

## THE DISAPPEARING 'S' AND THE HARD OF HEARING

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Hard of hearing children are unique in their language learning abilities. Depending on the kind of hearing loss the child has, the age at which the child became hearing impaired and the age at which they were diagnosed and treated are all factors that contribute to the individual's language acquisition abilities. Every hearing impaired child hears differently.

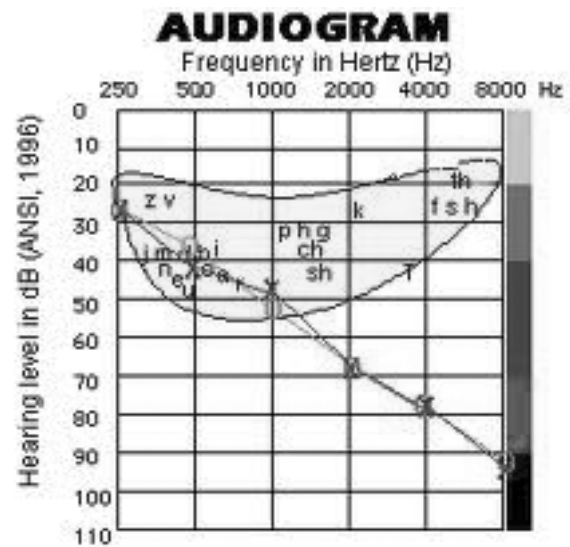
The concept of hearing according to decibels is familiar to most of us. The louder the sound, the easier it is for a person to hear. We all inherently understand that ambulances have loud sirens so that we all hear them and move out of the way to allow them to pass. We also understand that some people have very acute hearing and hear a dripping faucet, while others don't. Normal hearing in a child is between 0-20 dB. Profoundly deaf children don't hear from 90 dB on up. There are obviously many children with hearing losses in the middle, ranging from mild to severe hearing loss. Those children are often integrated into our regular English classes.

Hearing is also measured according to frequency. This measurement is less known to the public and more difficult to treat. Most hearing aids increase decibel levels, but they don't have the ability to improve frequency. Different phonetic sounds are heard at different frequencies. An example of a low frequency sound is "m". An example of a high frequency sound is "s". A child with low frequency hearing loss won't hear the "m" sound when people are speaking. A child with high frequency hearing loss won't hear the "s" when people are speaking. Hearing aids do not correct this.

Children who are hard of hearing therefore only hear partial words. The following is a graph that is commonly known as the "Speech Banana". It charts the sounds that a hearing impaired person doesn't hear according to degree of hearing loss. The 20-40 dB range delineates the sounds that a mildly hearing impaired person doesn't hear. Notice that the ever so important "s" is one of the first sounds to disappear. Many of our students with even mild hearing loss don't hear the sound "s".

If you have a student with a mild hearing impairment in your class, there is a very high probability that the child doesn't hear the "s" sound. The implications of learning English without the sound "s" are far reaching and can be overwhelming. However, the simple fact that you are aware of the child's difficulty enables you to assist them. Simply using a lot of visual aids when teaching subjects such as plural/ singular nouns and third person present simple, can make a world of difference to a hard of hearing child.

This information is obviously only the very beginning. It is essential that you be in touch first and foremost with the child's parents. The homeroom teacher, school advisor and local Shema treatment center are also essential resources. Please don't try to do this on your own. Find out as much information as you can about the hard of hearing student in your class.



\*Butler Iain, MB ChB, MMed (ORL) Identification and Management of Childhood Hearing Loss, CME, Vol 30, No 9 (2012)

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