

What is an Audiologist/Hearing Aid Dispenser?

Audiologists are the primary licensed health-care professionals who evaluate, diagnose, treat, and manage hearing loss and balance disorders in adults and children. They work in a variety of settings, such as: hospitals, clinics, private practice, ENT offices, universities, K-12 schools, government, military, and VA hospitals.

Almost all types of hearing loss are treatable by an audiologist. Audiologists treat all ages and types of hearing loss: adults, teens, children, and infants. Audiologists prescribe and fit hearing aids (if they have a Hearing Aid Dispensing License), assist in cochlear implant programs, perform ear- or hearing-related surgical monitoring, design and implement hearing conservation programs and newborn hearing screening, and programs provide hearing rehabilitation training.

Most hearing loss that is caused by nerve damage can be treated by an audiologist with hearing aids, assistive listening devices, and hearing rehabilitation. Audiologists can also provide you with information about intervention strategies (therapies or services) related to communication options (e.g., different ways to communicate such as sign language, auditory training, speech reading, listening skills improvement, cued speech, etc.)

A hearing aid dispenser (hearing instrument specialist, hearing aid dealer) is a person licensed to sell hearing aids. Hearing aid dispensers are trained in the interpretation of hearing assessment instrumentation, hearing aid electronics, specifications, analysis, modifications, and programming hearing aids.

The audiologist and hearing aid dispenser will work with your family and a team of professionals, such as a speech-language pathologist, ENT (ear, nose, and throat doctor), early intervention specialist, and teacher of the deaf, to provide you and your child with the services you need.

An audiologist and hearing aid dispenser who have training and experience to test and provide services to infants and young children will offer the best care for your child.

Below are some questions you may want to ask your audiologist and/or hearing aid dispenser. These questions were suggested by New Jersey EHDI Hearing Evaluation Council (advisory board) members and/or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Questions to ask when scheduling an appointment:

1. Do I need a referral from my child's pediatrician/primary care provider for a hearing test or hearing aid services?
2. Do you accept my insurance?
3. What is the earliest appointment I can get for my child?
4. How long will the appointment take?
5. Are there things I should do to prepare my child for the appointment?
6. Do you frequently provide services to young children?
7. Do you have experience in evaluating and treating babies and children with hearing loss?

8. What age group of children have you worked with?
9. What type of equipment do you use to test for hearing loss?
10. Where will the testing take place – will this be in your office or at a hospital?
11. How do I make sure an interpreter will be present (if you need a sign language interpreter or you do not speak English)
12. Should I postpone my child's appointment if s/he has an ear infection?

Questions to ask during the appointment:

1. How will you share the results of this exam with my child's pediatrician/primary care provider?
2. May I have a copy of the hearing test results? (Attach and explain the audiogram or other information to this form.)
3. Do I need to schedule a follow-up appointment?

Questions to ask if your child has a hearing loss:

1. How much hearing loss does my child have? Please explain the terms: sensorineural, conductive, mixed, mild, auditory neuropathy; moderate, severe, profound.
2. Is the loss permanent? Does my child need more testing? How often should my child's hearing be tested?
3. Can you tell if my child's hearing loss will get worse or change?
4. Do both ears have the same hearing loss?
5. How will the hearing loss affect my child's speech and language development?
6. What could have caused my child's hearing loss?
7. Would you suggest genetic counseling for our family (A genetic counselor is a health care professional who talks with people about the risk for genetic conditions and provides counseling and support)?
8. Does my child need a hearing aid? What are my choices? Should he or she have a hearing aid in both ears?
9. How much do hearing aids cost? Can I get help to pay for the hearing aids?
10. Can you help me contact a program that can lend me hearing aids?
11. What will my child hear with the hearing aids?
12. How often will my child need new hearing aids or parts?
13. What are the parts of a hearing aid that may need to be replaced?
14. What should I do if my child does not want to wear the hearing aid?
15. With my child's hearing loss, should I consider a cochlear implant (an electronic device placed under the skin behind the ear)? Where can I go for more information?
16. Can you help me learn about the different types of communication options (for example: total communication, oral, sign language)?
17. When should I begin early intervention, school, speech and other therapy, or classes for my child? What is available in this area?
18. Is there a parent group in my area? Where? Who should I contact?
19. Can you help me meet another parent of a child with hearing loss?
20. Can you tell me about other ways I can learn about hearing loss – books, videotapes, films, websites, and courses?
21. How do I describe the results of the hearing tests to family members?
22. What are some tips for working with my child at home?
23. Do you know how I can meet Deaf and/or hard of hearing adults.