

2020

How to Talk About  
**HEARING LOSS**

# How to talk to your teen about hearing loss

Part of the *How to Talk About Hearing Loss* series  
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# How to talk to you teen about hearing loss

**T**EENS are at an especially challenging age for hearing loss. They want to establish independence and define their own sense of style but there is a fine line between being unique and being too different from everyone else. Adolescents with hearing loss often worry that wearing hearing aids will cause others to judge them or cause peers or teachers to see them as “needy” of special treatment. Other kids and even some adults can make these faulty assumptions all too often.

Teens need to feel confident and empowered about hearing wellness. That means being well informed and armed with confidence, so they can ignore even the most insensitive comments or prejudices. We put together a list of talking points to help you and your teen do just that. So, get some ice cream, grab a basketball, or just go for a walk and use these ideas to have a heart to heart talk with your teen about hearing wellness.

Hearing well matters. After all, hearing has a direct impact on their health, their social lives, their grades, and their careers.

## Getting Started

**So, let’s talk about your hearing. How is it going in school and on the team?**

Keep the conversation simple and direct. Let your teen do most of the talking, so they

know you’re always willing to listen. Sympathize with their challenges, cheer their successes. Above all, let them know how much you love them and how proud you are that they’re willing to “own” their hearing loss and make smart decisions to hear better.

It might help to remind your teen (and yourself) why hearing well matters

so much. After all, hearing has a direct impact on their health, their social lives, their grades, and their careers. The following information might help you and your teen understand why hearing is so important now and in their future.

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## Did you know...

### ...better hearing leads to better grades?

It's true. Teens with unaided hearing loss struggle more than their classmates because they have to work harder to figure out what was said before they can even begin to understand it. The pause can be a distraction that results in lost focus and the time lag can derail a conversation or logic string. Hearing aids help your teenager hear more of what's being said and understand it more completely. So, learning becomes easier and grades get better. Learning is hard enough—no need to make it even harder!

### ...better hearing leads to better jobs?

Hearing well doesn't just affect grades, it affects careers. In fact, [one study](#) showed that people with hearing loss who try to “get by” without a hearing aid, earn an average of \$20,000 less per year! So, it's important to make hearing well part of the college and career plan.

### ...better hearing leads to better health?

Several studies (including [this one from Johns Hopkins](#)) show that untreated hearing loss can lead to isolation, depression, and even cognitive decline. For better brain function and for our mental and emotional health, we need to hear well.

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## About Them

### Are you hearing the way you want to at school? At work? Other places?

Check in with your teen to understand their comfort level with different hearing situations and be open to making



adjustments. Perhaps a greater balance of online classes to in-school classes can help, especially for subjects with tricky jargon. Maybe adjusting where your teen sits in class, or where your family sits at religious services, sporting events, or in other group settings can help. Whatever course you take, be sure your teen knows that hearing well is important and that the family is committed to doing whatever it takes to make sure they're comfortable and successful.

**You know, one of the nice things about your hearing aid is it makes you unique.**

Teens spend a lot of time developing their “personal style.” Some kids have piercings, some have flashy clothes or jewelry, but not everyone has a digital earpiece that they get to wear during class. Maybe your teen wants a brightly colored case so they can stand out with style. Or maybe they opt for a more subtle piece that they can “reveal” on demand. Either way, their hearing

technology can give them a unique “edge” in terms of style and fashion.

**Plus, the technology is really cool.**

Teens without hearing loss likely use AirPods or some other earbuds anyway. Your teen’s hearing aid likely has all that those devices offer and more. Features like noise cancellation, automatic adjustments for different sound environments, and connectivity to music and videos are all the rage. Encourage your teen to show off their tech and impress their friends (but wait until after class!). You might even consider throwing a “listening party” for your teen and friends to share their hearing tech and enjoy some music or a movie together.

**Even though your hearing tech is cool, I know it can sometimes be annoying because you “have” to wear it. But keep it up—you’re doing great!**

It might help to talk about rewards and



incentives. Just like keeping grades up, getting chores done, or other responsibilities, it's okay to reward a job well done. If your teen consistently wears their hearing aid all semester, consider a small celebration. They get to pick the movie or the restaurant. Or maybe they get that extra cool hearing aid case at their next fitting.

## About Their Environment

### Do other kids ever make negative comments about your hearing aids? How do you handle it?

Give your teen a chance to confide in you about their struggles as well as their successes. Be understanding, confident, and supportive throughout. And, be ready with ideas for how your teen can respond to insensitive remarks. For example, humor often helps. When asked, "What are those things?" your teen could say, "Well, I'm an Avenger and need to stay connected to my team in case there's a superhero emergency." Or even, "Shh. I'm spying right now." Most people admire someone confident enough to handle confrontation with a wink and a smile.

Teasing is part of adolescence, and displaying a bit of humor around insensitive but innocent remarks is appropriate and can build confidence. But be sure to tell your teen that outright bullying is not acceptable and that they should let you, teachers, or

school administrators know if it's happening.

### Have you thought about doing something to help other kids at your school?

Teens are often willing to get involved with social causes. One student with hearing loss joined with other classmates (one blind, one in a wheelchair, and one with a severe learning disability) to host a "disability forum." Other kids asked questions and the whole student body learned about diversity, acceptance, and possibility. Older teens might enjoy mentoring younger students with hearing loss through your school's peer mentoring program. Getting involved helps your teen become more connected

and more confident about who they are and how they can make a difference, plus it helps them develop leadership skills.

### What are you not doing that you really want to?

Be sure to give your teen plenty of confidence and encouragement for doing the things they love. Hearing loss

affects most activities, but some, like music or singing, can be especially challenging. Still, with technology and creativity, there's likely a way to pursue anything that your teen wants to do.

Encourage them to pursue their passions. If needed, help them discover new ways to participate or be involved. You can also help them find new activities where hearing loss may be a less important factor. For example, your teen might consider writing, visual arts,

Hearing loss affects many activities, but with technology and creativity, there's likely a way to pursue anything that your teen wants to do.

or chess. “Visual” sports, like tennis or golf, or “individual” sports, like cross country and swimming, might be options.

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## From the Heart

### I love you.

We’re pretty sure teens can’t hear these three words enough—whether they live with hearing loss or not. Even though they may seem reluctant, resistant, or downright rebellious at times, they need to know that home and family are a safe space where

they can learn who they are and feel comfortable being themselves.

In addition to love and support, honest encouragement and confidence from you as a parent or caregiver goes a long way. Let them know that they can overcome any obstacle they face, that there’s always a way to pursue their passions, and that you’ll be there to help them find it. If it helps, you might use our list of “Heroes with Hearing Aids” (see next page) for some inspiration. However you do it, the most important thing is to keep talking to your teen—and keep listening—with love, respect, and a promise to meet life’s challenges together. 

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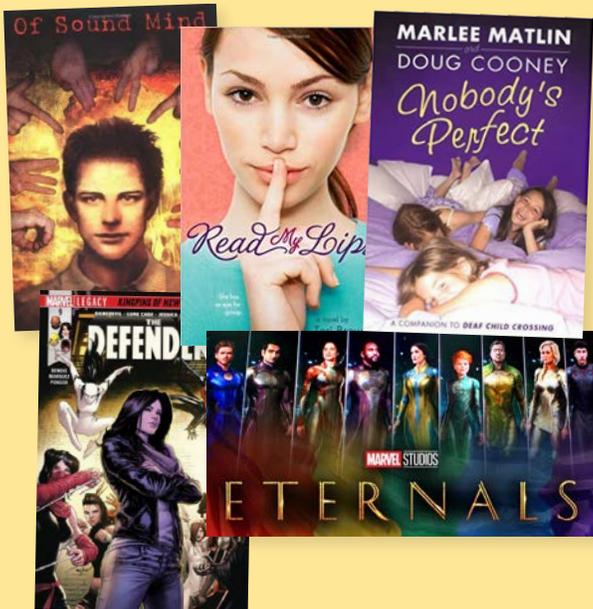


# HEROES

with *Hearing Aids*

Teens need role models. Providing heroes with hearing loss or deafness can be especially inspiring for teens that wear hearing aids.

**Fictional heroes.** Reading good books, especially stories that feature teen protagonists, can be a great help, as “literary teens” can often share insight and inspiration in a way that “real life” peers may not. Sharon Pajka, Ph.D. hosts [a wonderful blog](#) dedicated to deaf characters in adolescent literature (200+ books!). Some of our favorites include *Of Sound Mind* (Ferris), *Read My Lips* (Brown), and *Nobody’s Perfect* (by Oscar-winning actress Marlee Matlin and Doug Cooney, later made into a bilingual English language/ASL musical). Echo and Blue Ear from Marvel Comics are also excellent “reads,” along with Makkari from Marvel’s *The Eternals*, played by born-deaf Broadway star, Lauren Ridloff.



**Heroes from real life.** There are many famous men and women with hearing loss who wear hearing aids. Here’s a few that might inspire your teen:



**Halle Berry.** The award-winning actress who played “Storm” in Marvel’s *X-Men* franchise lost 80% of her hearing in one ear, but that hasn’t stopped her from becoming one of Hollywood’s biggest stars.



**Stephen Colbert.** The popular late show host became deaf in his right ear as a child and later went on to become a successful comic and actor, including a cameo in *The Hobbit* (Colbert is an avid Tolkien fan).



**Jameela Jamil.** “The Good Place” actress was born with congenital hearing loss and labyrinthitis which left her with 70% audibility in her left ear and 50% in her right ear. Her career includes music (as a BBC Radio 1 music host), fashion (model and writer), and even a game show.



**Adam Savage.** The lead “Mythbuster” of the popular series tests the science behind urban myths and movie magic, all while proudly displaying what he calls his “titanium ear bones.” It doesn’t get much cooler than that. [a](#)

If you’re looking for even more heroes with hearing loss, you might try [10 Athletes Who Overcame Hearing Loss to Excel](#), or [8 Famous Musicians with Hearing Loss \(and a few more\)](#), [33 Famous Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing People](#), and [Wikipedia’s List of Films Featuring the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#).