

# FM for babies and toddlers

**FM for babies and toddlers: making the most of the opportunity**

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In 2007 we began a collaborative project between the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust and the Berkshire Sensory Consortium Service to evaluate the management issues and practical considerations when fitting FM systems to very young children. We have since fitted 25 children with ear level FM receivers. They were all age three and under with bilateral hearing losses ranging from mild to profound. We discussed our findings and final thoughts on the project in a workshop at the BATOD/BAEA Achieving Potential Through Technology Conference in Birmingham. For the first phase of the project, equipment was provided by the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust and comprised the child's current hearing aids, direct audio input shoes and ear level receivers, and a compatible FM transmitter. Five children were provided with systems, which were given to their ToHI to fit at home. Parents were asked to fill in a daily log for the first four weeks of using the equipment. There were several challenges including compatibility and technical issues with equipment, and emotional reactions from children and parents. These issues resulted in ToHIs spending a great deal of their time dealing with FM issues leaving little time for other activities. However, comments from the families encouraged us to find solutions and the project was expanded to include 12 more children.

During the second phase the systems were offered to parents as a possible solution to situations where they had perceived that their child was having difficulties hearing and listening. They were set up in clinic and the

educational audiologist fitted them at home. We used the FM Working Group Quality Standards to inform and guide our practice.

Phonak provided us with ten integrated FM systems (each including two Naida hearing aids with integrated receivers, and one campus transmitter) for the third phase of the project. Ten children aged between two months and three years were given integrated systems which were set up in the clinic prior to the child's appointment with audiology or session with the ToHI. The integrated systems solved the compatibility and connection problems we had seen previously. They also simplified the system for the families to use as, for example, equipment did not need to be dismantled to change the battery. Some parents were keen for their children to try integrated systems after seeing other children using them at our pre-school group. We found this group to be useful for encouraging parents to use new equipment as they were able to exchange ideas and support each other.

We recently asked families to reflect on their experiences with their FM systems and to let us know how they use them now. Here are some of the responses:

*We use it in the car a lot, also at children's parties or situations where there are lots of other children and it is used all the time he is at nursery.*

*A now uses the radio aid in school. I don't tend to use it on social occasions any more, as A is able to access speech by lip reading to assist her hearing. Though actually, she struggles in the cinema to have a conversation before the film starts, so maybe I might use it for that situation and when we are somewhere dark like the theatre as well.*

*We used it in busy/noisy environments, generally out of the home such as restaurants, shopping centres, children's parties etc. Since starting school L uses it every day in the classroom as well as still using it in busy/noisy environments such as parties, restaurants etc.*

*He uses it most at nursery which he attends for two full days a week. We also use it on car journeys over 5 minutes or if we are somewhere noisy. If*

*he is at a group we give it to the leader to wear so he can follow the activities better.*

*Overall it has been really helpful and the negatives are far outweighed by the positives. I would not be without it now.*

### **Final thoughts**

FM systems give young children the opportunity to engage fully in family and nursery life and give parents and carers confidence when interacting with children in challenging listening situations. This in turn facilitates speech and language development, mimicking as closely as possible the experiences of normally hearing young children. Training and information sharing are crucial to ensuring that systems are used effectively and are functioning correctly. We have found that managing the impact of introducing new equipment is greatly assisted by enabling parents to view the equipment as a solution to a difficulty they have highlighted, having an efficient set-up of the system, effective support and troubleshooting by professionals, and peer support from other families. We continue to offer FM systems to young children through the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust as part of a comprehensive package of habilitation.