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### **Adopt the right teaching methods, and your hearing impaired child can be bilingual.**

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Most people would probably think that it is an arduous task for a child with hearing impairment to master one language. To ask of him to learn an additional language would be asking too much out of him.

That may not be true. Based on researches done by the professionals in the US over the past 3 years, it takes the adoption of the right methods to guide a child with hearing impairment through language learning. With the help of hearing devices, children with hearing impairment would be able to pick up any number of languages, like any hearing child. This would put the child on par with his hearing peers.

### **More than half of the children who have undergone AVT are bilingual**

The National University Hospital, Auditory Verbal Therapy program sees about 45 children of age between 4 months to 12 years of age. Out of these children they see, about half of them are bilingual. They can either comprehend both English and Mandarin or English and Malay. Therefore, when these children enter the mainstream schools in Singapore, they would be able to cope with the bilingual curriculum here in Singapore.

American Auditory Verbal Therapist, Ellen Rhoades, pointed out at the interview that it is important for the parents to draw a clear boundary for their hearing impaired child, on when he can use a particular language. This not only helps the child to identify very clearly the syntax and structure of each language the child is exposed to, it also helps the child to learn and understand each language better. For example, the parents of a pre-schooler can speak to him in his mother tongue at home, while the schoolteachers communicate with the child using English. For children who have yet to start school, parents can each speak to the child using one language each.

Ellen also pointed out that parents should not speak to the child in a mixture of languages. This would confuse the child. Parents should also change the way they see their hearing impaired child. Parents should communicate more with their child. Communication can be through play. This helps the child to listen and speak the language used to communicate through play, while he enjoys the play.

Lela Luomo, National University Hospital, Auditory Verbal Therapist said, parents in Singapore tend to be overly anxious about their child's academic performance. They tend to drill their child instead of engaging them in meaningful play and communication.

Experts say that children learn language best between 0-3 years of age. The earlier the child gets in touch with language; the better would be his grasp of the language.

Leong Jian Xi, 3, is one of the children who have a good grasp of both the English Language and Mandarin. Jian Xi has bilateral mild to moderate hearing loss. His father, Leong Wai Kin, 49, lab officer, said, he and his wife were initially indeed very worried about Jian Xi's development. But, he believes that Jian Xi is God's gift. They do not treat Jian Xi differently from his 2 other children who do not have a hearing loss. Ever since he started Jian Xi on the AVT program at NUH, he felt that the child has made quick progress.

The Leong family speaks Mandarin at home, while Jian Xi is exposed to the English Language in school. Jian Xi is usually very talkative. This is especially so, when his parents takes him out shopping. He would ask for things that he wants to buy. Jian Xi also loves watching documentaries featuring animals. His eagerness to talk and his exposure to languages, aids in his quick grasp to both the language.

It is found in Singapore, that out of every 1000 babies born, 5 of them would be born with some degree of hearing loss. The Universal Newborn Screening (UNHS) program, was launched in NUH since 2001. This program aims to encourage all parents of newborn babies to send their children for a hearing test. Should there be any hearing loss found, these children can then be intervened at a much earlier age.