

Using the Telephone

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*****Note: Figures may be missing from this format of the document**

We have all heard stories of the three-year-old who dialed 9-1-1 and saved his parent's or sibling's life. Learning to use the telephone is not only fun for children, but an important daily living skill as well.

These days, the telephone is used for everything from shopping to banking. However, a child with a hearing impairment or an inability to speak clearly may not be able to use the standard telephone.

Modifications

Fortunately, many relatively simple modifications can enable children with hearing impairments to use the telephone. For instance, a child with a mild or moderate hearing loss may be able to use a standard telephone with an amplified handset and volume control. When purchasing these handsets, bring the telephone to the dealer to match the color and brand. Slip-on amplifiers, which fit over the earpiece of the receiver, can be purchased from Radio Shack for as little as \$20.

Another option is to buy a behind-the-ear hearing aid that includes a telecoil with a switch that lets the aid receive sound directly from the telephone rather than from the aid's external microphone. This option has the added benefit of tuning out environmental sounds or background noise.

For children with more severe or profound hearing losses, or those who cannot communicate well through speech, a teletypewriter—commonly called a TTY—may be the answer. Other names for TTY are "TDD," which stands for "telecommunications devices for the deaf," or, less common, "TT," which stands for "text telephone." TTYs include a typewriter-like keyboard and view screen. The handset of a standard telephone fits into rubber cups on a cradle, which is built into the TTY. (In older TTY models, this modem-like device is an attached appliance called a "coupler.") A monitor light on the TTY (or, in older models, its coupler) indicates the status of the outgoing call—a steady light indicates a dial tone; the light flashes to indicate rings or a busy signal. The TTY user types outgoing messages on the keyboard and reads incoming messages as they appear on the view screen. Since a TTY is used with a standard phone, any special features on your own telephone, such as rapid dial, are also available for the TTY.

TTY prices range from \$280-\$500, depending on optional features such as built-in answering machines, printers and additional memory to store messages. Some TTYs plug right into a phone outlet and have a dial function, eliminating the need for a telephone. TTY modems, which allow one to use a computer as a TTY, are also available. These modems typically cost about \$300.

TTY relay services—available in every state and through major long-distance carriers—act as intermediaries between TN users and users of standard telephones. A deaf child who uses a TTY could use a relay service to call her grandmother, who may not own a TTY.

"Voice carryover" (VCO) is an option built into some TTY models, or available through most relay systems. With VCO, a person can speak into the receiver while receiving typewritten messages from the other person, or listen to incoming messages while typing outgoing messages. This allows someone who can speak but not hear, or someone who can hear but not speak, to make more efficient use of time on the telephone. To set up your home phone system to use VCO through a relay service, you need only a "double modular jack" (about \$5, available at Radio Shack), which allows the TN and the telephone to be hooked into the same phone line.

To alert someone with a hearing impairment to a telephone call, devices such as flashing light systems are available. In addition, personal vibrating devices work like beepers and can include lights of different colors to indicate whether an incoming signal is coming from the telephone, the doorbell or the smoke alarm.

Special telephone access systems are available for children with hearing impairments, motor difficulties or both. These include voice-activated phones or remote-control speaker phones that can be activated by a switch mechanism.

Special services

Currently, about 33 states have adaptive telecommunications equipment distribution programs, which distribute free or reduced-cost telephone equipment to children and adults with disabilities. In addition, many major long distance phone companies—including AT&T, MCI and Sprint—provide relay services and may also offer additional benefits, such as discounts on long distance calls for homes with TTY machines. For more information on state programs, long distance services and other information about TFYs (including local resources), contact Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc. (TIM), 8719 Colesville Rd., Ste. 300, Silver Spring, MD 20910, (301) 589-3786, (301) 589-3006 (TTY), (301) 5893797 (fax). EP