

A Message to Parents

by Rosalind Ho

Disability does not equal disadvantage.

I was born with a severe bilateral hearing loss, and I use cochlear implants to hear. During my first years, I received support from the Burnaby Infant Development Program (IDP) as well as other early intervention agencies.



I also have a BA in English Literature from UBC and have been working at BACI for the last 5 years, first as a co-op student with Human Resources and now as an Administrative Assistant in the Finance department. I am interested in advocacy for young people with hearing loss, and I am the current President of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association's Young Adult Network (a network of young adults with hearing loss across Canada; our mission is to empower these young hard of hearing adults to foster active leadership, provide peer support, advocate, and promote awareness of hearing loss in their communities.) I am also considering further studies in accounting.

On March 4, 2014, I was interviewed at BACI by a team from the BC Early Hearing Program & BC Children's Hospital. Their objective is to create a DVD of various interview clips to showcase the full lives led by Deaf and hard of hearing adults. The completed DVD will be part of a parent kit that will be given to the parents of newborns who have been diagnosed with hearing loss, so as to help them see the many possibilities ahead for their children.

While the DVD will be for parents of children with hearing loss, I think its message of encouragement is universal for all new parents. When the interviewers asked me what I think are the most important things for parents to focus upon, my reply was:

1. **The Number One, numero uno, issue is communication.** Find a way to communicate with your child as early as possible so that they can develop language. My personal opinion is that it does not matter what communication method your family chooses as long as the child has a solid foundation for language development.
 - a. **Involve your child in daily living and communication.** When I was small, my mother would talk/sign to me while having me help her with chores such as laundry, using the microwave, etc. This helps children to learn basic routines and simple conversations.
 - b. **Take your child out into the community.** When I was a toddler, my mother took me to a weekly half-hour story time at the local library. I would sit on her lap to watch and listen to a librarian read aloud short children's stories or sing nursery rhymes.
 - c. **Read to your child.** Despite my enjoyment of the librarian's visual storytelling with puppets and expansive gestures, my hearing was still very poor. My mother wanted me to learn English while my developing brain was still young enough to learn quickly, so she arranged to borrow the books or songs to take home so that she could read them aloud/sign to me again every day.

2. **Form a strong support network of family, friends, and professionals.** Find people who will listen to you when you need to talk and who will support your own choices for your own child.
 - a. **Get siblings involved.** I credit much of my interest in reading to my older brother who has encouraged and bribed me into reading many novels and poems over the years. Nowadays my literary tastes range from Jane Austen to Harry Potter.
3. **Keep an open mind! Keep researching!** A mind that is open to alternate communication or learning methods will allow for many more possibilities for your child. And don't stop once you have made a choice, but keep researching to find out more information about it. You never know what hidden gems of information you might discover!

The involvement of parents is essential to the development of a child, and their support and good wishes are deeply felt. As I told the interview team, one of the proudest moments of my life was the day I walked across the stage to receive my UBC diploma, with my parents and brother in the audience. 😊