



CHANGES IN ADA REGULATIONS--THERE'S STILL TIME TO COMMENT!

The Americans with Disabilities Act became law in 1990. Twenty years' of technological advances later, the Department of Justice is seeking public comment about what changes in regulations need to be made, specifically in three areas: 1) access to the Internet 2) access to 911 emergency services and 3) captioning and video description in movie theaters. The comment period for all of these extends until January 24, 2011, but don't wait that long! Go to www.regulations.gov. You will need to do a "search"--under Document Type, check "Proposed Rules" and under Comment Period check "open." Type "DOJ Internet ADA" in the search box and you should get to a page with only the three documents of interest listed. Each one is a link that will take you to a long description of the issues and what kind of information the Department of Justice is seeking.

Many of the problems that have cropped up for deaf, hard of hearing, blind and visually-impaired users of communication technology have been addressed by Public Law 111-260, the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act, signed into law by President Obama October 8. Among other things, it will insure that captions are more widespread, especially on the Internet, and that more equipment is hearing aid compatible. Change will not happen overnight: rules and regulations must be written, and a complaint system set up, but change is coming.

*(Editor's note: I expect we will need several more updates to both the ADA and Public Law 111-260 before the 21st century comes to an end, if technology continues to change as rapidly as it has. In a perfect world, the developers of new technology could make them accessible from the start. An amusing note: Many television ads are still not closed-captioned. Perhaps advertisers would make a better effort if they realized that whatever caption appeared last remains on the screen until supplanted by another caption. The other night, I watched several commercials that had "son of a b***h" blazoned on them, and I doubt that was the message any of the advertisers were trying to convey.)*

UPCOMING AND ONGOING EVENTS

Deaf Center of Idaho Holiday Bazaar Saturday, November 6 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at Rocky Mountain High School, 5450 N. Linder Road, Meridian. It will feature holiday gifts, crafts, decor items, homemade goods and more. If you want to help out or are interested in a booth, contact Esther Brune at (866) 440-5734 or ruthbrune05@gmail.com. You can also find this event on Facebook.

Toddler playgroup at Elks Hearing & Balance on Sunday, December 5 from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Families will meet on the 4th floor of the Elks Hospital in Boise in the Bitterroot Room. We'll have snacks, decorate cookies, make a holiday craft and go caroling in the hospital. All families welcome! Contact Karrie Weightman, 489-4999 for more information.



Six years ago we compiled a grab-bag full of ideas for ways in which to make the holidays fun, memorable and survivable for both you and your child. We've a lot more families on the mailing list now, with an entirely new crop of preschoolers, so decided to update the article we printed back then. Have a happy Thanksgiving, merry Christmas, and joyous New Year everyone!

HO HO HUH? IDEAS FOR SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS AND OTHER OCCASIONS (2nd edition)

You've done whatever you need to do to give your deaf or hard of hearing child access to communication at home through amplification, creating a good listening environment and/or employing some form of visual communication. Suddenly the holidays arrive; the extended family gathers, the noise level goes up, and it's enough to confuse any child, let alone one who can't hear everything that's going on. How can you reduce the stress of family events, and even turn them into something meaningful and memorable? We've gathered the following tips from Idaho Hands & Voices families and other sources.

It helps to lay the groundwork. Talk to your child ahead of time; use books, family pictures and other visual aids to help explain what will happen. Involve your child in planning the event, if possible—let him help decorate, bake, and shop, plan the menu and guest list as age and ability allow. Not only will he better understand what is going on, he will be an important part of it. One family reports that this year, they've been making Christmas ornaments to give to teachers and other important adults in their children's lives since this summer. Christmas will be a much-anticipated event at their house, and the spirit of giving will not be forgotten in the holiday rush.

Make sure that your child is aware of what is planned each day, and keep them updated when plans change. One mother finds posting a written schedule to be beneficial, and not only during the holidays. *~And it doesn't hurt to take some time each morning or the night before to make one-on-one contact and confirm that my girls understand what is on the agenda; sometimes we assume that they heard something when they didn't.* This strategy has even wider applications: *~We knew that our deaf child would not be aware of what was happening unless we signed our conversations or took time to fill her in, so we were careful to make sure she got the information one way or another. To our surprise, we later realized that our hearing children, even when sitting right beside us as we discussed plans, weren't always paying attention and could benefit from the same kind of consideration!*

Noise, multiple simultaneous conversations, relatives who don't know sign language or don't understand your child's hearing loss all conspire to make communication difficult. The deaf mother of a deaf child reports that in both the past and the present, she has hated large gatherings. *~I speak well, but one-way communication doesn't sit well with me. My son seems to be blamed for anything that goes wrong when other kids are at fault as well, because of communication issues. I cling to my mother and chase after my kid to keep me away from chatting with others.*

It helps to explain your child's specific needs to the rest of the extended family; still, it's not unusual for a parent to end up facilitating communication. *~The most important thing for us is making sure they're not left out of dinner table conversation, which means being patient about repeating things and explaining jokes, even though the point of the conversation or the humor of the punch line may be lost on the third or fourth re-telling. ~We can't interpret everything that is said, but we try to hit the high points and recap what is going on. ~When talking to someone else, I try to at least sign for myself; my daughter regards half a conversation to be better than none, and I pass on interesting stories and other information.*

Remember, though, that this is also your chance to visit with friends and family; arrange times when you can enjoy the company of other adults on your own. Even professional interpreters take breaks! *~As my daughter grew older, she came to understand that we needed "just talking" time, and developed coping strategies. She'd play with the younger children, who found her quite amusing, or disappear with a book or other project. We'd have a break and be better able to interpret for everyone when she returned.*

For the child who depends at least in part on his hearing, do what you can to minimize background noise. Turn down the Christmas carols! (Bah, humbug.) If your child uses an FM unit at school and you have access to it during vacation, pass the microphone around or set it in the middle of the table—hide it inside the centerpiece, if your child is self-conscious about it. The mother of a child with a cochlear implant says that hearing with only one ear makes it difficult for her son to localize sound; group conversations are difficult for him to follow. *~Be sure to point out the speaker; we often name the person who is speaking and point.*

There are a couple of ways to encourage people to take turns speaking. One is to pass or toss around some kind of token, which will also make it obvious who is talking: "It's your turn to talk if you're holding the reindeer." A big communication challenge faced by one family is the annual summer family reunion bonfire-big crowd, bad lighting. One year a young couple used the occasion to announce their engagement, and on the spur of the moment everyone was asked to get up in turn to make their own "announcement." This tradition has continued, and gives the family's now adult deaf son a chance to learn a bit about extended family members' news, as one person at a time speaks, and in a predictable order. Turn-taking also makes it easier for a parent to facilitate communication if needed.

Sometimes it may be possible to make holiday plans which reduce communication problems and stress. The deaf mother who has a horror of large get-togethers reports that she's chosen to have a small Thanksgiving dinner with a few family members rather than attend the big gathering. She suggests staying on the home turf as another option: *~I'm trying out something different for Christmas this year, a family gathering in my home. My son will feel more comfortable in his own environment; he can boss the other kids around, more empowerment to him. It's my home and a more deaf-friendly environment for both of us.*

Another idea is to employ strategic seating at the table, making sure that your child has visual and/or auditory access to people who communicate well with him and are willing to take the time to repeat or interpret what is being said, or just carry on a conversation with your child—and they don't always have to be his parents.

We may get so focused on the sound environment during the holidays that we neglect the visual environment. It's worth noting that many Deaf adults rely on visual alerting devices such as flashing alarm clocks and doorbells, and decorative lights that wink off and on can be annoying--sort of like having the stove timer "ding" incessantly. Ask your child about this.

Merely surviving the holidays is hardly enough; it's a special time of year, when we want to honor family traditions and build relationships. We've also garnered a couple of tips on how to make this time of year meaningful. A fun one: one mother reports that she's saved all her son's hearing aid molds, from the time he was a baby! They've strung the multi-colored ear molds on a string, like popcorn, and each year he takes pride in draping it onto their Christmas tree, a little longer than it was the year before.

The holidays may be the one chance for children to get to know relatives who live at a distance. No matter what form of communication they use, one-on-one conversations are easier; do what you can to encourage these. *One Christmas, my father had purchased a small wooden model for my daughter, intending to help her put it together. He thought he'd need my help as an interpreter, but I suggested that he try writing. Simple vocabulary coupled with a 'hands-on' type of activity resulted in smooth, independent communication for both grandfather and granddaughter; he was thrilled. It's one of the last memories my daughter has of him, and doubly precious for that reason.*

Adapt family traditions to fit the needs of your children: *In my family and my husband's, the father of the family always read the Christmas story from the Bible before presents could be opened. Instead of doing this, we enact the story using a sturdy Nativity set and sing "Happy Birthday" to Baby Jesus when we place Him in the manger. Our children understand the meaning of the holiday without fidgeting through something they find difficult to understand.*

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Thank you to everyone who sent in new ideas for this article! The next issue of *Wavelengths* will appear sometime in early January. Please send in stories, book reviews, helpful hints, whatever you have to share. Contact Lorna Irwin at niwri2@msn.com or (208) 324-7544. We're still looking to contributions to our series "Fun Stuff to Do with Your Kids."