

SHIFT: Driving Families and Children from Learned Helpless to Self-Advocacy, Engagement and a Growth Mindset!



Learned Optimism
(also termed mastery orientation)

- Focused on learning/development goals
- Failure not taken as a measure of self-worth
- Accepts adult criticism as constructive cues; concerned with fixing the problem
- Regards abilities and traits as attributes that can be developed through effort
- Relishes challenge, "highly motivated"



Learned helplessness is a pattern of response to new or challenging situations

Learned helplessness begins early!
More than a third of 4-7 year olds show this response, which has implications for early intervention.

Optimism/helplessness is a continuum of response patterns rather than either/or.

Any childhood disability puts the child at risk of moving toward the helplessness end of the spectrum.



Learned Helplessness

- Focused on achievement goals
- Sense of self-worth is contingent on achievement
- Vulnerable to receiving or perceiving negative judgement of work from an adult
- Regards abilities and traits as attributes that are fixed and fruitless to try to change
- Avoids challenges that could possibly prove "too hard"
- "Lack of motivation"



How can we keep "driving" toward learned optimism?



Early bonding between infant and caretaker is the foundation for social-emotional development and communication.

Hearing parents may need extra support as they work through the implications of hearing loss and their own shock and grief, plus the decisions they have to make within an atmosphere of controversy.

Deaf parents intuitively have ways of interacting with infants that are not natural for hearing parents, but can be learned.

Toddlers love to help! While it may be faster and easier to do it yourself, having a toddler "help" lets him know you consider him to be useful and competent.

Toddlers should also be learning to do things for themselves, and taking responsibility for simple chores.

Hearing parents sometimes discount the abilities of children who are d/hh, or find it easier to do for the child than to communicate what needs to be done.

Feedback language for the young child: Avoid negative criticism, especially any that implies the child is incapable. Don't micromanage, but provide light coaching and help the child come up with new strategies when a task is proving difficult. A smile and thank-you is the best reward!

Getting to know deaf adults can help hearing parents see their d/hh child as a potentially capable person, and raise expectations. Good parent-child communication fosters this attitude, too.

Any new skills a child can learn will instill confidence in their ability to learn. Consider taking on projects as a family, sports, hobbies and youth groups such as Scouts or 4-H.

Children with hearing loss will encounter extra challenges as they grow, and may encounter adults who view them as less capable or who, with the best of intentions, help them too much. Having a strong start on the road to learned optimism serves as a kind of "innoculation" against learned helplessness.

Eventually, children grow and (we hope) leave home. A "can do" attitude and the ability to successfully self-advocate will serve them well!

Lay the foundations early:

COMMUNICATION

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

EXPERIENCES

and above all,

HAVE FUN WITH YOUR KID!