

pediatric pointers



Summer's Coming!

Who doesn't love summer? Doesn't summer mean flip-flops, ice cream, sun and fun? In the audiology office, summer might also mean increased repairs and, for your pediatric patients, scheduling hearing aid maintenance checks.

Instead of just readying those reminder letters, why not help your teen patients (and their parents) get a jump on summer by offering your expertise and suggestions now on how to manage this newfound time. For, as many discover, there are teens with hearing loss who have mixed feelings about summer vacation. Sure, they're glad to be out of the classroom, but are they going to be stuck at home? Will their hearing peers stay in touch with them? What, really, will they do for two whole months?

Every family has a different approach to this question, and some may not feel the need to think about it at all. Yet the teens I've talked with, both hearing and with hearing loss, have agreed it's nice to have plans, especially their own plans. Even if a kid has to go to summer school or take speech therapy, there's some feeling of choice and independence when it comes to the rest of the time. Summer's really an opportunity in this respect—an opportunity to set their own course and "test the waters" for the real swimming that comes later.

This is especially true for teens with hearing loss. They may be terrified by the thought of having to put themselves more and more "out there" in the world as the prospects of college, finding new friends and getting jobs all loom on the horizon.

SAFE HAVEN: By offering professional help, sympathetic understanding of difficulties and an interest in personal goals, the audiologist can give teen patients significant support when they are facing summer activities.

First steps can be taken in this direction during the summer, beginning as early as 7th grade. A 13-year-old can discover that many of the things his parents ask of him, from household chores to lawn mowing, dog walking and baby-sitting, can be perfected, can become sellable skills outside of the family and can be listed on a résumé. He'll discover every step counts.

The same is true of special talents like cooking, computer design, mechanics, woodworking, photography, and more. Such interests can, for older teens, lead to summer internships and, eventually, jobs. For those who are drawn to work with children, adults or animals there are volunteer (and sometimes paid) opportunities in day camps, parks, hospitals, nursing homes, pet shelters and on farms. One can learn about such openings through family, friends and neighbors, the school guidance counselor, the local newspaper, the YMCA and the Internet.

While there are certain basic things any teen needs to be familiar with while looking for a summer job or internship, be it filling out application forms, writing a cover letter or networking, the teen with hearing loss really has to go the extra mile—and sometimes many extra miles! There are employers and volunteer directors who have never met a teen like this. Seeing his hearing aid or hearing his "strange" accent may make them panic. This teen not only has to be able to convince them he can do the work, or is willing to try to do it, he has to show he can understand them, put them at ease and make his needs clear (for example, he may need to see the face of the person he's talking with). He has to step forward and be honest. Hopefully he'll discover this need often comes to be perceived as a strength.

The audiologist who works with hearing-impaired teens can offer huge support. First, offer professional help (a broken aid on the job can be a major calamity). Second, offer sympathetic understanding of the difficulties he may be encountering and the exhaustion he may be experiencing as he "jumps into" the waters. Third, offer interest in him and his path as a person with his own talents. The audiologist can become, for this teen, a safe haven, one of his first allies "out there" as he ventures beyond the home-and-school circle into deeper waters.

As we all look forward to summer with excitement, help your teen patients be excited—and ready—too. \$

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