The Natural Aural Approach – An Explanation

The Natural Aural Approach is based on what we know regarding language acquisition in hearing children and what parents do to facilitate this – it builds on this research to recognise that parents have within them the skills to do this.

However, when a hearing loss is confirmed parents often consider they need to talk in different ways to their child than if they had not been deaf. Professionals who wish to use this approach and who are working with families will try to ensure the ‘natural’ features of parent/family interaction and language input come to the fore. As a holistic approach, it is essential, for example that the home first language be used with the child as the ‘natural’ intimacies will be spontaneous and identical to those used with siblings and family members alike and ensure that the child is totally immersed in the culture and life of the family at every opportunity.

The DELTA website provides examples and links to the stories of many profoundly deaf children young people and adults who have espoused this approach and what they are doing now.

Within a Natural Aural approach – the ‘Natural’ refers to how families usually interact and talk with their children. Encouraging parents to use language features that are part of the linguistic environment that naturally surrounds almost all young learners of a language – for example in English and in most western languages this includes: Child directed speech.

- Parents are highly responsive providing words to what the baby/child says or does.
- Words are well intonated and ‘sing-song’, with changes in pitch.
- It all happens within the here and now – which provides meaning and understanding to the words spoken.
- The child’s utterances and responses are rephrased and valued.
- The language is very repetitive, with lots of opportunities to hear similar phrases and words again and again, that makes for greater understanding.

Child directed speech grabs the child’s attention and supports feelings of wellbeing and closeness. Language is heard again and again as experiences are revisited.

Within the repetitive world of infancy parents instinctively adjust their expectations and extend their child’s contributions, modelling how-to listen, learn and engage in social interaction.

This supports the child’s understanding and helps the child to work out the meaning and make sense of what is heard in relation to what the child is doing at the time.

Within a Natural Aural approach the ‘Aural’ refers to the conviction that even where a child has a profound hearing loss, modern technology means that the primary route to language and learning will be an aural one.

Natural Auralism therefore is hugely centred on ensuring that hearing aids or implants are being worn, are always working and have been carefully configured so that they give the child optimal access to sound. They are regularly checked, reviewed and adjusted as necessary as the child’s learning needs and listening skills change.
The Natural Aural approach begins at birth and continues as the child develops. Research highlights the importance of conversational language directed to children not simply to set them up for school, but for also building social relationships. Fundamental to this is the development of listening skills and for them to question and think for themselves.

*Information about a Natural Aural approach to communication can be found here.*