


Chapter 9

From Grief to Growth: Guiding Families of Deaf Children Toward Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the critical role of early interventionists in supporting families during the pivotal early years of a deaf child's development. The chapter addresses the emotional journey parents undergo following a deaf diagnosis—often marked by grief, confusion, and uncertainty. Rather than reinforcing deficit-based narratives, the authors advocate for a reframing rooted in the concept of Deaf Gain, which emphasizes the cognitive, cultural, and linguistic assets of being deaf. The chapter offers practical strategies for educators and professionals to validate parental emotions, introduce Deaf role models, promote bilingual-bicultural approaches, and foster inclusive early learning environments. Through empathy, education, and community connection, interventionists can guide families from initial grief toward empowerment, helping them to embrace their child's deaf identity as a source of strength. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the importance of systemic continuity, resource access, and family-centered advocacy as essential components of sustainable support.

Early childhood intervention for deaf children is a critical component of their overall development, encompassing language acquisition, cognitive growth, and socio-emotional well-being (Clark et al., 2020). The period from birth to age five is particularly crucial, as foundational language skills established during this stage

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significantly impact future academic achievement and social integration (Mayberry et al., 2017). However, early intervention is not solely about educational outcomes; it also profoundly shapes family dynamics, parental attitudes, and the child's self-identity.

A key aspect of early intervention is recognizing the initial emotional and psychological impact on families and providing the necessary resources and support. When parents first learn that their child is deaf, they often experience a range of emotions, including grief, fear, and uncertainty. The prevailing societal narrative frequently frames being deaf as a deficit (Valente, 2013), leading families to focus on perceived limitations rather than the possibilities and benefits of being part of the deaf community. A framework essential to this shift is Deaf Gain, which reframes deafness from a deficit to a cognitive, cultural, and linguistic asset (Bauman & Murray, 2014). Families benefit from understanding Deaf Gain early, as it emphasizes strengths such as bilingualism, visual learning, and cultural richness (Greene et al., 2024; Ferreiro-Lago et al., 2025). This chapter aims to guide professionals working in early intervention in supporting parents away from a deficit-based mindset and toward an understanding of Deaf Gain.

PURPOSE OF THE CHAPTER

The primary objective of this chapter is to support early intervention professionals working with parents in navigating the early stages of language and identity development for deaf children. Specifically, it seeks to assist families through the grieving process and help them recognize the rich opportunities within the deaf community. By reframing their perspective, families can move from a sense of loss toward empowerment, seeing their child's deaf diagnosis as an asset rather than a limitation. This transition is essential for fostering a positive deaf identity in children, ensuring they grow up with confidence and a strong sense of self-worth.

Early intervention for deaf children must go beyond addressing language development; it must also consider the emotional and psychological well-being of both the child and their family. By shifting the focus from loss to gain, parents can help their children develop a positive self-identity and access the many strengths that come with being part of the deaf community. While this chapter is written for professionals in early intervention working with families of deaf children, the strategies and insights are intended to directly support families, ensuring professionals can guide parents with clarity, cultural respect, and practical tools.

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