

pediatric pointers



Offer Effective Support Materials

We all recognize the value of providing written materials to supplement our discussions and improve retention with parents about topics such as their child's hearing test results, hearing aid care/maintenance and hearing technology. Written materials provide an opportunity for absent family members and other caregivers to understand the process, outcomes and recommendations. The materials you choose to use in your office are just as important as the words you use when counseling and conveying information.

There is a wealth of printed materials available to hearing care professionals and consumers on topics ranging from middle ear infections, normal speech, language and auditory development, to classroom acoustics and, of course, childhood hearing loss. Many of these materials are available at minimal or no charge from knowledgeable sources such as the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing), AG Bell Association (www.agbell.org), American Academy of Audiology (www.audiology.org), American Speech-Language Hearing Association (www.asha.org), Boys Town's "My Baby's Hearing" Web site (www.babyhearing.org), the Listen-up Web site (www.listen-up.org), as well as medical and hearing aid manufacturer Web sites.

So how do you choose the most appropriate written materials? Which materials will help you create a partnership between you and the family and promote parental confidence and self-advocacy for the child?

Whether you are using existing material created by others or developing your own, several factors should influence your choices. Consider: logical organization of the material; gender, class or cultural bias in the material; the cultural bias of the reader; primary language of the intended reader; and the possibility of the reader's illiteracy. Glossaries to define audiology

jargon and abbreviations are essential.

The material must be readable, both in content and appearance. Use a formal readability test to evaluate the reading level of support material. Two well-known readability tests are the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and the Flesch Reading Ease scores, both of which are available as part of most grammar or editing software offered today. Use your toolbar "help" and "search" functions to obtain instruction for activating the readability statistic functionality.

Once you've determined the reading level, remember that reading comprehension differs from reading ability. Formulas cannot measure comprehension, interest or suitability to a reader's needs. Think of readability formulas as screening tests which merely offer a prediction that the text is appropriate for a particular parent or caregiver. When writing versus evaluating material, it is sensible to be aware of the reading level; however, do not try to write to the formula, as you risk decreasing comprehension. If audiology terms are defined using simple text, they can be removed when determining overall grade level or reading ease scores, as their multi-syllabic nature will affect scores.

Also be aware that visual issues can influence readability. Your materials should contain white space on the pages to make the text less intimidating and easier on the eye, feature a readable font style and size, and use pictures and illustrations to enhance and reinforce the text. These elements can be adapted to give your materials a more or less formal look, depending on intention and audience.

Whether using established material or creating your own materials, the "Keep It Simple" rule may be a good guide. Better than anyone else, you understand the cultural, emotional and educational needs of the families and children you serve, and you can choose—or create—the written tools that will best reinforce the messages and recommendations you want them to remember. \$

For more information on the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and the Flesch Reading Ease scores, visit www.advanceweb.com/aud.

Maureen Doty Tomasula, MA, CCC-A, FAAA is pediatrics marketing manager at Oticon Inc.; she may be reached at 800-227-3921, ext. 2507, mdd@oticonus.com. Melanie Sisson, AuD, is associate director of clinical trials at Pfizer Inc. and a practicing pediatric audiologist at Lawrence and Memorial Hospital in Connecticut. She recently authored the Workbook for Parents of Children who are Newly Identified as Hard of Hearing, published by Oticon Pediatrics. Contact her at melanie.sisson@pfizer.com

oticon
PEOPLE FIRST

Information sponsored by Oticon Inc., www.oticonus.com