

# The Role of Audiologists in Helping Head Start Programs Implement OAE Screening Practices

Currently, many Head Start grantees serving children 0 - 3 years of age are seeking the assistance of audiologists to help them update their hearing screening practices through the use of Otoacoustic Emissions (OAE) technology. A set of resources have been developed by the National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management at Utah State University for audiologists to use as they train Head Start staff on how to appropriately implement OAE screening and follow-up practices. These resources are available at <http://infanthearing.org/earlychildhood/index.html>.

## Background

Early Head Start (EHS) and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs serve children 0 - 3 years of age. Head Start requires that all children receive a hearing screening within the first 45 days of enrollment. Traditionally, most programs have had to rely on subjective screening methods; however, recent feasibility studies have demonstrated that Head Start staff can be trained to successfully update their screening practices using objective OAE screening methods. As a result, increasing numbers of children with hearing disorders have been identified, including children with sensorineural hearing loss and a range of other conditions. A concerted effort is now being made by the Office of Head Start to inform all programs about OAE screening practices.

## Role of Audiologists

Head Start programs undertaking OAE screening of 0 - 3 year-old children are strongly encouraged to do so only with the involvement of a pediatric audiologist who can provide training, technical support and consultation in program planning. Some audiologists also play a supervisory role in monitoring screening and follow-up activities which can significantly contribute to the long-term quality of the screening program.

The following are some ways that you, as an audiologist, can help a Head Start's OAE screening program:

- Assist Head Start staff with completing the enclosed ***OAE Screening Implementation Checklist***.
- Explain the recommended 2-step screening and referral protocol (*see resource materials*).
- Evaluate and help select which OAE equipment will be purchased (*see criteria in resource materials*).
- Identify potential partners who may help with training and technical assistance and with whom information and resources can be exchanged (such as state Early Hearing Detection and Intervention program staff, individuals/entities implementing other state screening efforts, local health care providers, state American Academy of Pediatrics Chapter Champions for newborn hearing screening, etc.)
- Identify local charitable organizations from whom funds for equipment purchases can be solicited.

- Provide hands-on training on conducting OAE screening and on implementing an appropriate screening and follow-up protocol.
- Provide follow-up technical assistance and additional training once screening is underway.
- Provide audiological diagnostic evaluations for children not passing evaluations (or direct Head Start staff to other audiologists who can provide this service).
- Review screening and referral outcomes and oversight on pass and refer rates, adherence with the screening protocol, general follow-up concerns for children not passing the screening, and equipment care and maintenance concerns.

**Resources Available at <http://infanthearing.org/earlychildhood/index.html>**

Primary resources for audiologists providing support to Head Start programs include:

- 1) Instructional Guide and Training Video for Head Start Programs entitled:  
*Early Identification of Hearing Loss – Conducting periodic Otoacoustic Emissions (OAE) hearing screening with infants and toddlers in early childhood settings.*

This guide and video is designed for staff at Head Start programs who will be learning to conduct OAE screenings for 0 - 3 year olds and includes the core information to be presented during a training. In addition to the training video, the Guide's CD-ROM includes text files that can be adapted and used by the programs:

- OAE Screening Form reflecting the recommended 2-step protocol (this form can be duplicated and used by screeners to document outcomes for each child screened)
  - Diagnostic Follow-up Form (to be completed by health care providers and audiologists on children referred from screening to inform Head Start staff of diagnostic outcomes and treatments)
  - Letters to parents, health care providers and others introducing OAE screening
  - Screening log forms
  - Sample mini-grant that can be adapted and used to solicit funds from charitable organizations for equipment purchases
- 2) Audiologist's Training and Technical Assistance Manual and Training Video entitled:  
*Updating Hearing Screening Practices for 0 - 3 Year-Old Children in Head Start.*

This manual includes everything you will need to prepare for, train, evaluate, and provide follow-up technical assistance related to helping Head Start programs implement OAE Screening practices for 0 - 3 year olds. In addition the contents of the Guide above, the manual also includes:

- OAE Screening Implementation Checklist
- Equipment Selection Criteria: Elements to consider when purchasing portable OAE Equipment
- Training preparation checklists
- Training outline and script to be used with the training video (Note that the 4-part video modules are included on the CD-ROM in the materials recently disseminated to Head Start programs and are also downloadable from the website)
- Training Workshop evaluation tools
- Articles summarizing the outcomes of studies examining the feasibility of screening infants and toddlers in Head Start Settings.