochlear implant to a young child

Background

Parents, experts, and teachers agree that providing straightforward information about the cochlear implant to classmates is critical. If the classmates have accurate, developmentally appropriate information about the cochlear implant, then the peer environment will be more accepting and supportive.

Tips

At the start of the school year, talk with the parents about how the child feels about talking about the cochlear implant. You may also explore this topic with members of the child's team that know the child well. Together, decide together on a strategy to discuss the child's cochlear implant and hearing loss with the rest of the class. Consider the following questions:

- Is the child shy about drawing attention to his or her hearing loss and cochlear implant? Is the child comfortable explaining the cochlear implant and answering questions?
- Does the child want to talk about the cochlear implant to the class?
- To what extent would a short presentation to the class be helpful and appropriate?
- What are the most important points to cover with the classmates? Should peers be asked to help the child by picking up the cochlear implant if it falls off at recess? Should the peers be told how the child is different from them?

Strategies

Working from the information you gather from the team, determine the best way to speak to the class about the child with the cochlear implant. The bullets below provide an outline of a class discussion you can modify for use with your class.

- Within the first few days of the school year, conduct a whole-class discussion to get to know each other.
- Explain that each person is unique. Ask each student to share one thing that is special about themselves with the group.
- Talk about how differences relate to our bodies. For example, some people use a wheelchair to move around because they are unable to use their legs. Blind people can use Braille to read. Some people are deaf, which means they may benefit from special equipment to help them hear sound. Explain that a cochlear implant is a tool that helps a deaf person hear sounds.

- Explain that a child in class, named [name], uses a cochlear implant to hear. You can sound this out by writing it on the chalk board: COKE–LEE–UR IM–PLANT.
- Depending on the maturity of the class and the comfort and confidence of the child with a cochlear implant, explain some basic information about the cochlear implant.
 - What does it look like?
 - Where on the body is a cochlear implant worn?
 - What can classmates do to help the child with the cochlear implant hear important information?
- Build on the children’s natural proclivity to accept others by discussing diversity in your classroom. Reinforce students who show strong character and demonstrate helpfulness to the child with a cochlear implant. Reinforce a classroom rule of no name-calling, teasing and/or bullying with any students.