

Protecting Children's Hearing: Listen to a Mother

By Shari Eberts, MBA

Most moms check the summer camp photo rolls for glimpses of their children excelling in sports or starring in the camp play, but my proudest moment was when I saw photos of my two children, 11 and 9 at the time, wearing earplugs at a camp concert. Why do I care? I am a mom with a genetic hearing loss, and I know the importance of hearing protection.

My children, now 12 and 10, have typical hearing—so far. I first noticed my hearing loss in my mid-20s, so we might not know for a while whether they have an issue. In the meantime, I work tirelessly to help them protect the hearing they have now. If they begin to have issues later, they might as well start from as strong a place as possible.

When they were young, it was easy to get them to protect their hearing. I didn't buy them earbuds (or iPods, for that matter), and I put the earplugs in myself whenever necessary. A few years ago, they were willing to listen to me and use earplugs on their own when I wasn't there to enforce it, as shown by the summer camp photos. But it gets more difficult every day.

Peer pressure has begun to rear its loud, ugly head, and my children are less willing to listen to my advice. They still take the earplugs with them to a loud party or sporting event, but the earplugs come home unworn or are "forgotten" in a coat pocket. It troubles me that they are now too "cool" to take care of their hearing. I don't want them to end up like me, missing the joke

Parents can require their children to wear earplugs, just as they do sunscreen and bike helmets.

when everyone else is laughing and requiring hearing assistance to enjoy everyday conversation with friends and family.

So what's a mom with hearing loss to do? I hoped that seeing my daily struggles would be motivation enough to keep my children interested in protecting their hearing, but it does not appear to have taken hold. Perhaps I will need to take more aggressive

action: no movies, no concerts, no dance parties unless they wear hearing protection. But that approach is not really enforceable now that they are older and smarter and can easily take photos of themselves wearing earplugs as evidence of their usage before crumpling them up to put in their pockets.

I think the solution is educating new parents about the risks of hearing loss. Parents can make all the difference by requiring their young children to wear earplugs around loud noise, just as they require their kids to wear sunscreen or helmets when riding a bike. If the practice starts early enough in life, it will become routine, and that is how real change will occur.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if children protected their hearing as an everyday habit? It sure would make this mom's struggle a little bit easier. 



Ms. Eberts is a hearing health advocate. She blogs at LivingWithHearingLoss.com and serves on the Board of Trustees of both the Hearing Health Foundation and the Hearing Loss Association of America. (Photo credit: Steve Grappe, StL StudioG.)



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