

Megan Kirshbaum

Serving Parents with Disabilities  
and their Children in Early Head  
Start

7/30/2014

18<sup>th</sup> Annual Birth to Three  
Institute

# **Dispelling Myths about Deaf Parents and their Children**

**Developed by Through the Looking Glass & the National Association of the Deaf**

**Assumption: Children of deaf parents will be deaf.**

**Fact:** *Almost 90% of all children born to deaf parents are hearing. There are thousands of different causes of deafness including accidents, illness and several hundred genetic causes. Almost all of these causes are one-time events, and most children born to deaf parents have no more chance of being born deaf than anyone else. Even genetic causes are usually recessive, so there is little chance that a child or grandchild of hereditarily deaf parents will be deaf.*

**Assumption: Deaf parents never know when their baby is crying.**

**Fact:** *Deaf people are ingenious at figuring out how to compensate for their lack of hearing -- including being extremely vigilant and responsive to their environment. Some deaf parents sleep with a hand in their baby's crib to sense the vibrations when their baby cries. Other parents have rigged up special devices which trigger lights to let them know when their baby needs them. Adaptive equipment such as a baby cry alarm is available through several manufacturers and distributors.*

**Assumption: Deaf parents cannot hear or speak.**

**Fact:** *Many deaf people actually have some hearing -- although usually it is not enough to be of practical use. However, as many hearing children will attest, deaf parents are often very aware of loud noises or music which they can sense through their residual hearing or by feeling the vibrations these sounds produce.*

**Fact:** *Almost all deaf people can speak -- although the clarity of spoken English varies tremendously. More importantly, however, many deaf people have had bad experiences using speech to communicate. As children, many deaf persons were forced to abandon their more natural and fluent sign language and rely solely upon spoken language. As children and adults, deaf persons are also keenly aware of the negative public reactions to their less-than-perfect speech. However, within the privacy and security of their homes, many deaf parents do use their voices with their hearing children.*

**Assumption: Children of deaf parents will have difficulty learning how to speak.**

**Fact:** *Although some hearing children of deaf parents have been sent to speech therapists, this is usually because other people anticipate speech problems rather than because problems are actually observed. This still raises the often asked question, How do hearing children of deaf parents learn to speak? In most cases, these children are exposed to spoken language -- through relatives, playmates and, in some cases, deaf parents who have spoken English skills. However, even hearing children who apparently have no early exposure to spoken language still manage to learn how to speak. This may be explained by recent studies which suggest that the development of spoken language is a fundamental human trait, and depends more upon internally driven development than upon external models or reinforcers.*

**Assumption: Hearing children of deaf parents who use sign language will be confused.**

**Fact:** *As many bilingual studies have demonstrated, children who are bilingual often go through initial stages of experimenting and sorting out their two languages -- but any apparent confusion is temporary. Almost all bilingual children go on to master both of their languages without intervention. Additionally, bilinguals are often more adept at linguistic and analytical skills. Adult hearing children of deaf parents have shown their verbal and oral skills in a wide variety of professions including lawyers, writers, teachers, psychologists and physicians.*

**Assumption: All children of deaf parents know sign language.**

**Fact:** *Although many hearing children of deaf parents consider sign language to be their first language, not all children are fluent in sign language. Some deaf parents are oral and do not use sign language. Even within families in which the parents sign, the degree to which a hearing child signs varies tremendously. Older siblings, particularly older daughters, are most likely to be fluent in sign language. Like other families in which English is not the dominant language of the parents, many deaf parents often encourage their children to use English exclusively. Negative public attitudes towards sign language has undoubtedly tempered some deaf parents desire for their children to learn to sign.*

**Assumption: Hearing children should speak and sign at the same time.**

**Fact:** *Although it is possible to speak and sign at the same time, doing so often compromises both forms of communication. Because the structures of American Sign Language and English are substantially different, trying to speak and sign at the same time is no different than trying to simultaneously speak English while writing Russian.*

**Assumption: Children of deaf parents are overburdened and parentified.**

**Fact:** *Family roles and responsibilities vary tremendously among families with deaf parents. Overall, however, recognizing that deaf parented families are culturally distinct avoids misconstruing or pathologizing behaviors which appear different than those in hearing families. Additionally, outsiders often project responsibilities onto hearing children -- for example, interacting more with the child than the parent, or expecting the child to be the spokesperson rather than merely an interpreter for the parent.*

---

This fact sheet was developed by Through the Looking Glass in collaboration with the National Association of the Deaf and Children of Deaf Adults International. For additional information, please contact:

**Through the Looking Glass  
National Center for Parents with Disabilities & their Families  
3075 Adeline Street, Suite 120  
Berkeley, CA 94703  
(800) 644-2666 (voice)  
(510) 848-1005 (TTY)  
(510) 848-4445 (FAX)  
[www.lookingglass.org](http://www.lookingglass.org)  
email: [tlg@lookingglass.org](mailto:tlg@lookingglass.org)**

# ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING PEOPLE

Developed by Through the Looking Glass

## **ORGANIZATIONS (National)**

ADARA

Professionals Networking for Excellence in Service Delivery with Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

<http://www.adara.org/>

ALDA (Association of Late Deafened Adults)

<http://www.alda.org/>

Self-Help for the Hard-of-Hearing (SHHH)

<http://www.shhh.org/>

National Organization of the Deaf

<http://www.nad.org/index.html>

Alexander Graham Bell

<http://www.agbell.org/about.cfm>

## **RESOURCES (National)**

Deaf Resource Library

<http://www.deaflibrary.org/>

Deaf Community Advocacy Network

<http://www.deafcan.org/>

Hearing Loss Web

<http://www.hearinglossweb.com/>

Deaf Services & Advocacy Agencies

<http://www.deafe.org/links/categories/deafservice.htm>

Gallaudet University

<http://www.gallaudet.edu/>

Gallaudet Technology Issues for the Deaf

<http://tap.gallaudet.edu/>

## **Sign Language Interpreting Services**

BACA - Bay Area Communication Access

<http://bacainterp.com/about/>

Hired Hands

<http://www.hiredhandsasl.com/>

Purple Communications (national, including Bay Area)

[www.purple.us](http://www.purple.us)

**LOCAL/REGIONAL RESOURCES**

DEAF SERVICES NETWORK DIRECTORY

*for Northern California*

<http://www.uccd.org/dsn.html>

DCARA (Deaf Counseling Advocacy & Referral Agency)

<http://www.dcara.org/>

Deaf Hope

(Deaf Women & Domestic Violence)

<http://www.deaf-hope.org/>

Northern California Center on Deafness

<http://www.norcalcenter.org/>

Gallaudet Regional Center at Ohlone College, Fremont

[http://www.ohlone.cc.ca.us/instr/div\\_deaf/GURC/GURCOOverview/gurcoverview.html](http://www.ohlone.cc.ca.us/instr/div_deaf/GURC/GURCOOverview/gurcoverview.html)

California Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program (DDTP)

<http://www.ddtp.org/>

California Relay Service Information

<http://www.ddtp.org/EquipmentAndServices/CRS/>

\*\*\*\*\*

This resource list was developed by Through the Looking Glass.

For additional information, please contact:

**Through the Looking Glass  
National Center for Parents with Disabilities & their Families  
3075 Adeline Street, Suite 120  
Berkeley, CA 94703  
(800) 644-2666 (voice)  
(510) 848-1005 (TTY)  
(510) 848-4445 (FAX)  
www.lookingglass.org  
email: [tlg@lookingglass.org](mailto:tlg@lookingglass.org)**

## RESOURCES FOR AND ABOUT BLIND PARENTS

*Developed by Through the Looking Glass*

### **Hands-On Parenting: A Resource Guide for Parents Who Are Blind or Partially Sighted**

by Debbie Bacon

Available from Through the Looking Glass

3075 Adeline Street, Suite 120

Berkeley, CA 94703

(800) 644-2666

TLG@lookingglass.org

<http://lookingglass.org/shop>

This book, written by a blind mother of three, includes thoughts and suggestions contributed by blind parents from all over the country. Topics include infant care, toilet training, games and recreation, safety, and much more. The book is available in large print, on CD-ROM, and in regular print.

### **Parenting Without Sight What Attorneys and Social Workers Should Know about Blindness**

Published by the Blind Parents Interest Group of the National Federation of the Blind

Deborah Kent Stein, Chair

<http://www.nfb.org/images/nfb/Publications/brochures/BlindParents/ParentingWithoutSight.html#4>

### **LightHouse for the Blind**

The LightHouse promotes the independence, equality and self-reliance of people who are blind or visually impaired through rehabilitation training and relevant services, such as access to employment, education, government, information, recreation, transportation and the environment. The main office is in San Francisco, with a branch office in Berkeley at the Ed Roberts Campus (Ashby BART Station).

415-694-7322 (San Francisco); 510-841-3224 (Berkeley)

[info@lighthouse-sf.org](mailto:info@lighthouse-sf.org)

<http://lighthouse-sf.org/>

### **National Federation of the Blind**

200 E. Wells Street

Baltimore, MD 21230-4998

Telephone: (410) 659-9314

Email address: [nfb@nfb.org](mailto:nfb@nfb.org)

Website address: <http://www.nfb.org>

The National Federation of the Blind is the largest organization of blind people in the United States. It provides information, education, and support to blind people of all ages and backgrounds and works to promote positive images of the blind to the general public. The NFB conducts an annual national convention with a host of workshops, lectures, and exhibits.

### **Blind Parents Listserv**

<[www.nfbnet.org](http://www.nfbnet.org)>

This email listserv is open to any blind parent or anyone else interested in issues of blind parenting. Listers are free to post questions and comments on any parenting issue. Archives of the list can be searched by topic.

### **Hadley School for the Blind, Courses on Parenting**

700 Elm Street

Winnetka, IL 60093

(847) 446-8111

<[www.hadley.edu](http://www.hadley.edu)>

The Hadley School for the Blind is a distance-learning institution that provides courses in Braille, large print, audio, and electronic formats. Hadley offers three courses on parenting that include specific tips for blind parents.

**Print/BrailleBook Club**

National Braille Press  
88 St. Stephen Street  
Boston, MA 02115  
(800) 548-7323

<[www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/cbbc/index.html](http://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/cbbc/index.html)>

National Braille Press offers a new print/Braille book selection each month. Braille appears on clear plastic pages between the pages of the print book so that a sighted child can see the printed words and look at the pictures while a blind parent reads aloud.

**Seedlings Braille Books**

Print/Braille books for children  
P.O. Box 51924  
Livonia, MI 48151-5924  
(800) 777-8552  
<[www.seedlings.org](http://www.seedlings.org)>

This resource list was developed by Through the Looking Glass.  
For additional information, please contact:

**Through the Looking Glass  
National Center for Parents with Disabilities & their Families  
3075 Adeline Street, Suite 120  
Berkeley, CA 94703  
(800) 644-2666 (voice)  
(510) 848-1005 (TTY)  
(510) 848-4445 (FAX)  
[www.lookingglass.org](http://www.lookingglass.org)  
email: [tlg@lookingglass.org](mailto:tlg@lookingglass.org)**