



COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS A-Z™

Rural/Urban

What do we mean by Urban/Rural Considerations?

Communication considerations in rural and urban settings address the decisions families must face when deciding where to live when raising a child who is deaf or hard of hearing (d/hh). Because deafness and hearing loss occur fairly infrequently, families living in rural settings often face problems that are lesser issues in more urban settings because local systems may not have encountered this condition before.

What issues are at the forefront of Rural/Urban living?

Many families report anecdotally that they move to urban centers to get to specialized services for their child who is deaf or hard of hearing. Living in a rural area can definitely be a challenge for peer interaction, language role models, clinical and educational audiological services, and proficient educators who have experience with children who are d/hh. But many families have found a way to live in rural settings and also raise a child successfully through some of the following strategies:

- Use of technology:
 - Internet- Your child can find a deaf/hh peer, do research on deaf/hh contributions to society, etc.
 - Videoconferencing – For students, access to classes and activities from other parts of the state; For local teachers, mentoring from deaf education and other specialists located in other parts of the state;

- -Telemedicine– Hospitals and health care providers are implementing procedures to deliver services remotely in rural settings to increase accessibility to their services
- Get Creative - Be Optimistic and Aggressive at a Grassroots Level:
 - Think outside the box
 - Often, small towns have the opportunity to know one another on a more personal level and unite to create solutions. One community all took a sign language class together.
- Build on existing relationships in your community

Many families in rural areas have strong relationships to extended family members and fully integrated into the community. That can be a real strength because you need these people to help—in school, in extra-curricular activities, and eventually for employment (after school jobs, etc...). Who can help? Don't be afraid to ASK!
- Don't compromise what you know is needed:
 - You have the right to ask for communication access for your child.
 - You may have to wait longer, but don't give up.
 - Work with the school board, the community (example: a fundraising community group in a small community is helping to raise money for FM systems)

“Rural educators and families can either focus on the feeling of isolation and lack of understanding they get from the urban-oriented American media, or they can appreciate the benefits of smaller communities and open spaces. But whatever their hangups or blessings, they must become more vocal if they are to have a voice in how national special education policy is shaped.”

- Marty Strange, director of policy for the Rural School and Community Trust.

3. What should every parent and professional know about making a decision about where to live?

Each family must determine for themselves the priorities about where to live on behalf of their child who is deaf/hard of hearing in the context to their whole family, employment, extended family and other values that guide their decisions. The value for many families for rural living can also be a contributing factor to a successful child, and should not be minimized.

4. Where else can I find information about (this subject)?

Resources:

- Article: Families Living in Rural Settings
<http://www.handsandvoices.org/articles/misc/rural.html>
- Article: The Road Less Taken
http://www.handsandvoices.org/articles/fam_perspectives/road_less.html

- <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/OSEP95AnlRpt/ch7c.html>
- <http://www.coe.missouri.edu/~vrcbd/pdf/HGfour.pdf>
- <http://www.wrightslaw.com>

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Communication Considerations A to Z™ is a series from Hands & Voices that's designed to help families and the professionals working with them access information and further resources to assist them in raising and educating children who are deaf or hard of hearing. We've recruited some of the best in the business to share their insights on the many diverse considerations that play into communication modes & methods, and so many other variables that are part of informed decision making. We hope you find the time to read them all!