



Help Kids Make the Call

“Wait, just a second ...” (moving to another spot)... OK, can you hear me now?” We all know these TV ads from a national wireless carrier, and they’re funny because the situations are real and we may find ourselves repeating the same phrase, sometimes laughably. But it’s no laughing matter for a parent or grandparent trying to be heard on the phone when speaking to a child with hearing loss.

Do we think about telecoils for children in the same way we do for adults? Telecoils have been around on BTEs since the late 1940s.¹ Since then, telephone access technology has gotten much more sophisticated with innovations like programmable telecoils, touchless T-coils and acoustic phone programs—not to mention the improvement afforded by feedback cancellation technology when using the phone. According a recent survey, T-coils are now in 54 percent of all new hearing aids and audiologists reportedly include telecoils in 70 percent of hearing aids.²

Unfortunately, statistics are not available on hearing aids fitted to children, but we do know that almost all BTEs contain a telecoil and BTEs are the instrument of choice for most children. In pediatric hearing aid fittings, FM compatibility is considered a prerequisite, but phone access, telecoils and cell phone compatibility should be high on our list, too, when recommending instruments for a child—regardless of the child’s age at the time of fitting. These programs can be disabled and then reintroduced

MONKEY SEE...: Kids want to be like everyone else, and that includes being able to use the phone, even when their enthusiastic reply may be only babble. Children with hearing loss are, first and foremost, children, and they deserve the same access to technology as everyone else.

as the child’s needs change, which can occur pretty quickly. Think not of what the telecoil can do today, but what the child can do with it next year—or next month!

At what age do kids start talking on the phone, anyway? The Playskool™ toy phone we baby boomers played with when we were young has been replaced today by toy cell flip-phones with sounds and buttons. Kids want to be like everyone else, and that includes being able to use the phone, even when their enthusiastic reply may be only babble. Children with hearing loss are, first and foremost, children, and they deserve the same access to technology as everyone else.

Children today are taught at an early age to be able to call 911 for emergencies; they have access to cordless home phones (almost all are T-coil compatible) and often to mom’s or dad’s Blackberry (some models are very M and T compatible, and some are not). Older children may even have their own cell phone. Additionally, many public venues such as museums and houses of worship are being looped for accessibility. It is our responsibility to help parents and children understand the multiple uses of the instrument’s telecoil and phone programs and advise them about cell phone compatibility.

And speaking of compatibility, wouldn’t you think after all the hype surrounding it that the new iPhone would be hearing aid compatible? Surprise—it’s not, as there are no M or T ratings given to it—and the same is true for the kid-friendly Firefly® cell phone, which is made especially for tweens and looks like even a first grader could handle it. However, you won’t find any compatibility information on those product Web sites. A great reference is www.phonescoop.com, which provides specifications for almost every cell phone. Look under Accessibility/Hearing Aid Compatibility; if there’s no data listed, the phone isn’t rated by the manufacturer for M or T usage.

It will take us extra time to make sure that mom, dad and even little Johnnie know how to use a hearing aid’s T-coil function or phone programs with the home phone or the latest and greatest cell phone. But our extra time and effort have a big payoff—the smile on the faces of mom, dad, and grandma when a precious child can communicate on the phone. **\$**

REFERENCES:

1. Ross, M. (2004). Telecoils Deserve Wider Acceptance as Assistive Listening Devices. *The ASHA Leader*, accessed online at www.asha.org/about/publications/leader-online/archives/2004/040525/040525b.htm
2. Kirkwood, D.H. (April 2006). Survey: Dispensers Fitted More Hearing Aids in 2005 at Higher Prices. *The Hearing Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 4.

Maureen Doty Tomasula, MA, CCC-A, FAAA is pediatric marketing manager at Oticon Inc.; she may be reached at 800-227-3921, ext. 2507, mdd@oticonus.com.

oticon
PEOPLE FIRST

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